

Holy Absolution,

rescued from the blasphemies of the Methodists
by C.F.W. Walther
Vol. 2, pp. 59f, 62f, 71f, 73f, 82f, 85f

Motto: The second part of repentance is the absolution, which the priest speaks in the place of God, and therefore it is nothing other than the Word of God, by which he comforts and strengthens our heart against the evil conscience, and we must believe and trust in it, as God himself. But if anyone is so blind that he doesn't see this, or so deaf that he doesn't hear it, he obviously doesn't know what God's Word and spiritual faith or comfort is, so what can he teach that is good? But if he sees and hears this, and thus intentionally condemns repentance in this part, then he is pure devil and no man, as one who intentionally sets himself against God, and contends so that God's Word should not be spoken to people, nor hearts comforted nor faith strengthened. He may justly be regarded as an enemy of God and every man, especially holy Christendom. And where there are preachers like that, there every pious Christian must truly beware of him, as before a living devil, for God's Word must have free course, and proceed both publicly and privately, teaching and comforting every man.

Luther

In the 371st issue of *The Apologete*, that well known Methodist publication, dated the 13th of Feb. of this year, two articles appear on holy Absolution. The first is by a Methodist missionary in Fort Wayne, named Mulfinger, the other is the work of Mr. Nast, the publisher of said periodical. There are primarily three reasons that have moved us not to completely pass these articles by with our silence. First because since we had occasion to read it, we do not want to make ourselves participants in the horrific sins of blaspheming God and his holy Word through our silence, since it is written: "If a soul should sin so he hears a curse and he is a witness of this or has seen or discovered it, and says nothing, he is guilty of trespassing." Second, it's because our office and calling demand that we warn the flock entrusted to us against such false prophets, who come to us in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Thirdly and finally, because the doctrine of holy Absolution being attacked, unfortunately! is not even being recognized these days by many Lutherans for its surpassing importance and its inseparable context in the body of doctrine concerning the counsel of God for our blessedness, so there is a danger that the unspiritual blather of the Methodists will also spread like a virulent cancer among Lutherans (2 Tim. 2. 16,17) if not seriously opposed.

Even if by our experience that we've had with the methods and ways of the true Methodist preachers of our time, we could never believe they are driven by the Spirit of Truth, yet we never guessed they would so clearly bring out into the light of day their spiritual progeny, as they have in the articles mentioned above. That is, in both of them, the writers do not merely state the reservations they have concerning Absolution, or those raised because of its abuse, but they do not hesitate to directly call it an "Egyptian reed" and a "chief trick of the devil" and they place those who take comfort from the Absolution spoken by a servant of Christ, in his stead and at his command, in the Name of the Triune God, under the ban with these words: "Cursed is the man who entrusts himself to men and with his heart departs from the LORD." We admit that as we read those words we were truly horrified in our hearts that Methodist preachers, who otherwise appear to be so zealous for God, could utter such horrible blasphemies before all the world, to declare God's eternal Word to be a wavering and fragile reed and call a high, holy institution of Christ a "chief trick of the devil" and thus make the Son of God himself out to be a devil. O that the pen would have fallen out the quivering hands of these writers in the moment they wrote such things! O that they would have been thrown to their knees through the Word of the living God which is as bright as the sun, since they had the Word of God before them: "Whosoever's sins you remit they are remitted unto them," with tears of regret, to beg God for forgiveness for their plan which was just as impossible as fool hardy, to darken these bright Words and to contradict thereby the faithful God who is speaking the truth therein to his face! Indeed, if we knew nothing more about Absolution than that a Luther and a thousand other honest and highly enlightened witnesses of the truth confess to have received comfort, light, life and power and the witness of the Holy Ghost in their highest anxieties and

afflictions of conscience through Absolution, we would, already for that reason, be ashamed to heap this scandalous, stinking pride over and against such men, and to dismiss their ways as misguided, that they thereby stood in an accused fleshly dependence upon men, yes, were employing a chief trick of the devil, to fashion for themselves false comfort. But supposing Mr. Mulfinger and Mr. Nast pitifully regard themselves as so highly enlightened that they think they are able to look down on a Luther, Melancthon, Brentius, Chemnitz, Arndt, Paul Gerhardt, Scriver, Heinrich Mueller, Conrad Rieger, Schade, Woltersdorf, in short, all Lutheran theologians, as superstitious people being helped by a chief trick of the devil, does that give them any right not to justly tremble just a bit as they pervert and condemn this holy, precious Word of God?

But without any further delay let's get to the heart of the matter.

In three places in the Scripture we hear our dear LORD and Savior, JESUS Christ, make three important and note worthy declarations, which obviously treat one and the same subject. According to Mt. 16.19, after Peter had confessed that he was the Son of the living God, he says this to Peter: "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Everything that you bind on earth will also be bound in heaven, and everything that you will loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven." Further, the Mouth of Truth says this to all the apostles according to Mt. 18.18: "Truly I say to you: What you will bind on earth, shall also be bound in heaven; and what you loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven." Finally, according to John 20, 21-23, Christ says this to them, when he had stepped into the midst of his disciples again for the first time after his resurrection as the Victor over sins, death, devil and hell: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you release, they are released, and whoseever's you retain, they are retained."

These Words are so clear that they need no explanation. Whoever would want to really explain them with his explanation would be acting no differently than some person who would want to light up the sun by burning a candle. For everyone knows that the Words "release sins" or forgiving means, declaring someone free of his sins and the punishment they earn; and that the Words "retain sins" mean not forgiving someone his sins and therefore sentencing him to his deserved punishment. The expressions: "bind, loose, keys," which Christ employs in the first passages are, indeed, metaphors, that means, non-literal, figurative expressions, but that doesn't mean they are ambiguous and uncertain, but are so clear that even a Christian school child can perceive that they must reveal just what is said in the last passage. Namely, it is well known that sins in the holy Scripture are very often compared to bonds and chains by which Satan has bound and taken them captive to their damnation, Prov. 5.22; 1 Tim. 6.9; 2 Tim. 2.26. Therefore if someone is given the power to free people spiritually, then this is nothing other than the power to forgive their sins and thus to sever the bonds of sins and damnation by which they were

bound. And if someone is given the power to bind people spiritually, then obviously this is no other power than that by which they bind them to their sins and leave them in the bonds of damnation, sentencing them to be imprisoned in hell. Finally it seems incumbent for someone to say that those who received the keys of heaven for others, naturally, would retain the power to open or close the heavenly kingdom for a person.

So if we don't want to twist the Words of Christ in the three passages quoted, and not becloud this with any thoughts that we have but are not contained in them, but take from them the thoughts that necessarily must go with them, then these Words irrefutably teach us, first, that Christ had given the holy apostles the power to forgive sins and to leave them unforgiven, to open and to close heaven, to declare them free and saved, and to be damned, and, indeed, that what they would do in this regard on earth must be as authoritative and certain in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear LORD, had done it himself. It is thereby self explanatory that the apostles and those who bear their office are not being made into gods with these Words, that they have not thus received the power to forgive sins as if they were the lords over heaven and hell, over salvation and damnation, as the LORD God alone forgives and retains sins since he is the one who is offended by each. Since it says that the LORD first had given the apostles the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, it is immediately apparent that the apostles must absolve and place under the ban only as they are instructed, as servants of Christ, and stewards and administrators of property that is alien, but only entrusted to them, not in their name, but rather in Christ's Name, not at their whim, but rather according to that special, specific instruction given them. But as a pardon received by a criminal sentenced by the king from the lowliest servant of the state in the name and at the command of the king is just as valid as if the king declared it to him with his own mouth, so also, according to the command of Christ, the Absolution of the apostles, when they impart it according to Christ's instruction, is just as valid as if Christ had spoken it in person.

Christ clearly says to Peter: "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, etc." He says clearly to all the apostles: "Whosoever's sins you forgive, they are, etc." Now whoever wants to be a Christian must be prepared to suffer a thousand deaths rather than wanting to surrender these Words of the living God. Or should someone be a Christian who, when God gives him a Word that tells him a thought that is against his natural thinking, twists that Word like a waxed nose and turns it and quibbles with it until God's yes becomes a no and black becomes white? Doesn't God say: "I have looked upon the suffering and broken spirit, and the one who fears before me"? (Is. 66.2; cf. Ps. 119.116) And how had Christ himself treated Scripture? As he, the eternal personification of the Word, would be tempted by Satan, he himself used no other weapon than the written Word and repelled every new attack when he said: "It is written." And as the Jews accounted him guilty of blaspheming God because he had made himself God, what did Christ do then? Even there he appealed back to the letter of the Scripture, which no one can contest, and said: "The Scripture cannot be broken!" (John 10.35) So? If the most praiseworthy Son of God fought with the sword of the written Word and explained that he was captivated through the declarations of the prophets, that he would not surrender and, so to speak, could not budge a bit away from it, so should we miserable people not want to be taken captive by the Word of Scripture? Would we want to despise such divine confines and not stand peaceably within them, but impudently jump those bounds? Do we want to call ourselves Christians and not direct our thoughts according to the Word of Scripture, but rather bend the Scriptures to our way of thinking? Never! Not even if Methodists had a thousand fold greater appearance of sanctity than what they dress themselves in, even if they stood on the earth as angels of light (2 Cor. 11.13 - 15.),

yes, even if all the prophets and apostles rose from their graves and every angel descended from above (Gal. 1.8) and all said, no human apostle could have the power to forgive and retain sins in the Name of Christ, yet a rightly fashioned Christian must answer them with Christ: "**It is written** Whosoever's sins you remit, they are remitted to them, and whosoever's sins you retain, they retain them, **and the Scriptures will not be broken!**" I remain with that. Others may entrust themselves to their hearts or their reason, I entrust myself to the Word of my God and will thereby someday appear in comfort before his judgement seat. "That some will not believe on that, so what? Should your unbelief nullify God's grace? No way! It much rather thus remains, for God is true, though every man's a liar," even the Methodists. Rom. 3.3-4.

That should suffice for now. In the next issue with God's help we plan to remove some of the doubt being raised against a literal understanding of Christ's Words and to foundationally dispel the objections already laid. . . .

As we have seen in the last issue, the doctrine of holy Absolution is so clearly grounded in the holy Scripture, yet barely any other doctrine in this age of unbelief finds such universal opposition by unbelievers and enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*), than just this one. Now indeed, one might think that since the Scripture speaks so clearly, it would be unnecessary to waste a word of response to the charges that are raised against it in the discourse of those who reject this doctrine, who still find it impossible to believe the Scripture. Such a person could be helped in no other way than one seek to convince him of the divinity of the Holy Scripture. If this is done, then every doubt concerning the divinity of Absolution declared by a human apostle would fall away on its own. But as surely as that is true of most people, even so-called "believers" also come out against the doctrine of Absolution because they still do not believe in their hearts that the Bible is God's Word and the LORD JESUS is the true God and eternal life (1 John 5.20). For as God's Word tells us that "heretics easily mislead even innocent hearts through sweet words and fair speeches," (Rom. 16.17-18) and their "minds are corrupted from their simplicity in Christ," (2 Cor. 11.3) it is therefore most necessary for such innocent hearts and simple souls, easily misled and made to stray, that we give a defense to stop these accusations, to remove from them this misleading poison and to neutralize it for those who do not want to be damned or stubbornly remain in their heresy.

The ways and means by which people rise up against this doctrine of holy Absolution are diverse. The most godless and infamous methods so-called believers might use is employed by the Methodists of our day and, now, specifically, by Mssrs. Nast and Mulfinger. Namely, they not only deny that the Christian church would still now have the authority to forgive sins and to retain them, but they even assert, Christ's Words being clear as day notwithstanding, that even the holy apostles had never had or used this authority. They reason, quite rightly, that the best way to uproot this doctrine, lock, stock and barrel, would be to convince Christians of this. But in order to reach this goal, they twist the Word's of JESUS Christ in such a way that it must deeply outrage a Christian heart.

So, of course, Mr. Mulfinger first writes: "The passage: 'Whosoever's sins you forgive, etc.,' appears at first glance to be consistent with Absolution." But after that he explains that the Absolution, according to this passage, would only be "the authority to preach the conditions of reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins through faith on JESUS." Now we would not quote here this blather of a blithering ignorant neophyte if Mr. Nast had not declared this as very "well founded and edifying" and stated as proof that even a "great German scholar of divinity" of our age

said: "The power of the keys is nothing other than the presentation of the conditions under which God saves or damns people."

In truth we must wonder out loud, what will ever open the eyes of anyone who does not perceive from this sample of Methodistic interpretation of Scripture that the Methodists do not get the unique aspects of their religion from out of the Bible, but rather out of their hearts and their reason? Think about this, dear reader, when our LORD JESUS Christ gives someone the responsibility to forgive others their sins, this means according to Methodistic Bible interpretation as much as if one should lay out for them conditions for forgiveness. So when Christ commands of his believers that they should forgive those who trespass against them, then according to the Methodists, he is not at all commanding them to actually pardon them their trespass against them, strongly assuring them with their mouths that they are really forgiven and gone, and should be considered in their hearts as if they hadn't been committed, but rather, according to the Methodists, Christ only commands here that Christians should have the power to show their enemies what they must do in order to receive forgiveness. Is that what you call good Scripture exegesis? Yes, doesn't saying this of Christ – it is horrible to say – treat this as if spoken by a fool who must not have known how he should express himself? Isn't that called taking the Holy Spirit to school? If God's Word is permitted to be interpreted that way, what Word can a sinner count on anymore? Then what Word is left to stand sure? If this methodology is respected, what doctrine could not be exegeted (declared) from out of the Scripture? – So it is undeniable, the Methodists hereby prove that they, as offshoots of the Reformed Church, actually stand on the same ground and foundation as the rationalists. For once someone asked Mr. *Lichtfreund* if he also would believe that Christ had saved men as the Bible says. So the famous man responded immediately: "Oh sure, for in no way do I agree with the somewhat respectable writer for *The Torch* in New York, who rejects the Bible as a book of lies and Christ as a deceiver. But obviously one must not imagine that Christ had really redeemed men. No, he had only done that insofar as he had revealed to men the conditions that they would have to fulfill to be saved." Is the Methodist way of explaining the forgiving and retaining of sins a hair's breadth better than that? Don't they and the rationalists look like two peas in a pod? Therefore whoever still believes God's Word, be warned before the spirit of the Methodists. It is a spirit that does not fear before the Word of God. The Words of the Office of the Keys are not the only ones by which this spirit is manifest. The Methodists treat the words of God that deal with holy Baptism, the holy LORD's Supper, on our being accounted the active obedience of Christ, and the like, with the same shallow sacrilege. And oh that this shameful despising of the written Word would only be encountered by the leaders of Methodist congregations! But unfortunately, this disease has infected the poor souls who have been led by them, with very few exceptions. For if you talk to a Methodist, or an Evangelical who thinks like a Methodist, or neo-Lutherans, you will see they have no reverent fear for any Word of God. If a clearer explanation of the Scripture is presented that witnesses against them, as when they talk to Lutherans, they act as if they'd tripped over a goose. Still that truly is not a sign of the Holy Ghost. For the Spirit much rather witnesses "that is the Spirit of Truth" (1 John 4.5). This Spirit produces a broken heart that "fears before God's Word" (Is. 66.2) and that steadfastly believes that: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4.4). A Christian enlightened by the Holy Ghost follows Christ, therefore, we say again, his Savior, and does not allow himself to be driven from the Word, but calls out to himself when strife arises, saying: "It is written! – And the Scripture cannot be broken!"

Your Word stands fast, a fortress wall
That stands e'en if opposed by all,
Their wisdom notwithstanding.

So after we have now shown that the Methodist's interpretation of the passages that treat holy Absolution rest upon principles that would undermine the truth and certainty of holy Scripture as a whole, so now we want to address other accusations that are related to the analogy of faith. (Rom. 12.7)

The usual objection to this article is that, yes, the Scripture certainly teaches that God alone can forgive sins. (Luke 5.21, cf. Is. 43.25) But we reply to this: That is true, but this does not abrogate the legitimate doctrine of Absolution. There is no dispute over the fact that God alone could forgive sins. Lutherans don't deny this any more than do Methodists or any other party in Christianity. It's only a question as to whether God would forgive sins through people. This the Lutherans alone assert, and, indeed, in accord with Scripture. For it is not only written: "Whosoever's sins you forgive, etc.", but rather the preachers of the Gospel in God's Word are called "God's co-workers and assistants." (1 Cor. 3.9; 2 Cor. 6.1) So St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "I have borne witness to you in Christ JESUS through the Gospel." (1 Cor. 4.15) He tells the Galatians: "My dear children, I suffer again the pains of birth." (Gal. 4.19) Yes, the same apostle even writes to Bishop Timothy about the salvation of his hearers and says: "Give attention to yourself and defend the doctrine in these matters. For if you do this you will save yourself and those who hear you." 1 Tim. 4.16. The Methodists would obviously summarily dismiss these passages and say all these expressions are being employed to say too much. Certainly God alone could make them born again or save them. The apostle here only wants to show by these expressions that the preacher of the Gospel could only present the conditions for the second birth and for being saved. But that's what I'd call twisting a passage to justify their twisting other passages. That's not called explaining Scriptures, but nullifying them, not sharpening (Dt. 6.7) but blunting them. If that sort of explanation of Scripture applies, then searching the Scriptures becomes useless, then exegesis is nothing other an exercise in twisting and bending the Words of Scripture until they produce a meaning that common human understanding can bear. So then the work of an interpreter consists in using sophistry to save the Scripture from its accusers so that it might survive before the judgment seat of reason. But with all discerning Christians, we regard those as good interpreters of Scripture who exhibit a special skill in exegesis to always uncover ever greater depths of wisdom and ever sharper boundaries of the truth. But whoever treats Scripture as if it used too many words that don't make much sense, as when it employs clear and unique expressions but he blurs the content beneath them, as what portends to have mysterious depth is made completely opaque, such a Scriptural interpreter has the devil to thank for all his labor. That is Rosenmueller's, Dinter's and *Lichtfreund's* method to refute Scripture under the guise of explaining it. So now what is it that the apostle is teaching us when he says the preachers of the Gospel are co-helpers and assistants of God, that they are spiritual fathers and are saving those who hear them? He is thereby teaching us that God himself is powerful and active through the Christian preaching office that he instituted, that the voice of his Gospel preachers is not merely a human voice, but rather is God's voice, that God works on the souls of men through the same, as through his means and instruments (Acts 9.15). Now as according to the Scripture God alone calls, enlightens, grants faith, second birth and saves, yet through the office of the Word, God alone also forgives sins, but through the office that preaches reconciliation. Therefore St. Paul writes, 2 Cor. 5.17-20: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. The old is passed away, all things have become new. But all this is of God,

who has reconciled us to himself through JESUS Christ and given us the Office that preaches reconciliation. For God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not accounting their sins to them, and has raised unto us the Word of reconciliation. So we are now heralds in Christ's place, for God is exhorting through us. So now we beg you in Christ's place, be reconciled to God."

When an ignorant and thereby irreligious person makes the accusation: "How may a man, who knows himself to be a miserable parson, let himself think he can forgive sins? He thereby acts as if he were God!" it should not surprise us. But shouldn't men who are knowledgeable in Scripture and who want to teach others be ashamed at leveling such charges? Shouldn't they at least be aware of the difference between the lord of a household and a steward of the household and thereby make all of the difficulties in this passage disappear? (Heb. 3.5,6 cf. 1 Cor. 4.1) Obviously, those act as if they were God who want to forgive others' sins by their own authority, as a lord over hell and heaven, damnation and salvation, from their own limitless perfection of power and in their own name, but a legitimate Christian preacher absolves, always confessing the nature of the same in this way: "by the authority of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, in the stead and by the command of my LORD JESUS Christ and in the Name of the Triune God." Now as even the poorest person can distribute the treasures of a rich man if the rich man has made him his steward over them, so also with the forgiveness of sins, which is a spiritual treasure of the wealthy, heavenly Father, if the sinner is ordained by him to be his steward. The Absolution of a human apostle must be considered in this way. That first charge is thus dispelled. The Methodists obviously seek to convince their people that the doctrine of the Lutheran Church is this: God has abrogated for himself the authority to forgive sins and transferred the same unto the Lutheran pastors, who are now able to receive anyone they want into heaven or shut them out. These gentlemen prove by taking that position they must know full well that should they attack the real doctrine of the Lutheran Church they would be accusing Christ himself of being a liar, so therefore they must impose on Lutherans a doctrine that Lutherans themselves detest. . . .

A second charge usually made against the doctrine of the authority of absolution, is, as it is presented by this same Mr. Mulfingher (fat and sassy enough) this: "How is it possible that an ignorant man can look into the heart of his fellow sinner and be able to test the authenticity of his repentance, which is necessary to declare the absolution?"

This charge proves nothing but that those who make this charge don't know what absolution is. That is, were the absolution the judgment of the one doing the absolution over the condition of the soul of a penitent, that is, that he is now fit and worthy of forgiveness, or if the absolution could only be an announcement of what had already been done by God in heaven, then certainly the one who wanted to speak such an absolution to another would have to know to whom that absolution applied or to look into God's heart. But God's Word teaches nothing of an absolution like that. Christ does not say: What I loose in heaven, that you should loose on earth. It's rather the other way around: "Whatever you will loose on earth shall also be loosed in heaven."

To rightly see the true meaning of this doctrine in its context in the whole system of Christian doctrine, we would have to consider the following. Christ, true God and true man in one person, had died as the One who took the place of all people, and on the third day rose again from the dead. His death, his penance, was the death and penance of all sinners. His being brought back to life again, and his justification, thereby achieved, was the restoration to life and justification of all sinners. For thus says the

holy apostle: "We consider that as one died for all, so all have died." 2 Cor. 5.14. Further: "As through one man condemnation has come upon all men, so also through one man's righteousness justification unto life has come upon all men. For just as through one man's disobedience many have become sinners, so also through the obedience of one man many will be justified." Rom. 5. 18-19. So through Christ's death and resurrection all sinners' situation is made right with God, all sins are now removed, all have won reconciliation, forgiveness, righteousness, life and salvation. There is nothing left but that now all also come to truly possess and receive the same and that all of it actually be appropriated, the right to which has been won for all people. But all the riches of his grace will be bestowed, handed over and appropriated from God to men through the preaching of the Gospel and the holy sacraments, which are the seals of the same. That is, Christ says after this, his work of redemption was completed: "So it is written and thus the Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and have repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached to all people in his Name." Luke 24. 46-47.

Before anything else, repentance must be preached to all men, that is, they must be shown their lost condition from out of the law, and be witnessed God's wrath over their sins so they are struck and terrified, and, in feeling their soul's distress, they learn to ask: "What must we do to be saved?" Thereupon the forgiveness of sins must now also be preached to them, that is, their salvation in Christ must be shown them in the Gospel and the grace, justification and salvation Christ has won for them must be revealed, that they receive this in faith and, thereby, they will be brought to life again, born again, sanctified, and made new. But besides the preaching of the forgiveness of sins in general, Christ also has instituted the preaching of the forgiveness of sins for each individual sinner who desires this (since Christ knew full well what difficulties stand in the way of a terrified sinner believing that this grace proclaimed applies even to every one of his sins) and this preaching of the forgiveness of sins for the individual sinner is just this so-called absolution, which Christ instituted with the Words: "Whose ever's sins you loose, shall be loosed."

Now as all who are terrified over their sins – when it is preached in general: "You frightened sinners, take comfort, Christ has born your sins!" – believe this general preaching, – and come to forgiveness thereby, so also those sinners come to it as individuals when it is declared to them in particular: "Take comfort, your sins are forgiven you!" so he also believes this. And further, as each hearer should believe the general preaching of the forgiveness of sins and must do so or lose his salvation, so also each one must believe this individualized preaching. And finally, as each servant of Christ must also preach God's grace from the Gospel to his whole flock of hearers to whom he has preached God's wrath out of the law, even if he is not sure who is pious, yes, or if anyone in the flock is repentant, so also every servant of Christ must specifically speak forgiveness to each one who has confessed to him that the law has struck him, that his sins weigh him down, that he would like to be loosed and, therefore, craves the absolution, even if no human servant can ever know with divine, infallible certainty what may be the disposition of the heart of any individual penitent. The one who receives the absolution must certainly know his own heart, but not the one imparting it. By all means, a faithful steward of the mysteries of God should not absolve those of whom he has public evidence of their impenitence, for that's called making a mockery of absolution and intentionally throwing sacred things to dogs. It's for just such people that the binding key has been instituted.

All that being said, it must now be clear to our dear readers that the absolution spoken through a man is, therefore, not at all

invalid because he can't look into the heart, for the absolution, even if spoken by a man, is not the judgement of man, but rather the judgement of God. It is a benediction which Christ has brought forth from his death and his resurrection and has ordered, instituted and seriously commanded to be spoken to all frightened sinners, which he therefore also wants believed and received as his gracious benefit. So the penitent is not permitted to think: What good will it do me for a man to speak an absolution to me, who can't look into my heart? Must it not always be dubious whether or not this man is right about me? Might he not actually be losing me, when he ought to be binding me? How can he know if God in heaven is also willing to forgive my sins? What comfort can such dubious forgiveness from a man give me? I certainly hear the comforting voice of a man on earth, but, oh, to hear the voice of the only One who can forgive or condemn me! – No, the penitent is not permitted to think that. He must much rather resolve: If Christ had not won forgiveness for all men and had not commanded his servants to preach forgiveness to all frightened sinners, then obviously their absolution could not give any comfort. But Christ has truly given this command to his servants of his pure Gospel, and promised that what they loose on earth should also be loosed in heaven. By faith I cling to this command and this promise and am therefore assured thereby, despite devil and hell, that I have forgiveness, for God cannot lie.

But perhaps many will say, the absolution might be comforting to those who know they are penitent, but since no one can see into the heart, it might often loose those who should be bound! In that case, doesn't the absolution become a worthless farce? For an impenitent, even then, may not believe it! – We reply: The impenitent, so long as he remains so, can't believe it, but, nevertheless, he also should believe it, as certainly as Christ has also taken away his sins, reconciled even him to God, and has opened heaven, even unto him. The absolution is constantly true, constantly efficacious, constantly applicable, for it is not dependent upon the condition of those who receive it, but on Christ's universal atonement, and upon his command and promise. So where these ring out in the Name of Christ, there the gates and the rule of the hellish jailors are definitely opened to the sinner and he can flee from them. There God truly lays the treasures of his grace in the hands of sinners, and he may well receive them. There God undoubtedly extends the hands of his mercy to him and he may grasp hold of them. There God offers him authentic reconciliation, forgiveness and salvation, and he may receive it as his own. But who ever doesn't take it by faith, yes, because of carnal security residing in him, he cannot receive it, God has certainly knocked at his door, but he has not opened to him. For God had called to him, Peace be with you! But he has not responded to him. He has shut out the forgiveness declared, himself has ripped up the divine pardon and hypocritically once again written a new bill of debt for despising God's grace to add to his list of debts of conscience. Woe to those who do not believe, who call God a liar. But blessed is he who believes. For who ever receives this witness of the Son, "has certified that God is true." John 3.33.

That's why Luther writes: "But you speak as the fanatic spirits and the sophists also do. Even hearing so much of the keys that bind and loose, they still do not turn to them but remain unbound and unloosed. Therefore something else must be there than the Word and the keys. The Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit must do it! – But do you think that a person who does not believe in the binding key will not be bound by it? He shall experience well in due time, that for the sake of his unbelief that binding had not been in vain, nor was it ineffective. So also whoever does not believe he is free and his sins forgiven in time shall also experience well how completely and certainly his sins had been forgiven then, even though he refused to believe it. St. Paul says in Romans 3.3: 'God will not be ineffective for the sake of our unbelief.' So we also are not

speaking here (about) who believes the keys or not. We know full well that very few believe. Rather we are speaking of what the keys do and give. Whoever won't receive it, obviously has nothing. But the keys are not ineffective because of that. Many don't believe the Gospel. But the Gospel is not ineffective or a lie for that reason. If a king gives you a castle and you do not accept it, it's not because the king failed or was lying, but you have fooled yourself and are to blame. The king had most certainly given it. – The absolution is God's command and Word, that one speaks and another one hears. Both are responsible at pains of their soul's salvation to surely and firmly believe, as in all the other articles of faith." (See Luther's excellent *Writing on the Keys*, from the year 1530. L. W. Halle XIX, 1175 ff)

Yet we go on to respond to a third charge Mr. Nast makes in the article cited in the following words: "It (the absolution) strangles the root of the compelling work of the Holy Ghost who is the only one who brings grace, in that the preacher arrogates to himself the high office of the Holy Ghost, to impart to the sinner a witness of the forgiveness of his sins and to declare peace through his spirit." If Mr. Nast has ever more clearly betrayed what an arch-enthusiastic religion Methodism is, he has done it with this charge.¹ With this Mr. Nast asserts that the preached Word of Christ is no witness of the Holy Ghost, but an empty, dead, impotent shell, and that it is therefore dubious to entrust one's self to the dead letter and shell of the written or preached Word of Christ, to cling to it and build upon it the certainty of his having receiving grace.

Then again it is well for us to note that obviously the Holy Ghost alone appropriates to us sinners the grace of Christ, for "no one can call JESUS the LORD, except by the Holy Ghost." 1 Cor. 12.3. But then what is used, even by the Holy Ghost, in order to bear witness and seal Christ's grace in the hearts of men? Is it not even the written and preached Word? Does not Christ say: "The Words that I speak are Spirit and they are life"? Doesn't he say to the apostles: "You will not be the ones who speak. Rather it is the Father's Spirit who speaks through you!" Mt. 10.;20. Did not St. Paul say: "We are God's co-workers"? 1 Cor. 3.9. "God admonishes you through us"? 2 Cor. 5.20. We bear the "office, not of the letter, but of the Spirit and that gives the Spirit"? Eph. 3.6,8. "You are a letter of Christ, prepared through our preaching office and written through us, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God"? Eph. 3.3 Didn't John write: "Three are the witnesses upon the earth: The Spirit (the Word inspired by the Holy Spirit), and the water (holy Baptism) and the blood (the holy LORD's Supper)"? 1 John 5.8

Therefore it is public blasphemy to pit the witness of the written and the preached Word of God against the witness of the Holy Ghost, since the Holy Ghost witnesses and comes into the heart solely through the mediation of the Word and witnesses nothing inwardly in the heart besides and apart from what he previously has witnessed through the Word, read or heard. Now, according to Mr. Nast the preacher of the Gospel is not allowed to give a sinner any witness of the forgiveness of his sins as this is, according to him, an imposition into the office of the Holy Ghost. So what sort of attitude must Mr. Nast have towards the Word of God and the preaching office? This fellow must thereby also view it as a crime when the preacher wants to comfort, teach or rebuke

¹The famous enthusiast Schwenkfeld from Selesia made this same charge three hundred years ago. This fellow writes: "We regard the servants of this (of the Lutheran) ministry as preachers of the holy Scripture, so far as God is made known there we should respect them, but in this they gravely err, by imagining that their service is the service of the Holy Ghost. And they do not differentiate between instruction of the holy Scripture, and what would be the office of the Holy Ghost and his inner working, yes, mixing them together into one office." (*Book of Church Ceremonies* p. 58) The enthusiast Weigel writes in a similar way in his *Discussion of Christianity*. This man defines it this way on p. 70: "I have the Absolver in me, and am not allowed to be absolved by someone else's mouth or hand." The pious Arndt makes the following reply to those words: "This seer thinks the absolution rests upon the mouth of a man, yet it is Christ's Word and comfort: We are heralds in God's place, etc. Behold, I place my Word in your mouth..."

a sinner, since all these are offices of the Holy Ghost alone. O you blind enthusiasts! We hear Luther: "In the church," he writes, "preachers and parsons are placed in the order. If you should hear them, you are hearing God himself. Therefore it is Satan's striving and chief skill that he goes around so that he draws such external offices into disrepute. It is certainly true that the Holy Ghost alone enlightens the heart and kindles faith. But he doesn't do so apart from the external office and without the external use of the holy Sacraments. That is why Paul was commanded to heed Ananias in Damascus. Acts. 9.6. If you will retreat from the ordered office, and want to follow your own imagination and bright ideas, then you will thereby not only not accomplish anything, but will also grasp and receive Satan as God, and you will never be sure if your thoughts are coming from God or the devil." (On Gen. 21.21) In another passage Luther writes: "Do not let that pharisaical blather fool you, by which some let themselves be fooled, how a man might forgive sins yet can't give grace or the Holy Ghost. You remain with the Word of Christ and you be sure that God has no other way by which he forgives sins than through the oral Word he had commanded for us men. If you do not seek forgiveness in the Words, you will be left to gape up into heaven for grace, or as they say, for the 'inward forgiveness.'" (See Luther's excellent book referenced above "On the Keys").

If it were taught in the Lutheran Church that the external declaration and hearing of the words of absolution worked the forgiveness of sins *ex opere operato* (merely because the words are said), then Mr. Nast might not be unjust in asserting that the doctrine of the divine efficacy of the absolution "strangles the root of the working of the Holy Ghost, which is the only thing that brings grace." But hopefully Mr. Nast² at least knows that it is taught in the Lutheran Church that without a true and living faith no one will partake of the absolution, even if it would be spoken to him a thousand times every day, and that this true faith on the Word of the absolution is also worked solely through the power of the Holy Ghost. Therefore it is not the doctrine of absolution that "attacks the root" of the activity of the Holy Ghost, but rather – it is the spirit of Methodism that does so. At Methodism's root, the spirits are not to be tested. Every enthusiasm, no matter how crass, every expression of heated imagination, every fairy tale dream of one's own heart, if it has any spiritual appearance, is regarded and declared to be a work of the Holy Ghost. That's obviously why the doctrine of absolution must be demonized, since it affirms the Holy Ghost's only working through the Word, so that the spirit that comes without the Word and that mitigates against that Word must be a lying spirit. Another root of Methodism: The external witness of the Holy Ghost through the Word and the holy sacraments is despised in contradistinction to the inner witness. Frightened sinners are not taught that they must ground their faith on the external witness by which the Holy Ghost also witnesses in their hearts thereafter, but rather souls are warned the opposite, against receiving the external witness before believing, until feeling and experiencing the living, inner one. Souls are thus turned inward to one's own false works and advised that they must struggle and fight for grace within while, according to God's Word, receiving grace does not come from one's striving, but rather once one has received grace the struggle and the pursuit of it begins and continues, until he's entered through the narrow gate

²That is, we would like to attribute to the Methodist preachers the boundless ignorance that is so characteristic of them, documented on nearly every page of *The Apologete*, since Mr. Mulfinger sets down the Lutheran doctrine as follows: "Here all that needs to take place is that a man feels repentance and contrition over his sins when he goes to confession with the resolve to do better, and as soon as the priest utters a few words, he is free of his debt of sins. . . . If he returns to his sins, he need only use the medicine mentioned again." If Mr. M. is not ashamed to publish such lies about the Lutheran Church, what sort of description might this gentleman give his hearers in private conversation about the Lutheran Church! --

and the goal of salvation has been reached. (Luke 13.24; Phil. 2.12,13; 3.13-15) Man is impotent to engage such a battle before he's received grace for a new life from God. Whoever wants to fight to get grace strives against grace, for the holy apostle says, "if it is from grace, then it is not a reward for works" (for fighting and the like), "else grace would not be grace. If it were a reward for works" (battling), "then it is not grace. Else a wage would not be a wage." Rom. 11.6. This invention of self righteousness and one's own working, that is innate to all this, is the real root of Methodism. Whoever can't see through this must see much of our battle against Methodism as shadow boxing. But the doctrine of absolution does seize Methodism by its root, which is why it is charged with that horrid blasphemy. They feel they are fighting for their life by this. It's all too clear to see that where the doctrine of absolution is believed, Methodism can't take root. Note that absolution, rightly understood, bars legalisms, worry benches, movements of the Spirit, and all the spiritual snake oil of Methodism as with one fell swoop over all the flocks.³ Note that absolution would make manifest the hypocrisy of the Methodists, when they say they also teach that man is saved and made righteous before God through faith alone, for through the absolution man's attention is taken away from all he does, as he is commended to the Word alone, and it cries out to him:

If now it seems he wants you not,
Then be not all afrighted,
For where he brings his saving lot,
He will be eas'ly sighted,
His Word must even surer be,
When your heart says "It cannot be!"
So do not be despairing!

Obviously the Methodists will want to conclude from this that Lutherans know nothing about the inner witness of the Holy Ghost, yes, since carnal people cannot know anything about it and in their blindness they must consider it foolishness.⁴ (1 Cor. 2.14) We reply: We also teach, and every true Lutheran experiences in his heart, how the Holy Ghost bears witness to the spirit of believers that they are God's children; how they bear the Holy Spirit as the guarantor of grace in their hearts and they are sealed through him, and how he cries out a sweet *Abba* in them. (Rom. 8. 15-16; 2 Cor. 1.22; Eph. 1.13-14). We only rebuke the Methodist way of teaching this, for they insist that a person may not be allowed to ground his faith upon any external means of grace and pledge ordained by God, but he would have to much rather look away from the dead letter and signs, must wrestle after the inner witness and may not believe those means until he would feel the living, inner voice and comforting power of the Holy Ghost, so until he clearly feels the assurance he's longed for, as he's overflowing with sweetest joy. We reject that unscriptural way of talking about conversion. For, first of all, it attacks the very root of the doctrine

³It goes without saying that we in no way want to deny here the Holy Ghost also has his work among the Methodists. Methodists don't only preach Methodism. Where they actually preach God's Word, it doesn't return from them void, but accomplishes that for which God sent it. Is. 55.11. We would consider it blasphemy against God to speak against the real gracious working of the Holy Ghost, that also follows through the Word among them and is therefore also in perfect agreement with the Word. We battle against Methodism, not against Methodists. God also has his seed among them.

⁴Even the enthusiast Weigel, mentioned above, made this outcry against the Lutheran Church. He writes in his *Golden Grip*, p. 75: "The opponents (the Lutherans) deny the inner witness of the Holy Ghost or the anointing in all of us." The Wittenberg theologian N. Hunnius replies to this: "Whenever did anyone in our Church ever presume such things that the inner witness of the Holy Ghost would be rejected or not admit that the LORD Christ must dwell in us through faith and destroy the work of Satan? This is what he (Weigel) himself does, in that he rejects the external witness, out of which the inner witness stems and originates. For this comes from hearing the Word of God, Rom. 10.18, not out of what God should (according to Weigel's explanation) speak into the heart immediately (without means)." (See: *Hunni Betrachtung der Weigel. Theologie*. Wittenberg, 1622. p. 213)

of justification which takes place in heaven and, secondly, it takes away the comfort in Christianity. For the feeling of the sweet assurance of grace does not come prior to faith, but follows faith; it is not justification itself, but the fruit of the same (Rom. 5.1,2), and the witness of the Holy Spirit is not always felt in the heart to the same degree, yes in times of affliction, when it withdraws into the inner recesses of the heart, it seems completely silenced, with nothing left but a sighing after grace, as practically nothing is sensed but the condemnation of the heart (1 John 3.20). Our examples of this abound in the book of Job and the Psalms, where the changing conditions of the souls of the children of God's grace, that is, that now they have a sweet feeling of comfort and, all of a sudden it's gone, is confirmed for us by the pen of the Holy Ghost himself. Since that's the witness of the Holy Ghost, this is therefore not to be judged only according to our feelings, but, above all, according to our faith on the Word of grace. So if it is taught to trust only in the feelings of one's own heart, and not upon the unchanging heart of his dear Father in Christ, that is, upon the plain Word of the Gospel and its visible seal, the holy sacraments, then his soul is being subjected to a false ground of faith, turning a fruit of justification into its root, and toppling those being led thereby into the danger of either turning their experience into their savior, or of hypocrisy with respect to this demand to constantly feel grace, or even resulting in doubt and despair when God buries himself in their hearts.

On this important subject, that casts a bright light over all the modern Christianity of the Methodists, and also many post-Lutherans, evangelicals and other sects, we would like to follow up with a few beautiful witnesses of experienced men which will be most encouraging for our Christian readers:

In the *Formula of Concord* it says: "Of the presence, working, and gifts of the Holy Ghost one neither should nor can always judge *ex sensu*, if or how one's heart feels it, but rather, since it is often imperceptible, covered over by weakness, we should be certain from out of and according to the promise orally preached in Word of God, as the office and work of the Holy Ghost, through which he works certainly and is powerful in our hearts." (See *Brief Summary*, Art. 2 Free Will).

Luther: "God forgives sins in a two fold way: Hidden, so we do not feel that. Just as he reckons and retains the sins of many people and they don't feel or regard it at all. Secondly: Publicly, which is how we experience it, just as he accounts sins to a few people, so they feel it as through punishment and terrors of conscience. The first forgiveness is always needed, the second is occasionally necessary, so people do not despair. . . . The first forgiveness is bitter and difficult for us, but it is the noblest and best of all. The other is easier and so much less. The LORD Christ altogether evidences them both to Mary Magdalene. The first, when he turns his back to her and yet says to Simon: 'Her many sins are forgiven her.' She was not yet at peace with that. The second was when he turned and said to her: 'Your sins are forgiven you; depart in peace.' Then she was satisfied. So the first makes one pure, the other brings peace. The first works and brings it, the second settles one as it is felt. And there is an infinite difference between the two. The first is merely in faith and delivers much. The second is felt and receives the reward. The first is useful to noble people, the second to the weak and the inexperienced." (On Luke 7.47-50)

Scriver: "But here a disturbed heart might say: Oh, I don't feel the witness of the Holy Ghost in me, I know nothing of his inner voice, of his comfort, peace and joy. In my heart, for the most part, I experience nothing but fear and terror, sometimes in my trouble not a single passage of Scripture occurs to me, or even if it does occur to me or is presented to me by others, I can still glean no strength from it, I don't take it to heart, I pray with flagging

devotion and find no relief in it, etc. I reply: You must not judge according to your feelings and experiences about these most important and comforting things, but rather according to the Word of God, which teaches in clear passages that believing hearts are temples of the Holy Ghost, that he dwells in them, that he gives witness to your spirit that he is your Comforter and Counselor, who remains with you forever. So this way of thinking is false: I feel no peace, no joy in me, therefore the Holy Ghost and the Kingdom of God are not in me. I don't experience the witness of the Holy Ghost and his comfort, but only the roaring and spite of the hellish, murdering spirit, therefore my heart is not fit for such a witness. I can't believe I am God's child, therefore I must not be. This, I say, and things like that are out of line. Even as this does not follow: The tree is not green and does not bloom in Winter, therefore it has no sap, and is dried up. – So long as there is a groan for God in a man, no matter how small or weak it may be, the Spirit of God has not withdrawn from him. The longing of a soul after God's grace has its origin from the Holy Ghost." (See *Seelenschatz. Th. II. para.12.*)

Heinrich Mueller: "If you do not feel the abundantly joyful movement of the Spirit, don't let it bother you. That feeling is not even necessary for salvation. Christ says: Whoever believes shall be saved. Mark 16.16. But now, faith is not based upon one's experiences, but rather upon the promises of God. Yes, this is the noblest power of faith, when over and against everything being experienced one nevertheless clings fast to God's promise, as it is written of Abraham in Romans 4.18, that he, without hope, even against all hope, had hope. And God withdraws his sweet comfort even for that reason, that he test faith to see if it will also hold fast to his Word." (*Himmlicher Liebesk. C. 13, § 59.*)

Albrecht Bengel: The pursuit of the assurance of justification can make honest souls first err and become desperate and can drive impure souls into a self-centered cacozelia (mimicking a foreign language). For there can be no greater pressure brought to bear than when one denies a soul its justification or forces it to doubt it, insofar as such souls cannot be given this assurance in unqualified words. (*Abriss der Bruedergemeinde p. 478*)

D. Burk: We must first learn to trust God and thereafter experience, first take the food into our mouths, and thereafter let it taste good. Otherwise you'll get everything backwards. But since God gives the taste of things later, we must now trust him for it that much more. But the reason why a few impure souls sometimes jump too quickly to important conclusions (that they only then have forgiveness of sins), is just this: It happens through the relentless longing for assurance, that only comes later. When he thinks he's achieved it somehow, his desire for it falls away, which robs him of his continued desire. He satisfies himself with that. (See *Buch von der Rechtfertigung. §13. 14.*) "The witness (of the Holy Ghost) is not attested just once. This matter is not always witnessed that way for a long period of time, but rather it is given when it is placed in doubt, when it is contested." (*Ibid. § 30.*) . . .

A very common attack posture that has been adapted by the Methodists in their battle against the Evangelical-Lutheran church is that they accuse her of not having been fully reformed, but that she still rather retains many of the anti-biblical trappings of the papacy. And, among other things, holy Absolution is counted as part of this papistic leaven still remaining in our Church. Why? It is said, isn't that just what the pope does, that he pretends to have the keys of Peter, that is, the keys to the heavenly kingdom, that is, that he has the authority to open and close heaven?

Here now is the first answer we give: Is it a certain, legitimate, Christian judgement when it is said: The Roman Church has this or that, therefore it's false and must be rejected? – Doesn't the Roman Church also have the Bible? Doesn't she also have holy

Baptism? Doesn't she also have the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds? Since this apostacized, false Church has these, must they all be rejected? – The apostle says: "Test everything and retain what is good." Therefore the Lutheran Church retains and praises and values whatever agrees with God's Word, where ever it might now be found, even if it might be so foolish according to our natural reason and ever so contrary to our natural hearts. Therefore, if other Churches have reformed themselves according to their reason and hearts, and progressed by means of the spirit of the age, the Lutheran Church has reformed herself by means of the Scripture alone and remains standing immovably upon the foundation of the ancient, immutable truth. Now since the holy Scripture says, with bright, clear Words: "Whosoever's sins you remit, they are remitted unto them," our Church does not depart from these Words, but holds them as certain and truthful as the Words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Whether these Words are rejected by the Methodists, or most highly retained by the papists, it makes no difference to the Lutheran Church.

Secondly, there's a difference in the Office of the Keys as it is administered in the Lutheran versus the Roman-Catholic Church, a difference as wide as heaven. That is, the Roman Catholics teach 1.) that only their consecrated priests can validly absolve. For this is what it says in the decisions of the Tridentine Council: "If anyone says – that the priests alone are not the administrators of the absolution, but that it is stated to all believing Christians: 'Whosoever's sins you remit, etc.,' so, by the authority of those Words, each can forgive sins – let him be accursed." (*Sess. XIV. Ch. III. Sacrament of Penance, Can. 10*)

Roman Catholics teach 2.) that the priest sits as a judge in the confessional, that they are there to examine sinners, to demand from him a full confession of all his deadly sins, and, on the basis of their investigations, they have to declare the sentence over the penitent. For thus says the Tridentine Council: "Though the absolution of the priest is the distribution of an alien wealth, yet it is not merely an office to proclaim the Gospel or to declare that sins are forgiven, but it is like the act of a judge, by which the judgement is passed down from him (the priest) as from the judge. (*Ibid. Ch. V*)

Roman Catholics teach 3.) that the absolution is based and dependent upon whether the contrition of the one confessing his sins and the works of satisfaction of the one coming to confess are carried out in the judgement of the priest. For the cited papistic symbol goes on to say: "If anyone denies that for complete forgiveness of sins three acts (as the essence of the Sacrament of Penance) are required of the penitent, that is, contrition, the confession and the acts of satisfaction, which are called the three parts of penance; for if anyone says that there are only two parts of penance, that is, the terror of conscience aroused by the knowledge of sins, and faith that receives the Gospel, or the forgiveness of sins, by which someone believes that his sins have been forgiven him through Christ, let him be accursed." (*Ibid. Ch. III. Can. 4*) Yes, in the Roman rite, part of the absolution formula sounds like this: "The suffering of our LORD, JESUS Christ, the service of the blessed virgin Mary and all the saints, and all that you have done that is good and suffered that is evil, grant unto you forgiveness of sins, an increase in grace and the reward of eternal life." (*Ed. Pariss. p. 72.*)

Finally, Roman Catholics teach 4.) only the eternal punishments will be relieved, but the temporal punishments and the pains of purgatory are in no way removed by the absolution of the priest. Therefore the priest must prescribe for his confessing children all sorts of penalties by which he would shorten his suffering or that he might be delivered from it altogether. That is, in the more extended confession it says this: "If anyone says that

after a penitent sinner receives the grace of justification he is thus forgiven his debt of sin and the debt (*reatus*) of eternal punishment is removed so that no debt of temporal punishment remains that he must bear either in this world or in the future fires of purgatory before heaven can stand open to him: Let him be accursed." (*Sess. VI. Justif. Can. 30.*)

The doctrine of the Lutheran Church is far, far removed from this doctrine. Lutherans by no means teach that the power to forgive or retain sins is a unique authority of the preacher, the power and efficacy of the performance of the same being received with his office, his call, ordination or any such thing. We much rather teach the power of the Keys is a treasure Christ had given in the apostles to the whole church or congregation. It is, as it says in our Catechism, "a special (peculiar) power Christ has given his church (not the priests) on earth." The church is his bride with all he himself has entrusted her, and has now received the keys to his whole household and its treasures. She is the housewife, or the lady of the house. Baptism, the LORD's Supper, the preaching office, absolution, etc., are all her wealth. That's why Paul cries out to the Corinthian congregation: "Let no one boast in any man. All is yours. Whether it is Paul or Apollos, whether Cephas or the world. – Everything is yours." 1 Cor. 3.21-22. Therefore, according to Matthew 18, as Christ had shown how one who had sinned should be treated, and that if he would not also listen to the church or the congregation, that man should be regarded as a heathen man and a tax collector, so Christ immediately adds: "Truly I say to you whatsoever you shall loose on earth, etc." Hereby, irrefutably, the great power to open heaven and hell is handed over to the church or the congregation, so to all baptized Christians. In the New Testament there is no longer any priestly office mediating between God and men. The High Priest of the Old Testament was a type of Christ, but the priests and Levites were types of all of Christianity. No so-called spiritual estate, anointed and consecrated by men, but rather all true Christians are now the elect tribe, the royal priesthood. 1 Pet. 2.5,9; Rev. 1.6. So in keeping with this, the Lutheran church teaches that in an emergency even a laymen can impart the absolution and that then even his absolution is as valid, "powerful and sure in heaven also, as if Christ our dear LORD dealt with us himself." Yet that's only, obviously, in an emergency, since God, as a God of order, has instituted the holy preaching office through which the common offices and wealth should be administered and portioned out to all Christians.– Hopefully this makes it clear to every reader what a wicked slander it is when the Methodists assert that Luther and those who follow his faith had stood so firm on the doctrine of the power of the keys, and still do, to thus make themselves appear greater than they are and to place themselves as necessary intermediaries between God and the laity, yes, to be gaped at there as gods. According to Lutheran doctrine, the preacher does not administer the Office of the Keys as a lord, but as a servant of the church.

But Lutherans also do not teach 2., that the preacher acts as judge in the confessional, but much rather he is only God's instrument, only a steward and dispenser of the treasures of grace Christ has given his church. So it does not come from the judgmental decisions of a preacher if someone has the forgiveness of sin, but it rather depends upon the faith of the one who desires the rich comfort of the absolution.

Further, 3., we in no way teach that the absolution depends upon the perfection of our contrition, our confession and our works of penance, but that it is freely given out of pure grace and without any view of worthiness, by the power of the perfect service of JESUS Christ.

Finally, 4., in no way do we teach that a preacher, when he has absolved a sinner, is able to require anything of him by which

he must placate the temporal punishments that are still remaining, nor any pains expected in purgatory. We much rather teach that the absolution, if it is believed, will not only remove all guilt, but therefore necessarily also punishment for time and eternity, and that the cross, which even the saved sinner must still always bear, is no longer a punishment but a fatherly chastening by which the saved should be warned against apostasy, and that his faith and love should thereby be proven and put into practice.

Who cannot see from all this that at every point the Lutheran and papistic confession and absolution are two completely different things, that when the administration of the Office of the Keys in the Lutheran Church is called a vestige of the papacy that is either based on horrible ignorance or on wickedness? –

Now we come to an accusation against the doctrine of absolution in our Church that indeed, is not made by Methodists, but is not seldom made just by those who still believe in their hearts that the Bible is God's Word. We have in mind the accusation that the apostles had certainly forgiven sins, but that is no reason why a common servant of today's Church would be permitted to be invested with that authority. We had sought to show how baseless this accusation is two years ago in a sermon for Quasimodogeneti Sunday. We hope our readers will excuse us if we would now take the time to quote here the relevant passage from that sermon. Here it is:

"No one who believes the Bible can entertain the slightest doubt that Christ had given the apostles the authority to forgive and retain sins. It is explicitly stated with clear Words in today's Gospel (John 21.19-31) as well as in other passages of the Gospel. The only question that can be raised is whether that authority is present now, or if it vanished at the death of the apostles.

But obviously it is not enough to assert something based on a single fiat without any proof, that this authority had been only an apostolic privilege. A Christian, to whom the truth is no joke but lays at the heart of everything, desires that solid ground and will give as his response: Why should just this authority to forgive and retain sins apply only to the apostles? Christ has certainly also said only to the apostles, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, and Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Further, Christ has only spoken to the apostles in his institution of the holy LORD's Supper: "This do in remembrance of me." So then, by what sort of authority is the Gospel now preached, Baptism administered and the holy LORD's Supper celebrated? Isn't it only done because Christ had commanded the apostles to do it, and with and in them his whole church, as they comprised her initial membership and they were, so to speak, her first branches? Isn't that also why Christ, at his departure, also gave the command appropriate for this: "Teach all nations -- and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you?" Now therefore, no one can doubt that one can and must even now preach, baptize and administer the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, because the disciples were commanded this, so what is the basis for us to be forced to make the forgiving and retaining of sins an exception to this?

Yes, some think this only belongs solely to the holy status that only the apostles attained. – But that's heresy. Even the holy apostles were sinners and remained sinners, as they themselves clearly confess. Yes, if it depended upon the holiness of those who speak the absolution, there would be no saint in the world, not even an angel, holy enough. Comfortless, truly comfortless is any forgiveness built upon man's holiness or even upon the holiness of an angel.

Everyone knows that. That's why they obviously do not say the disciples had the prerogative to be able to impart the forgiveness of sins because they were holier than other men, but rather because they alone were in the position to know whom they

should or could forgive sins and whose to retain. But no one has that gift now. But, my friends, that's also heresy. Even the holy apostles could be fooled, and they were, for example, by Simon the magician, by Ananias and Sapphira, and they were deceived by other hypocrites for long periods of time. Not even the apostles could reader peoples' hearts. Only JESUS Christ had no need for anyone bear witness of a man. As John says, he knew well what was in a man and could even see their thoughts from a distance. So it is also untrue that the apostles had the prerogative to be able to forgive and retain sins, since they had been so enlightened that they could have seen into the hearts of every man. But the way by which the apostles were distinguished from every man consisted in their not erring in the preaching of the Gospel, and their doctrine would be confirmed with miracles and prophecies; and further, that they were not called into becoming his messengers through the mediation of men, but by the Son of God, himself, and they were not bound in the work of their preaching office to a single location but had been sent amongst all the nations of the globe.

Indeed, according to our text, Christ breathed upon the disciples before conferring the Office of the Keys on them with the Words: "Receive the Holy Ghost." But we are not permitted to draw the conclusion from this that they were being given supernatural apostolic gifts necessary for the conduct of that office. In this moment Christ was by no means portioning out the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, for that took place on Pentecost. Much rather, only on that day did the LORD give them the Spirit of gladness and courage that was so necessary for their conducting their difficult office, and he even now pours out this Spirit upon all his faithful servants.⁵

So what is the basis for the notion that the Office of the Keys died off with the apostles? It rests only upon human imagination and thoughts. It has no foundation at all in the holy Scripture. But we find therein clear, specific reasons for the opposite conclusion.

First, as has already been mentioned he says, "Teach them all things that I have commanded you," and thus he explicitly says: "So it is written and so Christ must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and have repentance and forgiveness of sins be preached in his Name among all peoples." Luke 24. 46-47. So now, as sure as it is that Christ hereby has given a command for all times and not just for the age of the apostles to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins, it is just as certain that he has given the authority to forgive sins for all times. For is the absolution anything other than the application of the preaching of Christ's grace to one or several specific people? And what is the repetitious preaching of the Gospel but a constant absolution to all who are penitent? And what exactly is a person who is baptizing another doing but telling him: Your sins are forgiven you, God receives you into his covenant of grace, you are now God's child, you are now saved? Further, what is a person doing who delivers the holy LORD's Supper to another, but saying: You also partake in Christ, in his sacrifice, in his atonement? So are the sacraments not most obviously absolutions, that is, in the sacraments isn't the grace of the Gospel also being declared, bestowed and sealed to

⁵In his pamphlet on repentance (written in 1521 at the Wartburg) Luther shows yet another grounds why Christ says; "receive the Holy Ghost" to the holy apostles while conferring the keys. He writes: "Here it is concluded that no one can forgive sins unless he have the Holy Ghost. – But, on the other hand, if I should not have forgiveness for my sins until my father confessor had the Holy Ghost, (since no one can be sure of someone else's having the same) when would I ever be sure about my absolution? ... Answer: ... No one binds or forgives sins but only he who so certainly has the Holy Ghost, so that you and I know it... But that is no one but the Christian church, that is, the assembly of all believing Christians. She alone has these keys so that you have no doubt. So whoever appropriates these keys to himself, is a true, impudent, sacrilegious church robber, whether he be the pope or whoever else... Therefore no one should receive an absolution from a pope or bishop, since they are the ones who are there absolving. God defend us from the absolution of the pope and the bishops who now fill the world. But... if a stone or some wood could absolve me in the name of the Christian church, I would want to receive it." See L.W. XIX, 1051.

individuals and specific people who desire it? Therefore is it not an obvious contradiction to assert that now we might still have the authority to baptize and communicate, but no longer to absolve? If you wanted to make a comparison, aren't Baptism and Communion somewhat higher and greater than Absolution? Therefore whoever says: How dare someone want to forgive sins, must, by necessity, much rather come to this conclusion: How dare someone want to baptize and thereby bear someone up to heaven or to administer holy Communion and thereby portion out the sacrifice of the Son of God, yes, his own body and blood!

O, don't let yourself become heretical through the empty blather of unbelievers. As surely as Christ instituted his church not only for the apostolic age, but for all ages, and has given his Gospel to all peoples, it is just as sure that, even now, the authority to forgive and retain sins on earth is there. As certainly as Christ remains with his people and will not forsake them until the last day, it is just as sure that the power of his death and resurrection extends over all sinners who believe the comfort being given: "Your sins are forgiven you." The church of Christ is and remains a heavenly kingdom on earth, in which the heavenly ladder of the Gospel, of the holy sacraments and Absolution have been erected, upon which all sinners may climb up to heaven. It is good that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost have ceased, which had been necessary for the removal of the old divine covenant and the introduction of the new, as divine certification. But after the church of the NT has stood firmly founded over the graves of the apostles, there is no longer any need for miraculous gifts. But the gifts and means of the Holy Ghost unto salvation, unto grace and the forgiveness of sins remain, as certainly as the kingdom of grace of the church cannot be overwhelmed by the gates of hell."
...

Two objections which the Methodists have made against the doctrine of holy absolution and against its use in the Lutheran Church still remain, that we still must now address as our conclusion.

That is, first of all, they object that many unconverted, fleshly hearts would be comforted in their service to sin by the absolution received, so they will become even more secure and hardened thereby. Here we can briefly reply with that well known maxim: *Abusus non tollit usum*, that is, abuse does not negate proper use. The holy apostle Paul did not stop preaching, loud and clear, that Christ extends his greatest grace to the most unworthy sinners, though fleshly hearts accused him of upholding the principle: "Let us sin so that grace may abound." Rom. 3.8. Yet he kept right on teaching that where sins have become mighty, there grace is much mightier, even if now many drew the conclusion from this that one should just keep on sinning so that grace would become mightier. Rom. 5.20; 6.1. So many hypocrites might always draw the sweet preaching of grace in service to their petulance, but for their sakes the full pasture of the Gospel may not be withheld from troubled hearts. Besides that, it's well known that true Lutheran preachers always labor long and hard against this abuse of holy absolution and still do, and that they teach that in every absolution, even if received (as is proper) with no conditions, repentance is always the implicit condition of that heart.⁶

Without lingering on this objection any longer, we will go on to discuss that last one. That is, Mr. Mulfinger and Mr. Nast finally assert, contrary to the witness of Biblical and church history, that in the church of God the authority to forgive sins has never been

⁶That *conditiones* (condition) of absolution considered is the same as is otherwise in common preaching, and every absolution, public or private, presupposes faith, for without faith it is not embraced, but it is not a deficient key for that reason. For faith is never based on our worthiness, but rather only goes so far as to receive the absolution and to add the believer's "Ja." *Luther's Works*. Vol. XXI, 424.

exercised. Mr. Mulfinger writes: "We can prove that neither the apostles nor the original church, in her purest and best days, practiced or claimed this authority, since neither the apostles nor the first servants of the church ever absolved people in God's place." Mr. Nast, after he had presented his best attempt to write his version of the origin of private confession, writes: "The more (in the 5th century) public church penance ceased, the more the spiritual estate made themselves appear as if God had directly given all authority to forgive sins to them."

If the truth were always on the side of those who prove that they make the most audacious claims in broad day light, then we obviously must retreat from this field with no further adieu. But everyone knows it's not assertion, but proof that's decisive, so we ask the reader to consider the following:

First, the Lutheran Church also teaches that penance, even if we find it being practiced in the Scripture,⁷ is still, a free, human order. So it's hard to understand why, when he wants to relate the history of the development of absolution, Mr. Nast does not talk about absolution, but penance. Either Mr. Nast himself is not clear on this, or he wants to confuse and muddy the waters for his readers to make his case.

The second thing to consider is that even Lutherans never assert that the manner and form by which absolution is delivered by him is commanded by God himself and, therefore, has been received in the church of God for all ages. We Lutherans know that it is not a command of God that even those who have committed no public sins and have not offended the church, or who have not had an especially sorely afflicted conscience must be served with the comfort of absolution on a regular basis. Further, we know that it is obviously not commanded by God that each and every time one wants to go to the holy LORD's Supper, he must have an absolution from a servant of Christ. Finally, we know it is even much less a command of God that every such absolution must follow an enumeration of one's particular sins. We do not deny that all of this is a form that's come from tradition and, therefore, is part of human orders that the church itself has the right and prerogative to institute and to change according to her circumstances. Therefore if Mssrs. Mulfinger and Nast cannot find the form and tradition used in the absolution now employed and given in the Lutheran church in Biblical and church history in the first age of the Christian church, they should not think that's strange. We have never asserted that the form and tradition the Lutheran church employs in her use of the Keys of the heavenly kingdom is one that has been in constant usage nor commanded by God. We only go so far as to say that the church of God on earth has always had and still has the authority to forgive sins in the Name of the LORD, and that her forgiveness has also been as valid and certain in heaven. It still is.

Now we will also prove this from the Bible and from church history.

In the O. Testament, indeed, believers usually had to cling solely to the general promises, yet we read that even the prophets occasionally applied the general promises of grace to individual persons specifically and declared they were forgiven.⁸

As, for example, David acknowledged his sin to the prophet Nathan with the words: 'I have sinned against the LORD,' so he immediately absolved him and said: "So the LORD has also

⁷Mt. 3.5,6. "There the city of Jerusalem and the whole land of the Jews and all the territories around the Jordan went to him," to John the Baptizer, "and were baptized by him in the Jordan, and confessed (did penance for) their sins."

⁸Compare with Luther who writes this: "The comforting, free Gospel must be given room so that it may be spoken to each and every person, as well as to many. For how is the absolution any different than speaking the Gospel to one single man who receives comfort thereby for the sins he confessed?" *LW*, Halle. XVI. 2178.

removed your sins. You will not die.” 2 Sam. 12.13. If we go on to the N. Testament, we not only find that Christ absolved several sinners, (Lk. 5.20-26; 7. 48-49), but also the apostles. As, among others, St. Paul had placed the incestuous man in the congregation in Corinth under the ban in the Name of JESUS Christ (1 Cor. 5.1-5), but now as the incestuous man had fallen into a divine contrition, he now also administered the loosing key towards him and wrote to the congregation: “It is enough that this man has suffered punishment by so many, so that you now forgive him all the more, and comfort him, so he not fall into inordinate sadness. Therefore, I admonish you that you show him your love. But whomever you forgive anything, I also forgive him. For even I, if I forgive anyone anything, I forgive it for your sake in Christ’s stead.” 2 Cor.2.6ff. Now if Mssrs. M. and N. had read this, how could they be so bold as to write: “Neither the apostles nor the original church have practiced (absolution) in their purest and best days”? Don’t these gentlemen know that Lutherans still have a Bible where the examples just mentioned are written as clear as day of prophets and apostles exercising their authority to absolve people? We’re afraid these gentlemen never imagined we’d mention these examples, when they so audaciously published to all the world there were no such examples. People are ignorant. They’ll take us at our word. But if they assert this to us, we test it with the Words of these apostles and prophets, as well as the Words of Christ. We’ve now written so many sorts of things on this and have so far looked at this from so many angles that our readers’s heads must be spinning. So perhaps, after all that, a few of our Methodists might still believe there is no example in the whole Bible of an absolution being imparted by a man. But even if these gentlemen achieve their goal in many people, let those who will not let the Word of God be taken from their eyes and have a greater respect for that Word than to be enthralled by the fiat of a saintly, living enthusiast (*Schwaermer*), rather mark and avoid these people as dishonest, deceitful falsifiers of the most holy Word of God.

Now, going on to consider the post-apostolic age, although it is true that the form by which the Office of the Keys is now administered in the Lutheran Church is also not found there, the office itself is easy to find. It is most clearly seen in the church’s restoration of the penitent-fallen back into the congregation. Even in the post-apostolic age the church was aware that the ban was not only God’s ban, but that, therefore, the forgiveness is God’s forgiveness by Christ’s command and promise, as Dr. Guerike writes in his paragraph about church discipline in the first three centuries: “Now if the excommunicated truly showed an honest repentance, they would finally, commensurate with apostolic regulation (2 Cor. 2.5ff), after an appropriate, often year long period of repentance, be received again into congregational fellowship through the laying on of the Bishop’s hand after the entire congregation concurred, and the absolution was imparted to them, and they were allowed to commune in the congregation.”⁹ So, since the end of the third century, the restoration of the lapsed received the form that exists in the ages that followed.” (That is, the penitent had to progress through four stages of church penance, after which they would first publicly confess their sins and would receive the absolution.) The church fathers, Tertulian (Presbyter at Carthage since 192 AD) and Cyprian (Bishop there since 248 AD), call giving and receiving that sort of absolution “giving and receiving the peace,” or “the peace of the LORD.” One of the things the latter wrote in his letter to Cornelius is: “We were

thinking. . . that those who had apostasized . . . in the persecution, . . . who did full penance and were in the throes of death received their peace. For it was not right for the church to close to those who were knocking, and that those contrite and begging aid in their saving hope should be denied, that those turning away from the world would be left without the peace of the LORD, even since he who himself had given the law had affirmed that what was bound on earth would also be bound in heaven, but that what could be loosed there, would first be loosed here on earth.” *Opp. Ad. Erasm. P. 5.*)

A truly convincing proof that the authority to absolve had been asserted and exercised in the church of the first three centuries is the emergence of a specific sect, the Novatians, in the middle of the 3rd century, whose principle, that no one who had violated his baptismal vows through coarse sins, and was for that reason excommunicated (placed under the ban, even in the case when, by the mercy of God, he could long for forgiveness) would then be permitted the assurance of the church of forgiveness of sins or be received again into her fellowship, had been rejected by the church. The church historian Socrates has preserved for us a lovely, appropriate history of this. Namely, he relates: “After the creed from the Council of Nicea (in the year 325) had been accepted and subscribed to, the emperor (Constantine) asked Acesius (the Novatian) if he also agreed with this creed and with this determination of the celebration of Easter. He said, “the synod has, O Emperor, determined nothing new. For the determination of faith and this time for the celebration of Easter, as I have heard it, goes all the way back to the time of the apostles. Now as the emperor responded and asked: So why do you cut yourself off from the fellowship? He held against this what had happened at the time of the Decian persecution, and stated the unusually harsh principle that for those who sin after baptism, since the Scripture calls that a sin leading to death, the congregation was not permitted to deem them worthy of the fellowship of the sacrament. Indeed, they were to be admonished to repentance, but their hope for forgiveness could not be from the priests, but was only to be awaited from God, who has the authority to forgive sins. After Acesius had said this, the emperor answered him: O Acesius, then put up a ladder and climb all by yourself up to heaven if you can.” (*Hist. Ecc. Trip. L. II. 6.13.*) May the Methodist Novatians of our time take this to heart, who oxymoronically enough heartily hurl their anathemas all around and declare that all non-Methodists are unconverted, condemned and shut out of heaven, while, on the other hand, they want nothing to do with absolution or the comforting, loosing Key.

Now we move on to more recent times, since we have now treated in detail whether absolution had been used in the best and purest age of the church. Here we only cite a few important witnesses, from the age of the Reformation on, about absolution, by which we ask our readers to compare this to what the modern Methodist saints have written concerning it, or much rather, have blindly blasphemed.

Luther writes this in his “Warning to those in Frankfurt on the Main, to Beware of Zwinglian Doctrine and Teachers,” from the year 1533: “If a thousand or even a thousand thousand worlds were mine, I would rather lose it all than let this penance be removed at all from the church. – The second part in confession is the absolution that the priest speaks in God’s stead. – This part is not only useful and necessary for the youth and the mob, but rather for everyone, and no one should despise it, no matter how learned and holy he might be. For who has risen so high that he doesn’t need God’s Word or may despise it? And for the sake of this part alone I need it most of all, and won’t and can’t be deprived of it, for it often and daily gives me great comfort when I am anxious and distressed. But since the enthusiasts

⁹The church historian Sozomen concludes his description of this process in the Eastern Church with these words: “When the appointed day passed and the punishment or a certain penalty was concluded, then he (the penitent) was absolved of his sin and was again presented to the people and the congregation.”

(*Schwaermer*) are carnally secure and want nothing to do with sorrow or affliction, they blithely despise this medicine and comfort, and then also want to wrestle it away from those who need it and must have it. If they are full they should still let those who are hungry eat. If they are holy then they should also let sinners become holy. If they no longer need God and his Word, then they should leave those alone who still do need it. But (as said), with such rage they show their great blindness and folly as those who have never yet learned what God's Word, faith, comfort, and conscience are, and so they are blind leaders of the blind who all end up falling in the ditch. So just let them go and always fall, but stay away from them." (*Works XVII.*, 2453ff.) Here the Mssrs. Methodist Leaders, who so horribly blasphemed holy absolution, have Luther's judgement about them. So, therefore, maybe now they'll stop dressing up their enthusiasms (*Schwaermeri*) by their twisting and perverting what Luther says.

Further, Luther writes the following about the dignity of the absolution: "The other reason and inducement to use and confess it as much as possible is the precious and noble promise of God in those four passages, Mt. 16.19, 'What you will loose shall be loosed;' Mt. 18.18: 'What you loose shall be loosed;' Jn. 20.23, 'Whoever's sins you forgive, shall be forgiven them;' Mt. 18.19-20, 'Where two on earth are agreed, whatever it may be, that shall be done by my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them.' Whoever is not moved by such lovely Words must obviously have a cold faith or is a lost Christian. For even if each individual may privately confess to God and secretly be reconciled to God, in that way he still has no one to declare his sentence to him, by which he's set free and his conscience stilled, and must worry if he must do something else. But he's all safe and secure when he grasps God by his own Word and promises, so he thus overcomes his strong reservations and opposition on a basis of divine truth, by which he may press on as boldly as God himself does with his own truth and say something like this: Now, dear God, I have mourned and revealed my sins before you to my neighbor and in your Name reconciled with him and desired grace. You have graciously promised, what you have loosed shall be loosed, and whatever we agree upon shall be done by our Father. So I cling to your promise. I do not doubt your truth. As my neighbor has freed me in your Name, so I am freed and it will be done unto me as we have desired. – Now God is truthful and whatever he promises, we are sure he will keep it, Ps. 33.4, so that St. Paul says in 2 Tim. 2.13: 'Even if we do not believe, he remains faithful and true, for he cannot deny himself.' Therefore this divine truth in his promise is a completely overwhelming, precious, rich and strong assurance which no one can shake or diminish. He must remain above all authority in heaven and earth, that God gives himself to him as his own and with himself the victory." (*Pamphlet on Confession. XIX.* 1076ff.)

Thus Johannes Brenz writes: "You will say: What good does an absolution do me if I already believe that Christ has suffered for me? I reply: Absolution was instituted for the same reason as the sacraments, in order to steady our conscience in its doubt and to strengthen our faith. For we have often said that there is nothing more tender than the conscience and also nothing is harder to believe, especially in spiritual matters, than what won't be verified by our senses. For we are born insensible to divine matters. Therefore we always bear doubt with us about them, and these doubts reveal themselves in trials. For when God's sentence over our sins is revealed in the conscience and we discover the burden of the same, then we tend to doubt, even if we hear that Christ has suffered for us, since in our pain we experience the opposite of faith. Even if the Gospel is publicly preached and every sermon of Christ is an absolution from sins, yet a conscience that is disturbed

by sins is very weak and thinks the public pardon doesn't apply, for I rather feel anything but saintly. This requires private absolution. That's why Christ has instituted the Sacraments, primarily Baptism, and then the LORD's Supper, whereby through them, as through a letter and a seal from heaven, we would be strengthened in faith. Finally, he has also instituted absolution as his own signature, to make us certain, from every angle, of his will towards us. So this is our thought: You may well hear the Gospel, you have the sacraments, Baptism and the LORD's Supper, as God's letter and seal, but you have to be much more sure of it if you could hear God himself speak to you or had his own signature.

That's why Christ has left us absolution and affirmed to us that it is God's voice when he says: "Whoever hears you hears me." And affirmed it as his own signature when he says: "It shall also be loosed in heaven." (*Homil. De poen. VIII.IX.*)

We could yet produce a whole cloud of witnesses of the most pious and enlightened theologians about the majesty of holy absolution, but we will just quote one more witness so as not to needlessly lengthen this article, from a man who is viewed as highly enlightened and converted, even by the horrid sect of Methodism, namely, Johann Arndt. He wrote the following in his postile: "Therefore these Words, whosoever's sins you forgive, are a divine authority and a carrying out of the divine authority to forgive sins in his Name and by his command from God's authority. Therefore, since it is from God's command, it is done in God's stead, in God's Name, so it is valid in heaven and on earth. For what God orders and commands, is God sure. Where his Word and command are, there is God's authoritative, eternal, immutable truth. That is why absolution is a great comfort, and the Word in the priest's or the Christian's mouth is God's authority, his Word, his order and command. (p. 731.)

Now before we close, we must first point out the untruth Mr. Nast has written down in his most extensive paper which, indeed, reveals a complete lack of a well honed conscience. We would like to be able to account it more to the ignorance of this author who has already patently spread the completely unfounded rumors he's passing on. That is, Mr. Nast writes: "However there has never been lacking among Lutheran theologians those who have attacked this unchristian doctrine of confession and absolution. We especially read of a J. C. Schade, Pastor at St. Nicolas Church in Berlin in the 17th century... In his book: *The Practice of the Confessional Chair and the LORD's Supper*, he not only rejects private confession and absolution, but even calls the confessional chair – Satan's stool and the fiery pool. And although he was an official of the Evangelical - Lutheran Church, yet he called it, in regard to this heresy, a left over from the papal 'Babel' and the 'beckoning of the whore of Babylon.' " To this we reply, though there have always been foes of the divine institution of holy absolution who have written against it, none of them were Lutheran theologians. Some were enthusiasts, who were never part of the Lutheran Church, some had apostasized from her and, finally, in the last century, some were wolves that arose out of the Lutheran Church herself, who did not spare the flock (Acts 20.29-30.), who prepared the way for the horrid fall of the same where we now see her. Included in these are the enthusiasts Schwenkfeld, Weigel,¹⁰ Paracelsus; the Anabaptists, Zwingli¹¹ and others.

Finally, with respect to the famous J.C. Schade, Mr. Nast has

¹⁰Weigel writes: "Woe to those who introduce and maintain this confession and absolution. They will both be cast into the eternal lake." *Post. P. 11. P. 250.*

¹¹Zwingli writes: "It is impudence that has been taught that a man may be made certain through the Keys, which is only certain inwardly through faith. It does nothing when you say: 'You are free.' For you cannot make him sure through your word any more than you can turn a flea into an elephant by saying: 'You are an elephant.'" (see *Lib. De vera et false rel.*)

published lies about him that, though they are not unknown to us, have been widely spread. Indeed, though we don't have the quoted pamphlet in our hands, even the title shows that what's being addressed therein is not the doctrine, but the practice, that is, to clarify the practice of confession and absolution. Hopefully the witness of Spener, who has Schade's college lecturer and preacher at his funeral on this subject is worth hearing. "He (Schade) did not have scruples over the confessional chair itself, but about all who would come to confession whom he would lay hands upon and absolve, since he never had the opportunity to rightly test their worthiness to ease his conscience... This question led him to also employ harsh terms in what he produced in looking into this matter and other writings as when he said: Confessional chair – Satan's stool, fiery pool, which raised such an uproar. But even in that same work where these words are written, what proceeds and follows them shows clearly enough that he is not speaking about the matter itself, but its abuse." (*Theolog. Bedenken*. II. 143.) That this is true is also proven clearly in other writings of Schade. In one of his writings he says: "What's still troubling me? The world is full of guile. She steals the absolution from the mouth of the preachers. The preacher's forgiveness is God's forgiveness. Whosoever's sins you remit they are remitted unto them. Jn. 20.23. That still stands fast. This forgiveness is God's forgiveness. This forgiveness approaches and grounds itself upon faith." (See *Schade's Writings*. I 130ff.) – So if the Methodists do not have the honor of being the first to wage war on the power to forgive sins Christ has given his church on earth, they still have no true servant of the orthodox Lutheran Church to lead them into battle, but only miserable enthusiastic spirits, manifest heretics (founders of fanaticism), and rationalists.