

Public Confessions  
of a  
Stephanite

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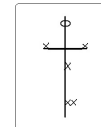
Confessions of Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl [1804-1872], Pastor

Issued by the same in August, 1841

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by Joel R. Baseley

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**Public Confessions**  
of  
Pastor Keyl, formerly of Neiderfrohn  
Concerning his Fellowship with Stephan and the  
Trespases Committed Therein.

Shared by Dr. Rudelbach at the request of the author

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**Foreword**

Every true friend of the church must deeply ache over an emigration that is not, in any way, necessitated by opposition threatening blood shed or life threatening persecution, but which instead had only sprung out of an unreasonable servitude to men and a failure to test the spirits as the times require. Yet, attainment of the truth must gladden us just as much and fill us with comfort in this eventide of the church. For within three years that whole misleading movement has been obliterated by God's gracious providence, and, more than that, the precious brothers, who for the most part would not acknowledge their mother [the church], now once again seek a way into her heart. The truthfulness and faithfulness of the LORD, from whom they had turned, is again being given glory amidst their bitter tears. And how should the church not then receive them as true sons whom she values doubly since they have broken through the path of trials with sorrow and have been purified in the crucible of suffering? She will remind herself of the hour when the LORD struck the Shepherd, and the flock was scattered. Yes, she will open her heart to them with motherly charity when she looks upon these sons. And she will bear in mind that so many, by powerful temptation accompanying their weak, unwary hearts, will have much for which they must some day give account, in this time when so few good and faithful shepherds are to be found. – But when in the present “public confessions” of our valued friend, Pastor Keyl (as

similar communications of Pr. Loeber and others have similarly arrived and are in print), certainly neither the voice of repentance is absent, nor the bright light of God's Word that illumines all things. On the other hand, one will also not see in this composition the easy inclination to consider the actual bonds of the form of the visible church as if they were mere rose necklaces, as if open, festering wounds might be bandaged over by claiming their actions' were for the cause of justice in the fatherland, to excuse or even value them. Whoever rejoices like the bird hearing a hunter's trap spring shut may not immediately test every aspect of his feelings. It's enough for him to know he's free. And he may well even stand there in danger of falling into an *aura fallax* (false breeze) in the pure blessed feeling of having his feet, now all ready to deliver the Gospel of peace, free. It was impossible for that release out of the painful trap of servitude to Stephan not to have also, on the other hand, lead many reactionary opinions and accretions that the Lutheran Church doesn't herself acknowledge nor has ever ratified through her development and fortunes – as we and others have reported with the public appearance of the article of Mr. D. Vehse (*Zeitschrift für die gesammte Luther. Theologie*, 1840, III, p. 133ff.). The presence of the church and her just verdict can only be discovered through the true verdict of history. In this light, what appears in this little composition of Keylie as well as in Vehsie's piece, must simply be valued as atoning sacrifices for earlier overreaching opinions. – We felt compelled to make these preliminary comments, at least to give an assurance that everything in the following confession has been left unaltered, as the author has set it down in writing. The faithfulness which our paper guarantees to each author (for we consider them as brothers in Christ, who will vouch for their own witness in every instance) is our double obligation to such a profound voice of a heart that has been wounded and healed. The few footnotes in the text are included to elucidate the facts surrounding this misadventure and the whole context of the matter. They are also taken word for word from a letter Pr. Keyl sent his former congregation, which is postmarked: Frohna in Perry County, 27 April, 1841.

### **Rudelbach**

Almost three years have already passed since that regrettable emigration, and I have still not issued a public explanation about the guilt that I share in it. My silence to this point must be raising all sorts of deprecations and suspicions about me. Even more so, since it's been quite a long period of time since the now blessedly departed Pastor O. H. Walther in St. Louis, one of the pastors who took part in the emigration, had set a humble confession of his own guilt on the record through his sermon for a day of repentance.

Indeed, I have in recent times come to vividly realize that my protracted hesitance to also confess my transgressions would only add new sins to those old sins. Only the more I considered the way and manner that I should do this, the more difficult it became to carry out. For I continued to uncover more and more aspects of my guilt, and, at the same, I saw time how deficient was my understanding of it. So because of that I had to dread the prospect of having to immediately change whatever I might have declared. – I also feared that my public confession of guilt could give opportunity to diminish the good fruits still being brought about by God's Word, even as the evil fruits that had been produced out of my profane fellowship with Stephan were being removed. I also feared the guilt for my ruinous actions and labors might not only be attributed to me alone, but also to the Word of the LORD in general and to those who have labored to set things right. – I also feared that many would be given an opportunity to ridicule the holy Name of God, to reject his gracious working, to dangerously disparage and despise the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and to even further entrench those in false security and in opposition to God's holy Word.

Yet the command contained in the holy Scripture, that "One shall confess his sins one to another," as well as the examples recounted therein of sins being confessed, have finally overshadowed all these thoughts that I've been having until now. So I will no longer delay also confessing here my sin publicly, as I have already done in several private letters. I am directing this, first of all, to my former congregation which I faithlessly forsook, than also to everyone in general whom I have grieved and caused offense, or whom I have caused any thoughts of regret, most especially all who emigrated with me.

God grant the readers hearts to read this composition in the spirit of reconciliation and with the fear of God and that you, the reader, will judge with clemency if in one aspect or another I have unintentionally left something out or have not described something clearly enough. Oh, that it would please God to turn what I have done evilly for the good, and that this composition might advance that aim.

Moreover, I now openly admit I had been a blind follower of Stephan.

I met Stephan in the year 1828 in Leipzig, and since I regarded him as an experienced servant of the divine Word, I employed his counsel in many matters that proved helpful in my preparation for the Office of the Ministry. In the following year, I would be entrusted with the Pastoral Office in Niederfrohna. I was at that time still free of any dependence upon him personally. At that time I submitted so little to his opinions and his personal thoughts that I often disagreed with him. Namely, this took place during an extended time of contact with him in the year 1831, when I met personally with him and came into conflict with him and then, also, one of his followers over a dangerous heresy in the doctrine of authority. Stephan's sudden outburst of anger Stephan over some insignificant, minor point of discussion led to much more. Now, in this matter, I was harshly attacked in several letters, at Stephan's initiative. I could still not be convinced that I had been in the wrong. The result of all this was that for a period of almost two years I was treated by Stephan as if I did not exist. – Only I would be more and more sharply denigrated on the part of Stephan's followers, that by this separation from him, my congregation and I were depriving ourselves of great spiritual advantage, destroying the unity of the true church, and causing great offense to the members of the same. My example lead others into a similar schism, as well as those who might still be won (that is, for Stephan) by making association with him suspect. It was only out of stubbornness that I, as a young, inexperienced man, did not want to submit to such a venerable and experienced man of whom, among all the servants of the divine Word in our age, no one was his equal. – Through these and other similar representations I allowed myself to be lured into his net. So I was yet, once more, happily ensnared, and in 1834, when the opportunity arose to go to Dresden, I once again tied the knot to restore my former bond with Stephan without ever coming to clarification over the former point of conflict. Yes, I acted the fool, begging him to be excused with expressions of humility. – From this time on, I placed my trust in him more and more, for I believed that I found with him, as by no other teacher that I knew, unity with much that's worthy of praise.

Stephan possessed, as far as I could determine at the time, a thorough knowledge of the pure doctrine of the Lutheran Church, a comprehensive

insight into the ever growing apostasy of the same, a sharp gift of discernment in the judgement of false and of true Lutheranism. He had great zeal to hold fast to the latter. That is, in his opposition to the ever more pervasive apathy and the inclination to remove all differences in confession for the sake of love, but at the expense of the truth. I had to give his published sermons, with respect to purity of doctrine and popular presentation, the highest approbation above all modern preachers. Stephan possessed an extensive knowledge of the world and of the experiences of a Christian in different situations. He could often speak wonderfully and therein give good counsel.

The opposition was voiced against Stephan in so many ways. I regarded it as his suffering for the sake of Christ and admired him all the more for it, especially since his opponents usually did not criticize his doctrine but his way of life. Here, he knew how to deceive even the authorities so that, out of their many investigations, he always emerged innocent. This gave way to my thinking even more that all the evil judgements over Stephan had nothing to do with secret sins but was slander only proceeding from opposition to the doctrine he presented. I can certainly assure, before the face of the all-knowing God, that during my whole ten year association with Stephan, and so often as I had been with him, I detected not the slightest trace of these works of darkness that he committed. Yes, I never suspected it in the least, since I had completely succumbed to the delusion that he, as he always asserted of himself, was just a much tortured, poor, sickly man, neglected by his family, who only had one thing remaining. He claimed he only wanted to be allowed what amounted to an innocent walk spent with those for whom he was father confessor as his refreshment. Moreover, I felt deeply indebted to him. For I cannot deny that Stephan had given me many good counsels, many right instructions and excellent criticism. Only some of that was truth more or less mixed with falsehoods, and I now see that I trustingly regarded those lies as truth. Some of these lies I have only now come to learn the truth about, but, unfortunately, at all too great a cost.

Stephan, indeed, strongly and repeatedly, commended me to the reading of the holy Scriptures, the symbolic books, the writings of Luther and other Lutheran teachers. Only he commended me even more than that to his own commentary for the explanation of the holy Scripture as the only correct one. I was to look at the writings of the Lutheran teachers through a tinted lens, so that, unfortunately, many times I had misused the sayings of Luther and others to become more entrenched in Stephanism. Stephen knew all kinds of ways to lead his followers into a certain mistrust of these teachers without them noticing it. He would point out this or that weakness

in their writings, and usually for no good reason. So often as Luther's writings persistently contradicted his assertions he was accustomed to say, "That must be understood in a different way, as Luther explains this more clearly in other places," or "that doesn't apply to our times." The unique manner he used to rob the writings of Luther from his blind adherents was that, even as he was delivering him into their hands, he was stealing him from their hearts when he was always asserting: "Luther must be reinterpreted from his times into ours." But he perpetrated these rejections of Luther with a deep, hypocritical humility, as if he considered himself the least of the students of Luther. Yes, frequently he would say, "if he were allowed to worship saints, he would want to fall down at the feet of Luther." With that he also knew how to make himself appear as though, in addition to theology, he also possessed substantial and comprehensive knowledge in other sciences, by which he deceived many gifted and intelligent people. – Their flocking to Stephan, their public defense of his person and doctrine, their confessions of what they had him to be thankful for, their zeal to prove this with their great offerings of thanks, their humble submission under his judgement, their seeking his judgement about every current event – all this blinded me more and more.

I saw in a few of these honorable men whom I knew personally, as well as in many other valued friends who stood in close connection with Stephan, such attributes of true Christians, that it made me want to emulate them. Only I was being transformed by this so often as I saw what went along with being in fellowship with Stephan, and, inasmuch as I breathed this in, I fell deeper and deeper into Stephanism. Far be it from me to blame these friends of mine for this, whose names are precious and valued to me, nor to make accusation against them. It is most likely that their warnings, as much as the warnings of others, would have been wasted on me, so great was my state of ruin. – I blame no one but myself. I allowed myself to be misled into such horrible delusions. Yes I confess with deep regret that I led others to ever greater dependence upon Stephan as much through my words as through my example. This deception was made even worse because of my official position and the many people who had placed their trust in me.

Without being aware of it, I fell deeper and deeper into a most feeble human servitude towards Stephan. I endured manifold tortures from him. In doing so, I believed that this was necessary for my humility and was part of the obedience and the honor that it was my duty to show him, for I regarded him – oh, it seems impossible to me now – as a chosen instrument of God, as the last light in this age, as a pillar of the church. – Stubbornly convincing myself of these and similar things, I made Stephan

prouder, more impudent and more secure as much through my sinful silence, since I should have rebuked him both for the sake of my office and my conscience, but also through my constantly heaping him with praise. – I was also so foolish as to report to him most of my activities, especially in my office, and to ask for his advice, which I also immediately followed. Yes, even in the most routine activities, I did nothing without receiving his opinion. This all took place with the goal of retaining only what was exactly right according to the Word of God, according to the insight of such an accomplished man. To possess his favor I regarded as a fortune beyond appraising. On the other hand I feared his displeasure in highest measure. Yes, at that time I would have regarded it as the greatest misfortune if I would have been rejected from his fellowship.

Thus whoever did not want to submit to Stephan unconditionally could also abandon all hope for his future favor, whom he would ignore, rebuke, reject and shun. Even in this, I, unfortunately, followed in his footsteps.<sup>1</sup> Oh, how many bonds which bound me to those who were previously my orthodox friends and to whom I was deeply indebted, that is, even to valued brothers in the Office of the Ministry, were torn asunder in this way!

This idolatrous reverence of Stephan now not only exerted a pernicious influence upon me as a person, but also upon the whole conduct of my office. In my manner of preaching, I became more and more a slavish imitator of Stephan, since I held his preaching as an unsurpassable model. I also accepted the deficiencies therein which were as yet not recognized, which were even amplified by my own deficiencies. Namely, I have often caused scruples by my own teaching, as if true Christianity consists in an external monkish isolation from the world and in certain forms of public and private worship, as if I only regarded as true Christians those who adapted these ways and would join me in them. Unfortunately, thereby, I entertained all sorts of shameful prejudices against true Christianity. I had often, by inordinate and excessive sharpness and harshness in my expression, more embittered my hearers than convincing them, thundering down on them with the law more often than lifting them up again with the Gospel, leaving them more in the burden of sins than awakening desire for

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<sup>1</sup>"Those connected with Stephan considered themselves alone the genuine Lutherans, often only for the sake of their mere, dead confession of the symbolic books, and even when others most honestly confessed them, yet if they did not also acknowledge Stephan and submit completely to him, they would be decried as impure in their doctrine and tainted with a deceptive nature, as false and unbelieving, *hermhutish*, stubborn, obstinate, blind people. Their congregations were considered extremely dangerous and therefore strictly avoided."

God's grace. I have not always presented repentance to God, faith in Christ, the new obedience, persisting to the end, etc., in the appropriate connection to, and, not clearly enough as solely a fruit of, grace, so that easily the thought could have arisen that it would be impossible to live that way. Alas, how many wholesome fruits of the Word of God I may have hindered in these and other such ways.

Further, in my behavior towards others, and especially toward members of my congregation, I appropriated much from Stephan that is worthy of rebuke. In my converse with others I often proved myself to be most unwelcoming, harsh, and standoffish, impatient and loveless. I more and more avoided the company of my congregational members who did not think as I did, not even receiving the sick with the appropriate concern and compassion. I didn't pursue the erring with appropriate faithfulness and merciful love. I was not careful enough to avoid every evil appearance and too seldom took into consideration the advice of others and public opinion. I never launched a defense against innuendos in the public papers, which I had still been required to do for the sake of the truth and my office. Too little did I heed good advice or kindly requests and wishes in divine matters. Through this behavior of mine, unfortunately, love and trust towards me continually waned among a large portion of the congregation and the blessing of my office was thus being wrested away.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, with regard to my conduct of office, I must finally confess my sin mainly in connection with those whom, for the most part for good reason, most people called my followers. For unfortunately I had more intimately drawn them to me personally the more I myself became a zealous follower of Stephan so that through my domineering praise heaped upon Stephan, I was at the same time turning my followers into his

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<sup>2</sup> "I now recognize full well that my manner of teaching was, at length, becoming more and more, as a whole, law oriented than Gospel oriented, more strident than convincing, more threatening than inviting, more menacing than kind, more the rod of woe than that staff of gentleness, more striking down than lifting up, more according to a slavish spirit than the spirit of a child. In my interactions with others, that is, as their soul's friend (*Seelsorger*), I exhaled Stephan in his often overwhelming strictness, in his bossiness over the conscience, in his mixing into temporal affairs, in his habit of giving all sorts of information to his confidants not in service to their faith, in his overbearing, high station in his preaching office, in his demanding unconditional submission under this office, in his seeking to pervert and make suspicious rightly fashioned teachers and children of God, in his repulsive, rude, un-Evangelical behavior to the world, in his regarding as nothing those who stood apart from him, in his desire to be apart from all who did not unconditionally agree with him or even completely contradicted him."

followers. I am not speaking here about those on whose souls God's work had been taking place, for I am convinced that God's grace had not been in vain in people, even including those among my hearers who had not joined more intimately with me. And I also hope that many of these have been preserved by that grace. I am only speaking here of my own corrupted actions and efforts. – That which in the beginning, and in certain cases for many people, was required, and especially required by me, to make people seek further instruction, counsel and comfort out of God's Word, would be more and more the norm, which was ultimately the burden of the law. Coming to me much or seldom became my measuring stick by which individuals were judged. For the delusion more and more dominated that no one apart from the advice of his pastor (*Seelsorger*) could find the true path to heaven and remain upon it, yes, not even in common earthly matters, where even sound reason is capable, could he preserve himself as a Christian. So whatever the pastor only said would not usually be tested according to the infallible Word of God, which is the duty of every Christian, but rather without that testing, which was often seen as a sign of not trusting the preacher. It was taken as truth because the one who said it had received his preaching office from God. Those passages in the Bible which speak of obedience to the teacher were then also applied without any qualifications.<sup>3</sup> In these and other similar ways the hearts of man, unfortunately, were misled into a sinful, sectarian dependence on my person and the person of Stephan. Being bound into such an unhealthy co

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<sup>3</sup>"It became an ever more frequent occurrence, and I permitted it, that you (and others with you) practiced a veiled idolatry with the holy office that I was bearing unworthily. For without a doubt, much fear, love and trust was directed to that office, next to, or above God, who had instituted it. And many certainly did many things and stopped doing things only for the sake of the pastor, not for the sake of God, not because God had said or desired it so, but because the pastor had. Whoever stood well with the pastor, believed he was then in good standing with God. Whoever was at odds with the pastor believed, even for that reason, he must also be at odds with God. So often some stood in a false peace, and others in a false sense of dread. The pastor was considered his *Seelsorger* in such a perverted sense that one believed he had handed up to him his own concern for his own soul. So one dare not test what his pastor said by the Word of God. It should be received immediately and believed if it agree with God's Word, not for that reason, as it should be, but rather because the pastor said it, who should be clung to as the infallible expositor of God's Word. Yes, the doubts and suspicions that arose in the heart over one thing or another, the warning and complaint of the conscience, was to be seen as inspired by Satan and as the monstrous invention of a ruined heart, and they were forcefully suppressed, therefore, without having the legitimate basis to judge the same – whereby, naturally, ever growing blindness, ever stronger silencing of the conscience and thus ever greater corruption resulted."

dependence would most certainly bring them more harm than any good.<sup>4</sup> Now since their visiting me became always more frequently the rule, most people had no time during the day because of the work of their callings or being parted from their families, so they chose the evening, often even very late, or they had to wait a long time since others had come before them, or they might well have even accompanied me when I went for a walk. But in this I must avow that I am telling the absolute truth before God, who has eyes as flames, that with this visitation nor on any other occasion did I in any way or at any time follow in Stephan's shameful footprints, nor in any of those walks in the evening did I ever violate any person from another's family. I have sinned much, unutterably much against both God and man, and had been a partaker of many of Stephan's sins, but God alone has prevented me from any such sin. I can accept no praise at all for this, since through not avoiding the appearance of this evil, I caused many people all kinds of deep consternation.

There were many complaints lodged against my so-called followers, that they considered themselves alone as pious and despised everyone else, that in their behavior, especially towards their relatives and former friends, they were standoffish, unkind, judgmental, that they were negligent in the work of their calling, disobedient and disrespectful to their parents and elders, quarrelsome as spouses, either too strict or too permissive as parents to their children, but in general disorderly, hypercritical and slander mongering in their speech and often dishonest and hypocritical in their dealings with others. – I would not now presume to judge to what extent these complaints were justified. But I had often either been blind or

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<sup>4</sup> "Namely, among this fellowship there dominated an unbearable sectarian judgement and a forgetting of one's own beam, a tendency to slander and gossip, boastfulness and keeping track of all sorts of incidents or pronouncements, suspecting and accounting evil to things said and done innocently or with no evil intent, unwary and unkind attacks on others, spiritual bravado accompanying knowledge and experience, and then again on the other side, much unspiritual babbling, joking and tomfoolery, lovelessness and injustice, posturing and hypocrisy, exaggeration and idiocy, favoritism, thinking evil of others, shallowness and abuse of Christian freedom, and still other more tortures of conscience. Oh, how much harm have many in this fellowship suffered in their souls! This also had such a ruinous influence upon temporal conditions. For many had thereby come to be led to neglect the calling appointed to them by God, to unfaithfulness in the care of their families, to take part in all sorts of endeavors that were beyond their skills, and abandon many of their plans to which they could have applied themselves with good conscience. And there is so much more by which I have caused heresy, disturbed, forced, treated unjustly, and have upset, namely you, my dear people, by my affiliation with Stephan! Oh that the merciful God would yet turn around for good what I have done for harm, according to his wisdom and faithfulness, and heal those deep wounds! But that you would, for the sake of the love of the Christ, forgive me all this from your hearts, and relieve your minds of my terrible sin!"

negligent towards these and other deficiencies that congregation members or those outside brought up to me. Yes, without intending to, I may have even hardened them by this and thereby inflicted great harm to their souls. To others I had given all sorts of opportunities to lay the charge that I was stubborn and sectarian.

The household small group meetings to share the reading of the holy Scripture, as well as the review of the sermon held in the Church every Sunday, gave further offense to many. Both sorts of meetings could moreover arouse suspicions of the conventicle and the ways of the sects, which I did not recognize at the time, nor was I of a mind to prevent them. I had actually liked them, even if I were not able to enunciate all of the benefits which they must solely serve. Finally, I must yet mention one of the circumstances that might easily raise suspicions about me, that I, like Stephan, may have been guilty of siphoning off donated funds.

Namely, for several years a free will offering was taken in the homes as well as at the Sunday review of the sermon in Church, which earlier went for the support of mission work and later to benefit the Bible Society, for the support of needy students, for making altar and pulpit paraments, and, unfortunately, for gifts for Stephan as well as to enable the publication of his sermons. Certainly many of the poor were thereby led to outlays that far surpassed their means, which now still makes my heart ache. But to my credit (this I can assure you before God) I have not benefitted from a single one of those gifts. On the other hand, my great unworthiness brings me shame for often receiving expensive gifts which were honoraria, given me from time to time by the poor and those lacking means. I am no less shamed by the poems and greeting cards I received on my birthday and other occasions.

Now by these and similar means, the minds of those committed to me had become bound ever more closely, not only amongst themselves but also with followers of Stephan who were elsewhere. They were thus prepared so the plan for a communal emigration must have found them to be fruitful soil. Unfortunately, by my own participation in this, my sin was greater than theirs, since I misled them.

Stephan first implied to me that, perhaps, it might be necessary to emigrate soon already in the year 1830, though at the time I didn't give it much thought. I thought more of it again with my renewed association with Stephan. But around Pentecost, 1836 a special meeting was called in Dresden for Stephan's serious followers. The condition of the Church in

Saxony, yes, in the whole of Germany was evaluated, – naturally, only according to Stephanite principles – and it was presented as being so hopeless that setting forth to another land, and, indeed, – in order to have complete religious freedom – to the United States of North America, must appear to be compellingly necessary. Yet this should not be done until God himself would give us a sign to carry out this decision. It was believed that this nod was well overdue, and it was seen by us in the suspension of Stephan, regarded as a premonition of his martyrdom, in late Fall of the following year. From this time, I also began to more and more place the approaching emigration into the minds of those connected with me. In this, according to Stephan's order, the greatest caution should be used so that our plan would by no means be either frustrated or complicated. Others, who did not think as we did, should even be excluded from us because of their earthly aspirations. In this, I also followed Stephan's wisdom. I, indeed, directly required emigration of no one, kept our plan very secret, and made our joining it contingent on many sorts of conditions. But naturally, I thereby only increased the longing for it and was misleading them by all that I said about the necessity of the emigration. – I must here point out that I did not come up with this, but rather it was the general outcry issuing from Stephan, by all the Stephanists. Truth and lies were most deceptively intermingled and parts were false conclusions drawn out of many true principles. To some extent, even the principles themselves were more or less false, in which, namely, such principles that only under certain exceptional circumstances require an unquestioning commitment, would be ascribed to be absolute necessities. The dazzling conclusion would be later transgressions in important matters by Stephan and by us. What I was telling them, which the above thoughts contend against and reveal the concessions I made, was something like what follows here:

Whoever wants to be saved must not only have the Word of God itself, but also the public, pure preaching of the same, and not merely the legitimate Baptism, but also the church's absolution and the pure and unfalsified holy LORD's Supper. Since now the Lutheran Church in the midst of the invisible church is the only one that has the Word of God and the holy Sacraments pure and unfalsified. Everyone who knows this true church must also retain it, if it is in any way possible to do so. The Lutheran Church in Saxony now, indeed, still has retained the symbolical books in name, but, in fact, most of the Churches and schools manifestly and blatantly teach against the doctrine they have pledged to teach in the symbolic books. The Sacrament is falsified in many places. Those teachers who still hold fast to the symbolic books may be forced, for that reason, to subject themselves to public accusation and legitimately fear that,

persisting in holding fast, harsh charges will be leveled against them, and they may well be expelled from their office. Now, more than that, there have been many sorts of, and declarations and wishes, even in public, that the idolatry of symbolic books be abolished and, thereby, the dividing wall between Lutherans and the Reformed be removed and, along those lines, so-called contemporary (*zeitgemässe*) adjustments be made in agendas, hymnals and school books. In these circumstances, and the almost universal enmity against God's Word, there is no longer any hope for the Lutheran Church, and she will no longer be able to maintain herself. But her preservation is our duty to bear for the sake of ourselves and our descendants. This can be accomplished in no other way than if we, since we are the last remnant of the true Lutheran Church, would transplant that remnant from out of Europe to America and would seek to once again bring forth her pristine purity in doctrine, constitution and life, where also the introduction of a strict church discipline and an episcopal constitution (*der bischöflichen Verfassung*), following the model of the Swedish Lutheran Church, and the establishment of institutions for Christian education and formation should serve her. Along with this blossoming of the Church, the temporal benefits were more and more developed and, in all these glorious presentations, every hope was placed upon America.

Oh, before God and man, how I am now ashamed of all that I had spoken that was sinful and foolish in support of the emigration! For although the situation of the Lutheran Church, in general and in Saxony, as a whole at that time, was nothing to be happy about and aroused great fears about the future. Yet for that reason, I, as a servant of the church, should have that much more admonished my congregation to prayer, to patience, to steadfastness, and been an example to my congregation in all this. And since I was still permitted to conduct my office according to my oath upon the symbolic books, I could have awakened my congregation to recognize this benefit and, instead of complaining, first and foremost my complaints against my superiors, those brothers in the ministry that wanted to befriend me, I should have regarded them better and done, or refrained from doing, whatever I could, without violating my conscience, for the sake of peace and love, and what could thus have been done out of Christian wisdom, and should not have stubbornly severed my ties. – What an impudent lie it was to assert that the Lutheran Church was doomed, not only in Saxony but in all of Germany, yes even in Europe, since there were undeniable facts revealing just the opposite. Through this assertion so many would be rejected, so many teachers and congregational members

who were still clinging steadfast to their churchly confession! – What a pharisaical, selfish boast to call this bunch of Stephanites the remnant of the true Lutheran Church, since even at this time so much that was utterly un-Lutheran was being practiced among us, as was now being revealed to all the world. For under the boast of being the strictest Lutheranism, the name of God was being blasphemed and put to shame and this guise of sticking to the letter of the confession of the Lutheran Church had been shamefully abused by Stephan and turned into a snare for a most grievous misleading, into a veil for evil, into a new papacy! What impudence to declare the punishing justice of God towards our precious fatherland, yes, to a whole hemisphere, which should have struck us as doubly grave! But what was the gravest sin – would be that God’s Word was also abused, that, by doing so, we would prove the emigration was God’s will.

I also made myself a participant in these great sins, in that, following the lead of Stephan, I compared the emigration with Noah’s entrance into the ark, with Lot’s flight from Sodom, with the exodus of Israel from the Egyptian house of slavery. Along with that, the words of Ruth to Naomi were misused: “Wherever you go, I will go, where you stay I will stay” as permission. I also, specifically, defined the emigration with the passages about escaping the abomination of desolation, shaking the dust off when the Word of God will not be heeded, on the departure from Babel. By the Words of Christ I promised those facing pains of conscience over rending their family bonds and forsaking house and home: “Whoever forsakes houses or brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, or land for the sake of my Name, he will receive it back a thousand-fold and inherit eternal life,” thus leading them into sins against their conscience.

Finally around Easter, 1838, the next Fall was established as the time appointed for the emigration by Stephan.

All of the apparent reasons, as they have been briefly defined in the section above, would now be presented anew and made stronger by all means. Those who wanted to join the emigration, according to Stephan’s explicit command, would be admonished to a most careful consideration of this step. But what these people were to consider at length was their need to be purged by the flames of God’s justice from the impending danger of believing, through the emigration, they would be forever secure, yes, to hope they would receive true well-being for body and soul. Their resolve must rather be to risk everything if only to remain with the true visible church! If they now had definitely decided to join the emigration, then they would be martyred all over again to follow the commands of Stephan to the letter, with a painful testing of their intentions, their spiritual

knowledge, and a listing of their wealth and household possessions. This was especially done with those whom, according to these required lists, Stephan did not want to admit, because of their lack of means, though usually other reasons came to the fore for their exclusion. – Oh, how many of these people who were left behind may well have wrestled in utter despair, since little or no comfort was left them. They considered themselves most unfortunate, though now we must appraise them as fortunate since they had been defended by God against deep sins and all sorts of trouble!

That’s when I and those who decided to emigrate would start a whole new list of manifold and even greater sins, whereby believers and unbelievers alike would be caused indescribable offense. – While I should have conducted my office with even greater faithfulness because of my fear of danger, I became an unfaithful hireling and forsook my flock. While I imagined it would be my duty of conscience to emigrate, I ignorantly broke my oath given to my God and to men to feed the flock of Christ. – I, who firmly believed that I was doing the will of God, became a public transgressor of the same. I, who wanted to save souls, became one who misled them. I neglected the souls of those who remained behind. The respect of a very few deceived me about my obligation to the whole flock. I did not bear in mind that someday the LORD would require from my hand the blood of all my congregational members and would say in his wrath: What have you done? I did not think how the groans of the forsaken and the misled would scream out for vengeance against me!<sup>5</sup>

I requested release from my office – not with fear and trembling, not with inner turmoil, oh no, but rather in a steadfast, horrifying delusion that overwhelmed all thinking. I imagined I was thereby doing God a service, convincing myself that this was my own free, well-intentioned decision. And, indeed, in my request for release, by Stephan’s explicit counsel, I intentionally withheld the reasons which had moved me to do so.

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<sup>5</sup>“Now I would yet beg you, to make known to me a service of love, that in my name and before God you would assure all those in your circle, that is, in my previous congregation, of whom you know or hear that they still are offended because of me and might gladly discover how I now judge what took place in the past, that I bear deep sorrow in my heart over the deep offense that I have given, namely, over the unfaithful forsaking of the office and my leading others to emigrate, as well as over all the other harm that I committed in my blindness as a follower of Stephan. I beg you to forgive all this for the sake of the love of JESUS Christ, who takes away our sins. If anyone still has complaint against me, also bear witness to them that everything that I have taught publicly and individually in agreement with the Bible and the symbolic books of our Lutheran Church, I today still and forever retain as valid, immoveable and as the sole saving truth.”

Even after I had taken this condemnable step, God still gave me a sign through two highly respected men holding high office in the church. In person they demonstrated their good will to me, which I didn't deserve and could very well have taken to heart. And perhaps at that time it might still have been possible that this step which paved the way to a whole new list of the deepest and most desecrating sins, might have been taken back.

Even from other quarters there was no lack of loving and compelling pleas, of kind admonitions, of serious warnings, even in the public papers. Only all of this was lost on me and those who were following me. I advised them, following the lead of Stephan, that those people were actually the reason for our emigration, as well as their joining with Stephan and the rest of the company. Our followers should not speak with the authorities, even if they both knew each other well. I unfortunately also misled them in this to deny the truth and thereby to sin against God and the authorities.

In blindness and delusion, I have been responsible for so many resigning their office in which God had placed them, moving away from their fatherland to which they owed a debt of thanks and for which they could have been a great blessing. Wives forsook their husbands whom they had promised life long fidelity, children their parents to whom they should have been indebted for the goodness they had received. A portion of them did this with harsh meanness as they severed themselves from close relatives and long time friends. They didn't trouble themselves about the dangers they would be exposed to in such a long, perilous journey, or in turning away from almost all of their possessions and wealth, or about the pressing burden of sins they had incurred, or that they were emigrating to a region where the unhealthy climate toppled many into early graves or made them ill for a long period of time and where so many sorts of sad experiences had encumbered hearts with many severe afflictions.

What ungraspable patience God exhibited, that he brought us through all the perils of our destructive path, and let us fortunately reach our destination. – Yet how much more should the sinking of our last ship, upon which also a few of my former congregants had met their death in the waves, have been a serious call to repentance! Only our eyes still remained shut and our hearts hardened. Yes, we had become even more prideful and stubborn through the fortunate results of our undertaking.

Without thinking, following Stephan's command, on the journey I had taken on the conduct of the office of a called preacher, even without the assent and agreement of my fellow travelers, even while all this was illegitimate. I did the same thing in St. Louis, where I received a salary as a pastor. There, I dared not preach any sermon that had not been given to

Stephan for approval, who so masterfully knew how to employ even my foolishness for my own manifold torture and to plunge me deeper in subjugation.

I not only personally affirmed his election to Bishop, individually, in the firm conviction that his election for the church of God would result in great blessing, but through my presentations I also inspired my fellow travelers to affirm this choice with me. But – what is even more aggravating, I convinced them to take that blasphemous and unheard of oath which Stephan himself demanded. In this they not only pledged unconditional obedience to Stephan in every churchly and communal matter, and not only placed such boundless trust in him that they would even, moreover, defend against any thoughts that would raise mistrust against Stephan. They also pledged themselves to desire to live, suffer and die under the episcopal constitution introduced by Stephan.

So the pile of my deep sins was ever growing, since I not only kept silent with this and all his other undertakings and allowed them to please me, but I also sought to support them with his most zealous praise. I had no problem using a public church prayer in which, according to a prescribed form, Stephan would be mentioned in an idolatrous way. I stooped to become his toady and fell into an ever more impotent submission to him. So I helped to make Stephan become more and more bold and secure. Whereby I, myself unawares, became more and more an instrument of his hierarchical plan, which I obviously at the time could not see through.

Now time was up when God said: "You shall come this far and no further, here your proud waves must lie" – as Stephan's secret shame became revealed and I was horrified to learn how I had been deceived beyond measure by the person of Stephan – since then, I do not deny that I have fallen short partly through my silence, partly through my loud agreement and active participating in justifying his isolation and separation from our settlement. At the time I lacked experience to consider with the appropriate knowledge what could happen and what should be done in such a case.

Only, with the removal of Stephan, Stephanism was in no way yet removed from our midst. I also still held fast to most of the Stephanite ideas in on-going blindness. The statement of protest by three fellow members of our association, also delivered and made public in Germany through publication, for that reason also fell short of its goal for me. Yes, I stepped forward in open opposition to it since, though at the time I had thereby received light on many important points, it unfortunately only became clear

to me much later. I acknowledge how shameful it is for me that I, who held a station that should have been able to enlighten others, had first to receive enlightenment from others and that I had strived against these people for far too long. I must be so ashamed of this prolonged blindness as I have come to learn more and more clearly how God, out of his infinite mercy and to the salvation of us all, had first begun in that aforementioned statement of protest. He called those among us who unintentionally were continuing the construction of a new tower of Babel to a halt, to demolish the un-Lutheran foundation of the same as well as what was built upon it and, once more, to bring into the light the ancient, tried and true foundation.

I received the express call as pastor, as did the other of the spiritual estate, soon after our arrival in the new settlement, from what was, at that time, a whole congregation being formed of emigrants. A bit later I received a special written call from those who had emigrated with me from out of my previous congregation and their neighbors. Several circumstances with this call were, indeed, of the sort that it could have raised doubts about the validity of the same. Yet since I can, up until now, determine nothing else but that the essential requirements for the same are not lacking, I must acknowledge this call as one that is valid.

About Easter in the previous year I began to learn what great sins I had committed through trespassing in the emigration and through forsaking my precious call, and what a great offense I had caused. I also confessed this before my present congregation and begged their forgiveness, as I would defer to their own discretion if they would remove me from the office, as I well deserved, or if they wanted to affirm me anew in the same. After taking some time to consider, they did the latter, also confessing how they, for their part, had sinned deeply, primarily by forgoing the necessary testing of their teacher. They thus requested also for me to forgive them, as God “has forgiven you” in Christ.

Since that time, especially after Easter of this year, I have still discovered much more about the abomination of Stephanism, by which I myself and by which others with me have been stained. – Additionally, several written expose’s have born our errors as a whole and as individuals, as they were issued now and then by one or another from our midst, as well as several oral presentations. I thankfully acknowledge this and must also herein confess my sin, if I have not also acknowledged the truth so well as they have and have caused anyone pain, before I had come to my present awareness.

I have publicly confessed my manifold sins both in public sermons as well as in private discourse. I have tried thereby to help others, especially the members of my congregation, that they also acknowledge their sins on their own part and confess before God and man. But above all, that they, in faith, appropriate to themselves the perfectly sufficient service of JESUS Christ and might cling to the intention that what ever they have done wrong, they do what they can to restore it for the good. Most importantly, that they become ever more what they believe they shall be someday, that is, rightly fashioned members of the Lutheran Church in the fullest sense of the word.

Oh how wondrous is the rule of the all-wise and merciful God who has employed an undertaking that had been carried out in sin and foolishness for the saving of souls in a two fold manner! We were brought to a knowledge of Stephan, which, in all likelihood, we would never have come to in our fatherland even through the most compelling arguments or harshest persecution, without the discoveries made here, had things not happened as they did. – Then we have been under the heaviest pressure to strive to seek the answers to many important questions with renewed effort and an honest longing to learn from the holy Scripture itself and in the reliable witnesses of the fathers of our church, above all, Luther himself.

Thanks and praise be to our faithful, merciful God, that he has born me in such patience and long suffering and has not let me die in my sins. He awakened me out of the deep sleep of my sins and opened my eyes, that I might learn to know the great power of my sins as well as the greater power of his grace. Yes, it is dear to me that he has humbled me that I may learn of his justice. This bitter but salutary remembrance of my sins will, indeed, accompany me until my end. But my comfort shall be the Word of the LORD. “I will forgive you your trespasses and shall remember your sins no more.” – May God also grant to the heart of all those whom I have misled, angered or troubled in any way, that they might no longer think of me with displeasure. Oh, that God himself would heal all the wounds for which I am responsible, and that he might also use this, my confession of sins, to that end.

God bless my beloved homeland, that it would be filled with the knowledge of the LORD and suffer no lack of anything good – God bless the precious king with long life and good fortune in his reign – God bless every authority, that under them kindness and truth embrace each other and righteousness and peace may kiss – God bless my precious congregation, which I will never forget, with every sort of spiritual blessing in heavenly

wealth through Christ and grant them a grateful knowledge of what is good, which they receive from the hand of the LORD – God bless also all who have emigrated with me. He leads them on the true road for his Name's sake and, after their sad emigration, will give them a joyful immigration into heaven!

Written in Frohna near Altenburg, Perry-County, Missouri,  
End of August, 1841

**Ernst Gerhard Wilhelm Keyl, Pastor**

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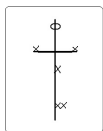
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## Stephan's Point

What is "Stephanism"? It is intellectually lazy and theologically naive to dismiss Stephanists as a group of good Christians who followed a man they trusted, and were outraged to discover he was sexually immoral. In fact, to be pre-occupied over Stephan's innocence or guilt on those morals charges would greatly please the devil. Crucial lessons the hapless Saxons learned could be forgotten, and Stephanism would once again be poised for a resurgence. Is it already? What is "Stephanism"?

Keyl's confession, astonishingly circulated in Germany even 50 years after written, chronicles Keyl's incorporation into the movement, the sins that resulted from his fellowship with Stephan, and his discovery and learning of the heresy's subtle nature. Keyl initially opposed Stephan over the issue of authority (p.4), and had to ignore this issue to regain his fellowship. This issue played out in Stephan's mentoring his Stephanites. He hypocritical praised Luther and the Confessions, but weaned Luther from their hearts by trumping Luther at many points (p. 5f). Scripture was used by Stephan, as 'official interpreter,' and his Stephanite followers (p. 14) to manipulate his followers to leave God-given vocations, break familial and Christian bonds of love, to sin against conscience, convinced they were obeying God's Word (p. 16). And if the Stephanite "line of despair" sounds similar to that of LCMS Confessionalists today, can lessons Keyl learned the hard way teach us anything about avoiding such pitfalls today (pp. 12f)?

Every synodical official, pastor, and concerned churchmen will find much benefit in Keyl's confession. His candor and honesty allow every Christian to find therein a catharsis, as Keyl's sins are real sins we also commit! Moreover, Keyl's confession helpfully returns us to our roots. We Missouriians are at our best when we know we're not the good Lutherans we ought to be or thought we were and, in well earned humility, find joy in being forgiven and taught by our patient, longsuffering LORD Christ in his Word!



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