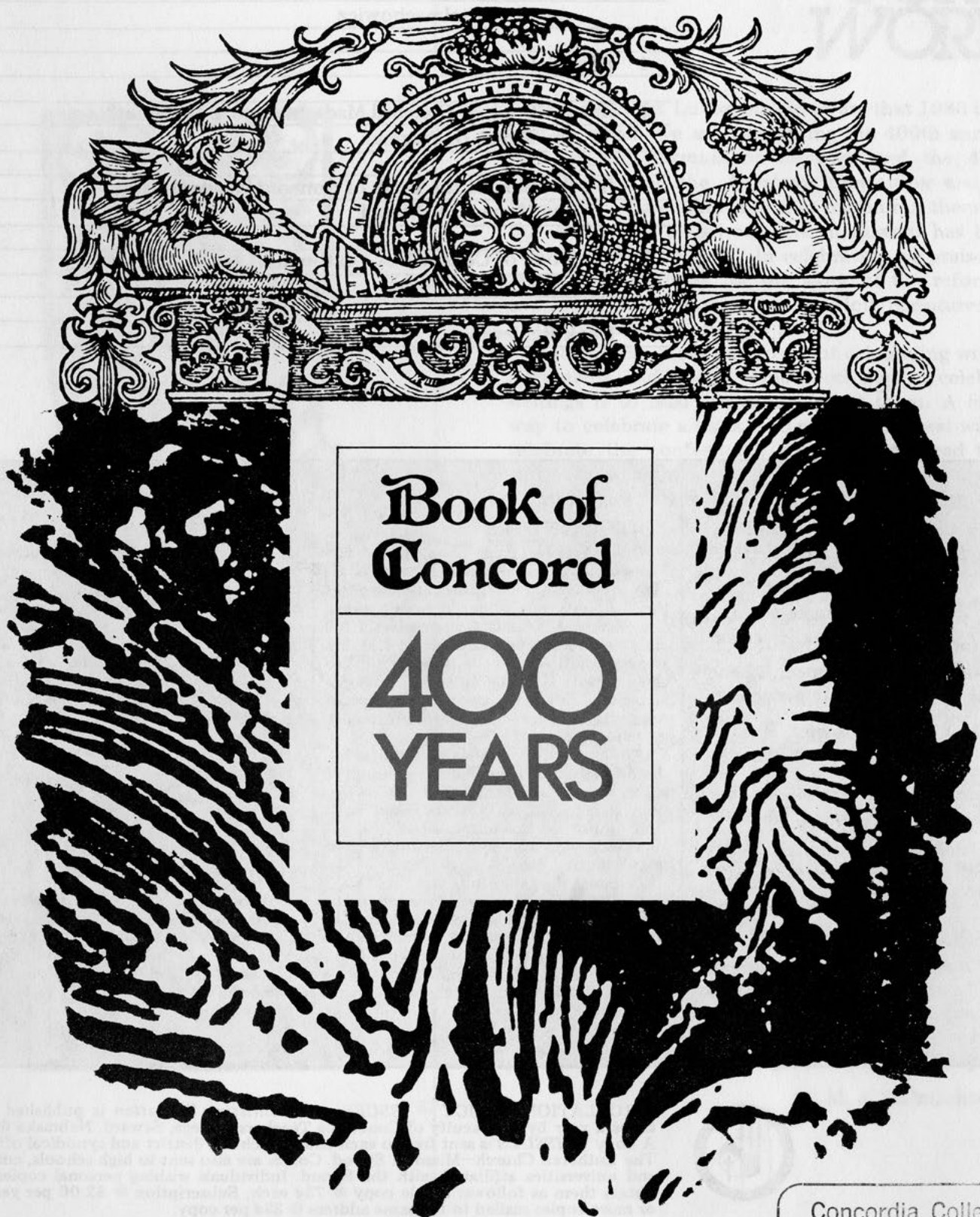


# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Spring, 1980

Vol. 14, No. 2



Concordia College  
ARCHIVES  
Seward, Nebraska

Spring, 1980  
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# ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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**EDITOR'S NOTES**

One of the current problems of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is its high membership attrition rate. Some of the dropouts join other denominations, and others disassociate themselves from churches completely. But why? Circumstances admittedly make it impractical to affiliate with a Lutheran church in some instances. But why do the number of dropouts far exceed the narrow category of "circumstances"?

An impressive number of former Lutherans must believe that one church is about the same as any other. An affiliation with a church (maybe even with God) must be an unmet need for yet another group who join the unchurched population.

Perhaps the attrition rate in LCMS could be reduced if we invested more time and money in the type of Christian education which would increase the depth of understanding of the *Holy Bible* and the Lutheran Confessions by both ministry and laity. Psychologist Kurt

Lewin's quip that there is nothing so practical as a good theory can point us to the importance of knowing doctrine before it is possible to apply it to our daily lives. May your study of this issue commemorating the 400th anniversary of *The Book of Concord* lead you toward a more effective understanding and application of the Holy Word and the Lutheran Confessions in your ministry in God's kingdom.

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Members of the Concordia Teachers College faculty prepared the materials for this number of *Issues*. Views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Concordia faculty.



CIRCULATION POLICY — *ISSUES . . . in Christian Education* is published three times a year by the faculty of Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska 68434. A copy of *ISSUES* is sent free to each church, school, district and synodical office in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Copies are also sent to high schools, colleges, and universities affiliated with the Synod. Individuals wishing personal copies may obtain them as follows: Single copy @ 75¢ each; Subscription @ \$2.00 per year; 10 or more copies mailed to the same address @ 35¢ per copy.

# A FORE WORD

By now most Lutherans are aware that 1980 is the year in which we are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the *Formula of Concord* and the 450th anniversaries of the *Augsburg Confession* and Luther's *Small Catechism*. For that reason our theme for this entire '79-'80 school year at Seward has been, "Celebrate in Concord." In celebrating we praise and thank God together for the work of the reformers and for all who point men to the Holy Scriptures and to the Christ of whom they testify.

But how else does one go about celebrating written documents and books? One *good* way to celebrate writings is to read and study about them. A *better* way to celebrate a book is to read it. The *best* way to celebrate the confessional writings is to read them and compare them to the Scriptures in prayerful study, discuss them with others and bear witness to their truth.

The purpose of this issue of *ISSUES* is to stimulate you to engage in all of these wholesome activities. The confessional position of Lutheranism which states its understanding of the written Word of God is our blessed heritage. It is an open, public confession, available to all for scrutiny and study. It has been so since the year 1530.

Celebration, however, ought not to be an activity carried out in isolation. It should inspire, encourage and mutually build up the participants. The celebration of our common faith in one Lord, one hope, one baptism ought to spur us on toward the mutual goal of a Godly concord. We are motivated in our common quest for Christian concord by the love of God for us in Christ Jesus and by our love for the truth of His abiding Word.

May you find joy and spiritual inspiration in studying and rediscovering the treasures and teachings of God's Word as expressed in the written doctrinal confessions of the Lutherans of the 16th century. May their ancient confession of faith also become your personal contemporary confession to His glory.

M. J. Stelmachowicz





### PREPARATION FOR A REAL CELEBRATION

In the year 2080 A.D., the church, God willing, will celebrate the 500th anniversary of *The Book of Concord*; and wouldn't it be grand if this could be a celebration of concord and peace (and also "unity") throughout the entire Lutheran Church and all of Christendom as well. Now that would be a real celebration!

What will it take to make such a dream a reality? Perhaps it is too whimsical to project a hundred years ahead; however, if there is ever to be any progress, the church's agenda must be intentionally set to address such dreams. Significantly, the 400th anniversary of *The Book of Concord* is celebrated this year, 1980, which is the threshold of a new decade, suggesting in itself reflections on the future. Is there cause for optimism about the future? Are there foundations which can be laid in order to effect the church's celebration in 2080 A.D.? How should our agenda read?

*The Book of Concord* suggests some directions. We can begin with attitudes. Irenic is a good attitude to have; intentional is another. The Preface to *The Book of Concord*, written originally to introduce the *Formula of Concord*, manifests this irenic and intentional concern for concord, peace and unity. Reconciliation is declared the primary intention of the book, recognizing that "good-hearted Christian persons" long for concord and unity in the church. This attitude is especially evident in the Preface's apology for the inclusion of condemnations which are for clarification and for protection of the laity. In all, as Lewis Spitz writes, "It breathes a pacific spirit."

*The Book of Concord*, and especially the *Formula of Concord*, suggests another item for our agenda: repentance. It is interesting and revealing that the problems which divided the Lutherans haven't changed much over the years. Conrad Bergendoff summarized the areas of division in the sixteenth century which the *Formula* addressed, with three sets of theological questions. "One was a cluster of questions about justification," including discussions about good works, the

Gospel, and the "third use" of the Law. "A second significant source of difference was the doctrine of the Lord's Supper." "The third... had to do with 'adiaphora,'... especially the questions of ceremonies and usages."

Sound familiar? Implications of these questions, such as, the Gospel's role, the Law, altar fellowship, authority, worship practices, and fellowship, are still divisive today; and the divisions are destructive. Repentance alone will open the way for resolution of divisions. In place of the hardening of theological positions which block any infusion of new life and desire for concord, we must learn to respond to each other in non-threatening and peace seeking ways.

The end is to realize the fulfillment of the prayer of our Lord, "... that they may all be one;" the exhortation of the Apostle, "... maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;" and the affirmation of confessing Christians, "... one, holy, catholic and apostolic church."

Celebrations are certainly nostalgic, and any achievement of concord within the church is worthy of celebrating. But let's also use this occasion to make preparations for a future celebration of realized concord and peace.

Richard Pflieger

### DO LUTHERANS PRACTICE THEIR CONFESSIONS?

The 400th anniversary observance of the publication of *The Book of Concord* should have the salutary effect of renewing interest in, stimulating a continuous study of, and fostering a more profound response to the Lutheran Confessions as true exposition of Scripture and faithful witness to the Gospel. This occasion should also highlight for Lutherans that to be a Lutheran means to become identified with a specific confessional movement within the Christian Church. Taking the Confessions gratefully as a gift from God, and studying them carefully,

can only mean a greater clarification of Lutheran identity and a strengthening of the Lutheran confessional movement in the church.

In this day of religious pluralism, contending cults, and theological cross-fertilization, it is particularly apropos for Lutherans to take the Confessions as seriously today as did the fathers in the sixteenth century. Opposing theological propositions are yet present. Some of the ingredients of Enthusiasm and semi-Pelagianism, for example, are unwittingly concocted with Lutheran theology, served in an attractive theological casserole, and consumed. Sometimes diets offered by other denominations seem attractive. In admiration of their "success," some rush in and consume heartily. The result may be only Lutheran indigestion. In other words, and by way of example, if one wishes to ape the vocabulary of other churches, utilizing such phrases as "decision for Christ," or "homogeneous church," one would do well to examine the implications of what one is saying. One ought to consider the implications of such jargon in the light of the Third Article or Article II of the *Formula of Concord*. More than ever the Confessions need to be read, marked, learned and inwardly digested — not as a substitute for Scripture but as exposition of Scripture.

From another perspective, one cannot help but hear the concern of many Lutheran people for the personal and practical dimensions of faith. The Confessions are certainly not void of this concern. Luther's Catechisms immediately come to mind. Here one discovers a profound expression of the meaning of life under the Gospel, of living in an intimate relationship with one's Lord. Furthermore, in the face of many moral difficulties today, one ought to probe the Confessions in order to clarify what it means that God is moving His children on to becoming what He has declared them to be for Christ's sake. Sixteenth century Lutheranism was dynamic, Gospel-centered, bold in confession, and did not separate faith from life. This ought to characterize Lutherans today. Indeed, the Confessions should not be viewed or studied as a curious relic of the past to be

given a respectful salute. They should be studied and taught as a dynamic exposition of the Gospel affecting one's daily existence. Confession is a gift from God to be confessed, taught and lived. For vitality in Lutheranism today one prays not only for an understanding and appreciation for content, but also for the translation of that content into the practical avenues of one's daily life in Christ.

Allan Paul Vasconcellos

### HOW MANY IS ONE?

When the subject of harmony among Christians is raised it is difficult to forget the words of Jesus in John 17:20-21. "Oneness" among Christian people and its intrinsic connection with "oneness" of God as the cornerstone of the Gospel mission is the major emphasis of these verses. God has always been one (Dt. 6:4) and His people were created one (Dt. 7:6; I Peter 2:9) in order that the world may believe. "Oneness" is for now. If the kingdom is to come as God intends, "oneness" must be visible to unbelievers.

The desecration of Christianity by the multiplication of denominations which are encumbered by cultural traditions and sanctified terminological jargon short-circuits the Gospel mission. The divisions in the institutional church are not God pleasing and must be eliminated for the sake of the Gospel. As the Body of Christ moves into the '80's it needs more denominational flag waving like wedding guests need gnats in their wine glasses. The church has swallowed enough camels over denominational differences to give it an acid stomach for centuries.

It is time for all Christian groups to repent for overselling evil in other Christian groups. It is time for all to confess that traditional generalizations about other Christian people are many times incrustated sinful overstatements. The decade of the '80's is the time to watch and pray that we enter not into the temptation of denominational aggrandizement lest the bridegroom arrive while we are in the middle of "gnat hunts."

Let us rather make the 80's the decade of realized "oneness." Let all denominations remind themselves of what they often preach about others. Christian groups live in tension between Christ's lordship, which is perfect, and their own articulation and practice of that lordship, which is not. This is an important aspect of the model of the body of Christ which has for too long a period been applied most frequently only on the individual level while a model of perfectionism has enjoyed the corporate limelight. Which denomination is the greatest? Who out of what group will join us for heavenly communion?

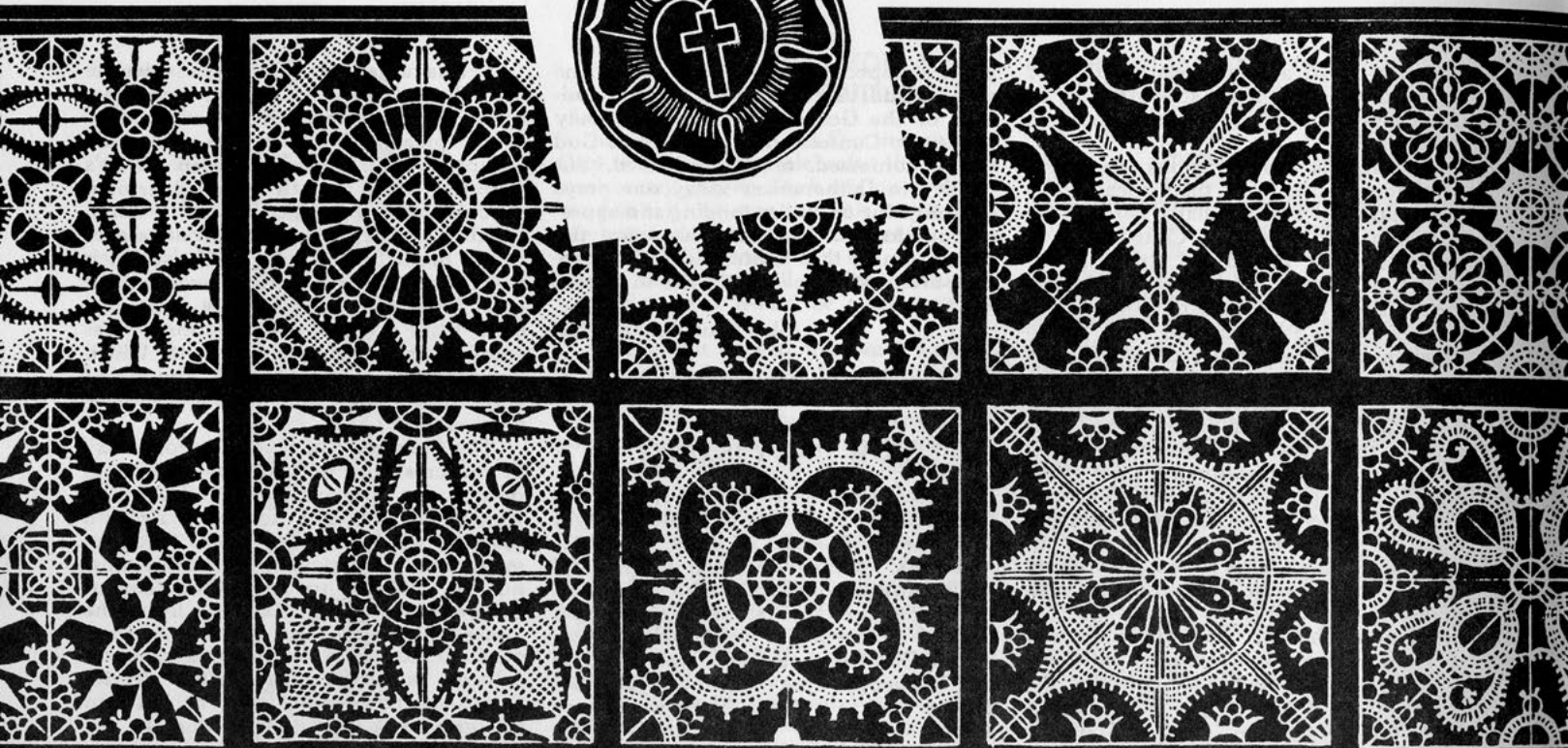
The "oneness" of God, the "oneness" of the cross and of baptismal death and resurrection compels us to find ways by which we are able to articulate and practice what God has given. Disagreements among confessing Christians must not be allowed to keep Christians of different denominations from living the "oneness" which is the common heritage of all. If, for example, an emphasis upon cultural worship roots further divides Christians, those roots must be put into the ground where they belong. If, for example, such "oneness" becomes the sole privilege of high officials and committees, it is no longer the "oneness" which Christ gives.

Individual Christian congregations must actively seek to break down the walls that have existed between Christian groups in their own community by opening dialogue, affirming common ground, and by learning to live from and with each other "so that the world may believe..." (John 17:21). Rebuke and encouragement, Law and Gospel, the model of the body of Christ are essential if the Gospel is not to be short-circuited (John 17:20-21). At the same time, individual Christians must proclaim, "Christ has given 'oneness' to me in my baptism and you cannot take it away."

Ronald Vahl

# Has the BOOK OF CONCORD made Lutherans different?

James H. Pragman



How does one answer the question which is the title for this article? The first response this writer had to the question "Has *The Book of Concord* Made Lutherans Different?" was this one: different from what?!

If the question is taken to imply a comparison among the various denominations — i.e., how are Lutherans different from Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterians or Mormons or Roman Catholics, etc.? — the answer(s) can be gotten with relative ease by consulting the appropriate resources on the comparative theology and life of religious denominations. But, on the other hand, if the question is understood in other ways, the answer(s) might not be so obvious or satisfying. For example, if the title means to raise a question about the course of the history of Lutheranism since the sixteenth century, suggesting that the history of Lutheranism would have been different without *The Book of Concord* and then asking for the definition of that difference, the title/question becomes virtually impossible to answer. The problem is that *The Book of Concord* is Lutheranism; it is impossible to speak of Lutheranism apart from *The Book of Concord*. Consequently, to this writer, the question/title (which was chosen by the editorial committee of this journal!) seems rather difficult to handle. The difficulty is that the answer is so obvious: *The Book of Concord* has informed and shaped Lutheranism; thus, it has made Lutherans "different." This article could perhaps be concluded right here!

The matter of "difference," however, leads to something else: if *The Book of Concord* has defined Lutheranism, then what is the understanding of Lutheranism set forth by *The Book of Concord*? How does *The Book of Concord* see itself and those who accept it as the confession of the faith? A discussion of these matters may provide helpful insights for both the writer and the readers of this journal so that helpful reflection on the question/title of this article can occur.

*The Book of Concord* claims to present nothing within its pages that does not conform to "the ancient consensus which the universal and orthodox church of Christ has believed, fought for against many heresies and errors, and repeatedly affirmed"<sup>1</sup> throughout the centuries. The confessors affirm very clearly that the *Augsburg Confession*, presented to the Emperor Charles V in 1530, was "compiled out of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures"<sup>2</sup> and that *The Book of Concord* does not intend to deviate from the 1530 confession in any way. Thus, the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530 is drawn out of the

Scriptures alone, and the doctrine confessed in the *Augsburg Confession* and in the other writings in *The Book of Concord* is the consensus of the orthodox and apostolic church throughout the ages. What makes Lutherans (i.e., those who subscribe to the *Augsburg Confession* and the other confessions in *The Book of Concord*) different is their similarity, even their identification, with the orthodox consensus of the faith in the history of the church. What makes them different is that they do not differ from the faith once delivered to the saints. Such was the claim and affirmation of the Lutheran confessors in the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, as the confessors knew very well, the claims they made for themselves and their confessions of the faith did not preclude the possibility of doctrinal dissension and disagreement within their fellowship. Those who identified themselves as the heirs of the theological and confessional legacy of blessed Martin Luther became embroiled in a series of devastating and disruptive doctrinal and theological controversies in the third quarter of the sixteenth century. This paper will not rehearse those controversies, but the several articles in the *Formula of Concord* respond to and resolve those controversies.<sup>3</sup> The Preface to *The Book of Concord* sets forth the perspective and the intention of the confessors in these words as they dealt with those controversies:

With divine assistance, it was our intention to remain and abide loyally by the truth once recognized and confessed at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the confidence and hope that thereby the adversaries of pure evangelical doctrine would be constrained to desist from their fabricated slanders and defamation of us and that other good-hearted people would have been reminded and stimulated by this our reiterated and repeated confession the more seriously to investigate the truth of the divine Word that alone gives salvation, to commit themselves to it, and for the salvation of their souls and their eternal welfare to abide by it and persist in it in a Christian way without any further disputation and dissension.<sup>4</sup>

*The Book of Concord* expresses and endorses the orthodox tradition of the one holy catholic and apostolic church of the ages — that is the book's own claim for itself. Furthermore, that is the claim of every confessor who affirms that his/her confession of the faith is *The Book of Concord*. This affirmation of *The Book of Concord* and its confessors, in case there is some doubt on the subject, rests securely on the understanding that *The Book of Concord* rests solidly and totally on the Holy Scriptures. The confessors affirm that their disposition and intention is to support no doctrine other than that which is based on the Holy Scriptures and embodied in the

first reformation confessions of the faith, i.e., the *Augsburg Confession* and its Apology.<sup>5</sup>

At the conclusion of the Preface to *The Book of Concord* the sixteenth century confessors and their heirs assert that

we are not minded to manufacture anything new by this work of agreement or to depart in any way at all, either in content or in formulation, from the divine truth that our pious forebears and we have acknowledged and confessed in the past, for our agreement is based on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and is comprehended in the three Creeds as well as in the Augsburg Confession . . . in the Apology that followed it, and in the Smalcald Articles and the Large and Small Catechisms of that highly enlightened man, Dr. Luther. On the contrary, we are minded by the grace of the Holy Spirit to abide and remain unanimously in this confession of faith and to regulate all religious controversies and their explanations according to it.<sup>6</sup>

*The Book of Concord* speaks clearly about its understanding of itself. It intends to remain faithful to the faith that was once delivered to the saints, the faith that has been the common heritage of the holy church throughout the ages. Nevertheless, the claims of *The Book of Concord* are not unique to the confessors who formulated it. Other theological formulators and their formulations claim to represent the truth of Holy Scripture without deviation or "shadow of turning." No confessor of the one holy catholic and apostolic faith of the church will assert that he or she is deviating from that one holy faith. Therefore, it is important to note how *The Book of Concord* views its own use and how it has been used since the time of its formulation in the sixteenth century. Has *The Book of Concord*, in other words, served to anchor Lutheran theology in the orthodox consensus of the faith throughout the ages? Perhaps the answer to this question will provide material for the consideration of the question that has prompted this essay.

In the "Introduction" to his *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* — the "Introduction" bears the intriguing title, "Theology of the Confessions as Prolegomena to Dogmatics" — Edmund Schlink reviews the three ways in which the Lutheran Confessions may be studied. One approach is the historical approach: the student of the Confessions reviews and analyzes the history of the origin and development of the documents.<sup>7</sup> A second approach pays close and strict attention to the content of the Confessions, the teachings they contain.<sup>8</sup> Although both approaches are necessary for a proper understanding of the Lutheran Confessions, Schlink makes the point that neither of those two approaches by

themselves do justice to the Confessions as "confession" of the one faith which has been delivered to the saints.<sup>9</sup> Schlink then proceeds to outline the third and, in his view, more proper approach to the understanding of the Lutheran Confessions:

Confessions in their proper sense will never be taken seriously until they are taken seriously as exposition of the Scriptures, to be specific, as the church's exposition of the Scriptures. Confessions are not free-lancing theological opinions; they are statements of doctrine that must be understood even to their last detail in terms of that exposition of Scripture which is the church's responsibility, entrusted to it in and with the responsibility of proclamation. Confessions are primarily expositions of Scripture . . .<sup>10</sup>

The Confessions of the church, therefore, are obligatory models of the preaching and teaching that happens in the church; they admit to no limits of time and space for in them the one holy catholic and apostolic church has spoken. Furthermore, "In the last analysis, all Confessions of the church are nothing more than a fortification built around Baptism, and an explanation of the trinitarian name."<sup>11</sup> Schlink also notes that the Lutheran Confessions are "organically related in a kind of family tree . . . to relatively few texts."<sup>12</sup> All of the confessional documents of the Lutheran Reformation are intended to be merely expositions of the ancient trinitarian creeds of the church. Consequently, "The Apology expounds the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms interpret each other, and the Formula of Concord, again, wishes to be understood as elucidation of the Augsburg Confession and, beyond that, of all prior Lutheran Confessions."<sup>13</sup> All of this being true, nevertheless a specific answer to this question is still needed: what is the role of the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the Lutheran Church, indeed the whole Christian church on earth? Schlink provides this answer to that question: "The Confession does not in the first instance determine what is to be taught, but sums up what is taught in the church."<sup>14</sup> The Lutheran Confessions — because they expound the faith once delivered to the saints — describe the church's faith; they do not prescribe the church's faith.

If that understanding of the role of the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the church is valid, then the answer to the question posed in the title of this paper is close at hand. The Lutheran Confessions have made Lutherans "different" insofar as the Confessions have served to describe the faith of the church throughout the ages to which Lutherans voluntarily commit themselves with joy and thanksgiving. Thus, when the church, i.e., the "Lutheran" church, confronts move-

ments and systems of thought that challenge it to move in new and perhaps deviant directions, the Lutheran Confessions serve to remind the church of that single and solitary faith that is the church's. Shall "Pietism" rise to suggest a new understanding of the foundation for one's eternal salvation? Then let the Lutheran Church confront itself with the Lutheran Confessions which describe the church's faith! Shall "Rationalism" rise to challenge the church's understanding of nature and grace, the nature of God and of man? Then let the Lutheran Church confront itself with the Lutheran Confessions which describe the church's saving and vivifying faith!

The Lutheran Church since the sixteenth century has found itself challenged by a number of movements and alternative understandings of the orthodox faith. The movements that have arisen in the history of modern Christianity are legion. Members of the church are tempted to take some of those movements and religious alternatives seriously. At that point, the Lutheran Confessions in *The Book of Concord* serve to help the Lutheran Church maintain itself on the sure footing of the orthodox consensus of the church's faith throughout the ages.

Space does not permit a detailed demonstration of the way in which the Lutheran Confessions in *The Book of Concord* have helped the Lutheran Church deal with the Social Gospel or Rationalism or Pietism or the encroachments of Calvinism, etc. But, nevertheless, and insofar as the Lutheran Church has taken seriously the Lutheran Confessions as the church's confession of the faith of the orthodox church throughout the ages, it has been equipped to deal with the theological, religious, and social challenges it has faced. *The Book of Concord* is valid today, as it was in the sixteenth century when it was formulated, because it is the confession of the church, the exposition of the doctrine of Scripture which abides forever.

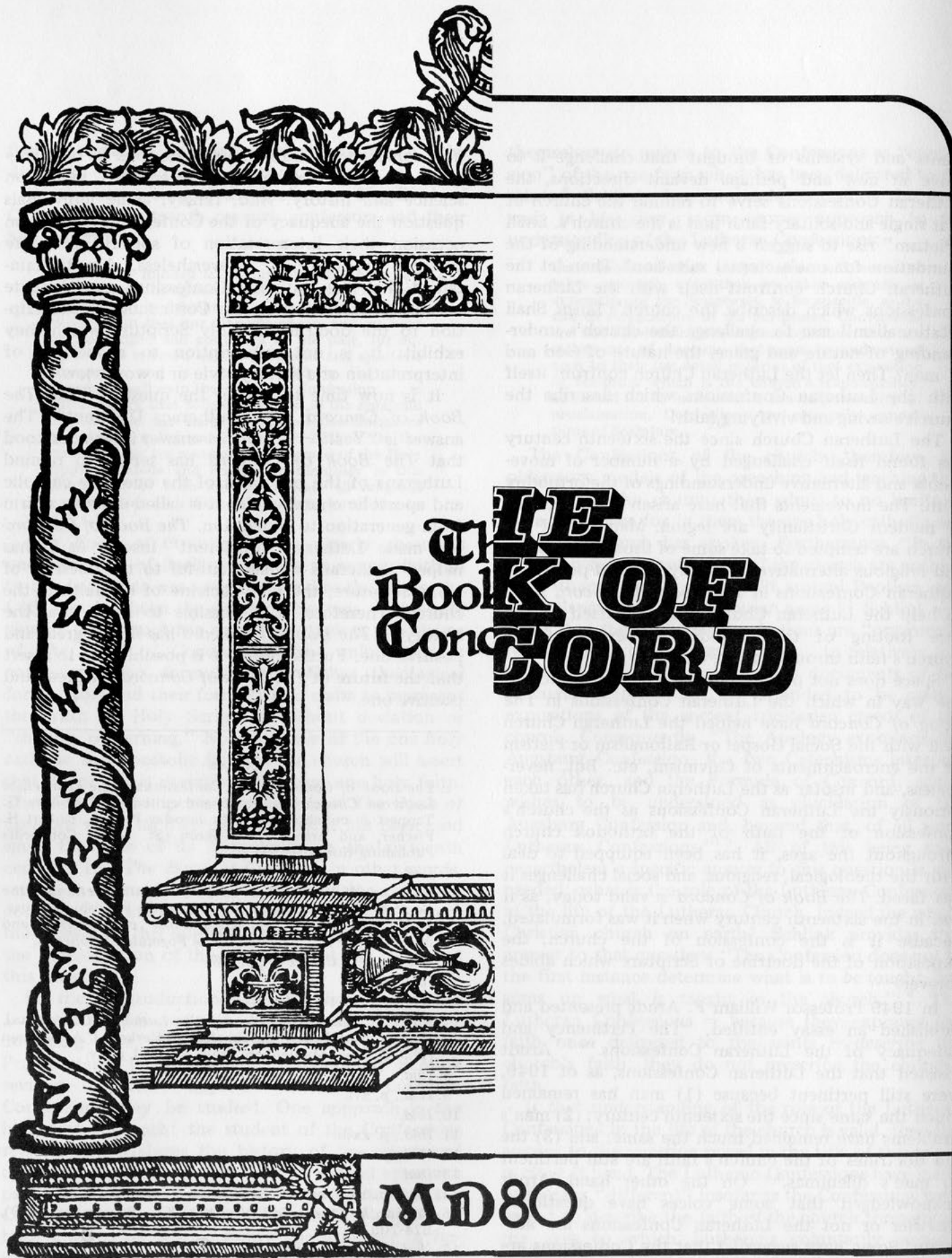
In 1949 Professor William F. Arndt presented and published an essay entitled, "The Pertinency and Adequacy of the Lutheran Confessions."<sup>15</sup> Arndt insisted that the Lutheran Confessions, as of 1949, were still pertinent because (1) man has remained much the same since the sixteenth century; (2) man's problems have remained much the same; and (3) the old doctrines of the church's faith are still pertinent to man's dilemmas.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Arndt acknowledged that some voices have questioned whether or not the Lutheran Confessions are adequate. Some have suggested that the Confessions are inadequate from the point of view of literary style and word usage. Another reason why some individ-

uals consider the Lutheran Confessions to be inadequate is that they express antequated views on science and history. And, finally, some individuals question the adequacy of the Confessions because on occasion their interpretation of specific Scripture passages is dubious.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, Arndt maintained that the Lutheran Confessions are adequate because subscription to the Confessions is subscription to the doctrine of Holy Scripture which they exhibit; it is not subscription to a method of interpretation or a literary style or a worldview.<sup>18</sup>

It is now time to answer the question "Has *The Book of Concord* made Lutherans Different?" The answer is "Yes!" — if by that answer it is understood that *The Book of Concord* has served to remind Lutherans of the one faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church which it is called upon to affirm from generation to generation. *The Book of Concord* has made Lutherans "different" insofar as it has helped Lutherans remain faithful to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, the one doctrine of the faith in the church. Therefore, it is possible to assert that the history of *The Book of Concord* has been a great and positive one. Furthermore, it is possible also to assert that the future of *The Book of Concord* is a great and positive one.

#### Notes

1. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 463ff. F. Bente's *Historical Introductions to the Book of Concord* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 102ff., rehearses those controversies and identifies the issues settled in the *Formula of Concord*.
4. *The Book of Concord*, pp. 5-6.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
7. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, translated by Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c.1961), p. xv.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
12. *Ibid.*, p. xxv.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Emphasis in the text.
15. *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XX (September 1949), 674-700.
16. *Ibid.*, XX, pp. 689ff.
17. *Ibid.*, XX, pp. 695ff.
18. *Ibid.*, XX, pp. 698f.



## Is a Revision of the Book of Concord Needed?

Herman A. Etzold

The question of revising *The Book of Concord* after four hundred years does not seem impertinent. After all, times do change. The categories of Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy employed in 16th Century theology are strange to people whose thought and speech are shaped by a more technological, materialistic, and existential approach to life. The big 20th century concerns about pollution, energy shortages, over-population, death by choice, genetic manipulation, world hunger, and nuclear fall-out were not even anticipated four centuries ago. In ecclesiastical polity, the Confessions address themselves to territorial churches, confessing groups, and the division of the Church into Latin and Greek communions, but they know nothing of our denominational systems and American plurality. In addressing the Roman Church, the Confessions address a Church which was an outgrowth of the feudal system in outlook and which was influenced by the political ideology of that culture. The Confessions do not even contain a single specific article which sets forth definitively the doctrine of the Word of God to answer our questions of inspiration, infallibility, or authority in doctrine. On the surface, all this may seem like a deficit which renders the Confessions obsolete and somewhat irrelevant.

What, then, are we celebrating in this 400th year of *The Book of Concord*? Is it merely an item among the memorabilia of by-gone ages? Is it still a dynamic tool in the distinctive mission of Lutheranism to world Christianity? Do the Lutheran Symbols which were bound into *The Book of Concord* four-hundred years ago still provide the true answers for man's perplexing questions in 1980?

To be honest, we purpose to demonstrate that Lutherans have more to celebrate on the 400th

Anniversary of *The Book of Concord* than an important historical document and event. *We have in these Confessions a faithful guide for Christian faith and life which the ensuing centuries have in no way diminished and which the changing world milieu has not rendered obsolete.* We find in our Confessions the distinctive purpose for the existence of the Lutheran Church among the multitude of denominations of Christendom to-day. The witness of Lutheranism is needed as sorely in this 20th Century as it was needed in the 16th Century. In our ordination and induction rites, Lutheran pastors and teachers still solemnly promise that they accept as God's Word the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that they regard the Scriptures as "the only rule and norm of faith and practice," and "all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> The phrase, "All the Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church," refers to the full content of *The Book of Concord* of 1580. The assertion of the Synodical Constitution that "the Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation" these Confessions is a requirement. It is not always actualized in individual members. At any rate, it is to be hoped that the celebration of the publishing of *The Book of Concord* will serve to increase our corporate conviction regarding the authority of Holy Scripture as the norm (*norma normans*) for what we confess, teach, and practice; and the acceptance of the authority of the Lutheran Confessions as the truth normed by Scripture (*norma normata*). That is the cement which binds us together as Lutherans, despite wide divergence in organization, church polity, culture, national origins, or liturgical practices. When we lose that

standard and the conviction that the Symbols contained in *The Book of Concord* are true, then we shall crumble and fragment into sectarianism or disappear in the general sweep of Protestant denominationalism.

#### Confessing the Gospel — An Unchanging Dynamic

Hermann Sasse's classic treatment of the nature and character of the Lutheran faith in *Here We Stand* traces the historic struggle of confessional Lutheranism for survival. To withstand the opposition to it, Sasse simply urges the need for confessing the basic teaching of Scripture, which is also the center of Lutheran Confessionalism, *viz.*, that a man is justified by faith alone. He observes:

The movement toward church union, which will probably make mighty strides of progress during the next generation, will oblige the Lutheran churches more and more to explain why they will not give up their independent confessional existence. How often, in the course of four centuries, has our church had to answer this question! How often has it been reproached for unbrotherliness, for having a sectarian spirit, for fostering uncharitable separatism! Whenever the occasion demands, may we be enabled to defend our position with the same courage of faith which distinguished our Fathers in the Reformation.<sup>2</sup>

Sasse depicts the necessity of confessing the central doctrine of the Confessions, which is justification by faith, without any other conditions. That is the distinctive mission of Lutheranism because "not only the church of our Confession, but the whole church of Christ, lives by this article."<sup>3</sup> The Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to a right understanding of justification by faith, is the unchanging dynamic of Christian life. Without it, there is no church.

But, one is justified in asking, are the Lutheran Confessions still needed to assure that the witness of the Gospel is preserved? The Gospel is taught throughout Scripture. Is that not sufficient? And the Confessions include themselves when they teach that:

Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times.<sup>4</sup>

We choose to answer yes to the question of contemporary need for the Confessions. They are still necessary as "witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved" at the time of the Reformation and how it must still be preserved in the face of errors and opposition to-day. It is still the height of foolishness and a block of stumbling to contemporary man. Man, even the

zealously religious, instinctively rebels against the Gospel. Heresy was to Martin Luther anything which contradicted the article of justification by faith, or which taught that human merit, works, or worth were somehow necessary, too, for salvation. The *Formula of Concord*, Part II, Art. III, quotes Luther as saying this about the chief article of Christian doctrine:

Where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony, and without any schism. But where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit.<sup>5</sup>

With the same conviction, Luther developed this first and chief article in the *Smalcald Articles* and warns: "Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised . . . On this article rests all we teach and practice . . . Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts. Otherwise all is lost . . ."<sup>6</sup>

We recognize that the Confessions answer questions of Christian faith and life which concerned 16th Century man. However, in as far as these questions dealt with spiritual questions, such as the nature of man, salvation, and the source and norm of truth, the answers are still right on the beam. *If we look into the Confessions for direct solutions to our modern social problems, they are, of course, not there. But then, neither are there direct answers to the social problems of 1530 or 1580, unless we place the question of the power and supremacy of the Pope, or the Christian attitude toward government, into that category. When, however, it comes to questions about man's relationship to God, the answers are there in clear and certain terms. If you ask how a guilty sinner can stand before a just and righteous God, what role does man play in conversion, are good works necessary, how should all church practices and teachings be judged, what are the purposes of ceremonies, and the like, the answers emerge clear and sharp from the Confessions, and they are as true and as pertinent to-day as when they were formulated. They are true and pertinent because they are drawn from the Scriptures.*

The fact that the antitheses against which the answers are directed may not be as clearly understood by us as they were by 16th Century Christians may reduce the witness of the Confessions for some. Rather than a revision of *The Book of Concord*, this may indicate a need to-day for helps which will elucidate the conclusions of the Confessions for those who are willing to study them. We note that the observance of the adoption of the *Formula of Concord* in 1977, the 400th Anniversary of that important document, and the celebration of the

Anniversary of *The Book of Concord* this year, has stimulated a notable beginning to fill that need.

There is a temptation to discredit the Confessions because they represent the mind-set, experience, thought, and opinion of a mere man, Martin Luther, who was by no means infallible as he himself was the first to admit. There is another aspect, however, that needs our sympathetic hearing. The Confessions were not accepted because of men's interest in Luther's teaching as such, but because Luther's teachings agreed with the Gospel. The Confessions did not come to possess authority because they came from a great man or a gifted genius. They became authoritative because it was recognized that they were in agreement with the Word of God. Sasse comments, "Luther showed himself a genuine teacher of the Church when, in his teaching, he referred people away from his own person and his own opinions, back to the Gospel."<sup>7</sup> The Confessions are, indeed, "the sum and pattern of the doctrine which Dr. Luther of blessed memory clearly set forth in his writings on the basis of God's Word and conclusively established against the papacy and other sects." But lest this should mislead us into setting up Luther as the authority, the Confessions carefully point out that Luther's teaching was "that the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it."<sup>8</sup>

#### The Confessions — A Norm for Interpretation

The value of the Confessions for 20th Century Lutheranism lies not merely in their contents, but especially in the fashion in which questions in dispute were answered. In this respect, too, they are normative. Basic principles of interpretation, derived from the Scriptures themselves, guided the Lutheran theologians in formulating doctrine and judging ecclesiastical teaching and practice. Holsten Fagerberg summarizes these in ten rules.<sup>9</sup> We may compact them even further in four general hermeneutical rules:

1. The Bible is the sole source and norm for Christian doctrine and practice.
2. Salvation is alone by faith in Christ, without any other condition.
3. A proper distinction between Law and Gospel must be observed.
4. Unclear passages of Scripture must be understood in the light of the clear teachings of Scripture.

While no specific article in *The Book of Concord*

deals with the nature of God's Word, it is everywhere simply accepted that the Bible was given by God's inspiration, that God reveals Himself in it, and that through it God works faith in human hearts. The Bible is meant when we are admonished "to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us."<sup>10</sup> The Scriptures are the source, the norm, and the authority for the teaching of the church. They have the power (authority) to convert (Cf. Romans 10:14-21). They are the standard by which false teachings and false practices in the church are judged. Justification by faith summarizes the central teaching of the Bible. We learn about Christ from Scripture, and salvation by faith in Him is the material principle, the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. The Bible is divided into two doctrines: the Gospel which promises sinners forgiveness and life, and the Law which speaks God's accusing and damning Word to sinners. Both are God's Word, but the two must be kept distinct. To confuse them is to teach falsely. The entire Bible, Old Testament as well as New Testament, is to be interpreted from the paradoxical view of Law and Gospel. Finally, that which is obscure, of doubtful meaning, or hard to understand in Scripture should be interpreted in the light of the clear message of Scripture. God cannot contradict Himself. That the Scriptures will not mislead us is implicit.

Adherence to these interpretive principles describes what it means to be a Lutheran. To expand on them is to summarize what is basic in Lutheran doctrine. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod discussed the interrelationship of the material and formal principles in Lutheran theology in the study entitled *Gospel and Scripture*. This extraordinarily tightly reasoned report on the interpretive methodology of the Confessions presents the insight that

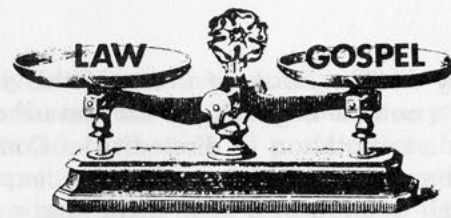
It is important to observe that the Symbols ask two questions concerning a given doctrine or practice: (1) What does it do to the Gospel of God's free grace toward sinners in Christ Jesus? (2) Does it have Biblical foundation? . . . Whatever is truly Biblical does not negate the Gospel. The true and genuine Gospel does not negate whatever is truly Biblical.<sup>11</sup>

Every article of the various Symbols demonstrates this methodology. For example, practices like monasticism, the Mass, the remembrance of saints, celibacy, confession, and the like, are not condemned as such. What is condemned is any teaching which prescribes them as necessary or ascribes to them merit for salvation, or which makes assertions about them which are contrary to Scripture. Students in doctrine courses frequently express surprise and appreciation

at how simply and clearly profound truths are expressed in the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apolo- gy*. Armed with the principles of interpretation which Melancthon, Luther, and the formulators of the "Formula of Concord" employed, and with a fair knowledge of the Scriptures, the average student finds no difficulty in grasping the reason for any conclusion stated in the Confessions.

Following Scripture as source and norm, and the Gospel as the central teaching of Holy Scripture, Lutherans steer a course between the Scylla of becoming a moralistic or doctrinal sect on the one hand, and the Charybdis of being swallowed up in the stream of shallow ecumenism. Following the Confessions, Lutherans stand united with the Holy Christian Church of all times, for the church is the assembly in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly (AC VII). Rome had forsaken the teachings of Christ. In reforming the church, Lutherans did not abandon the church. They merely became one with the apostles and the Apostolic Church. Luther declared, "After all, the teaching is not mine. Neither was I crucified for anyone."<sup>1 2</sup> The unfinished task of Lutheranism is to bear this same witness to the Gospel of God's free grace which the Confessions extol. In that doctrine is the true unity of the church. In fact, without it, there is no church.

The emphasis of the Confessions on Scripture as sole source, authority, and norm does not deny other factors which influence the formation of our faith. It cannot be denied that the culture has great influence on the way we express the Christian message. Luther's existential experience of an awakened tender conscience and his discovery of the Gospel obviously influenced his theology. He knew from experience the comfort of the forgiving Christ. Without the use of reason there is no understanding, interpretation, or communication of Scripture or doctrine possible. Tradition, likewise, has its place and Melancthon frequently refers to it, especially in the *Apolo- gy*. Culture, experience, reason, and tradition are among the needful factors in developing the faith which we confess. But they are not norms for the truth in theology. They are servants, not masters. Error results when we elevate any of these factors to the status of being on the par with Holy Scripture. The word used in the Confessions is that they are "subordinate to" the Word of God. If any doctrine of Scripture is denied on the basis of human logic, experience, feeling, or any other factor, then we have elevated something or someone other than Scripture to the status of theological norm and source for our faith.



#### Law and Gospel Balance Remains Crucial

We must, however, go one step farther. Having accepted the Scriptures as norm, we must interpret them according to the norm of the Gospel. Law and Gospel must be distinguished properly, according to a right understanding of the Gospel. If we interpret passages of Scripture as imposing conditions of moralism, rationalism, mysticism, ancestry, or emotionalism as requisite for salvation, then we have forsaken the Gospel which alone comforts burdened consciences and which is taught so lucidly in passages like John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-10; and Rom. 3:20-29. The observation of Robert D. Preus about the consistency of the emphasis of the Confessions on the Gospel as the central theme of Scripture impresses itself on all who take the time to study them. He notes that

Melancthon in the Augsburg Confession clusters all the articles of faith around the redemptive work of Christ and justification through faith in Him. When the writers of our Formula of Concord at a later date try to settle certain controversies over original sin, the third use of the Law (as a pattern to regulate our lives), or even church usages, they make it crystal clear that their concern for the right doctrine on these matters is to enhance the Gospel and its comfort to poor sinners.<sup>1 3</sup>

In the separation of Law and Gospel, *the Confessions maintain a keen balance between faith and works which is as relevant in Christian preaching and teaching to-day as it was 400 years, yes, 2,000 years ago.*

Recently Herman A. Preus published a book, *A Theology to Live By*, in which he recommends Luther's theology as the power for Christian living and thinking. He rehearses the accents of Luther's theology with a keen appreciation for its timelessness. He sees a need for a sympathetic application of Confessional theology to the quest of 20th Century man for theological truth.<sup>1 4</sup> Even in 1580, the theology of the Confessions was nothing new. It was the age-old faith based "on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures."<sup>1 5</sup> Its newness was the return to the ecumenical faith delivered by the Holy Spirit to the church through the inspired pages of the Old and New Testaments, and the new acceptance of those Scriptures as the final authority for orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

In a time when so much theology is merely

psychology and sociology wearing a halo, we need to recapture the spirit of the Confessions which accept no authority, neither of pope nor of science, as being on a par with Holy Scripture. Nothing sums up this attitude more succinctly than Martin Luther's heroic stance at Worms in 1521, "My conscience is bound in God's Word." At that Diet, before the mightiest monarch in Europe and august dignitaries of the Roman Church, this son of peasant parents declared he could not accept the authority of popes and councils, and unless he was convinced by clear truths of Scripture he could not, in good conscience, repudiate anything he had written. That's the spirit which made the Lutheran movement invincible. When Emperor Charles V demanded that the Protestant princes participate in the Corpus Christi procession at the Diet of Augsburg, Margrave George the Confessor, one of the signers of the *Augsburg Confession*, refused and said, "I would rather kneel down on this spot and have my head chopped off than give up the Word of God."<sup>1 6</sup> This complete subordination to Holy Scripture threads through the Lutheran Confessions from the Augustana to the *Formula of Concord*.

The question of authority in the church is still very much with us. The Lutheran Confessions point unswervingly to the Word of God as Law and Gospel, to Christ as the only Savior, and to the canonical Scriptures as the sole source and norm of Christian doctrine and life. All authority (i.e., power) for conversion to the truth, for creation of the church, and for norming the teaching and practice of the church is Scripture. Accepting only that authority, the Lutheran Church will strive to develop a pious clergy, professional church workers, who not only know the contents of the Confessions, but who live by that faith. It will strive to develop an educated ministerium which is at home in the arts and sciences, but which can, above all, rightly interpret Scripture as God's Word of Law and Gospel, and which is able to do that on the basis of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. No revision of *The Book of Concord* can achieve this enthronement of the rightful authority of Scripture in the church. It is assured, if 20th Century Lutherans will recapture the spirit of confidence in and obedience to God's Word in which every article of faith in *The Book of Concord* was framed. There's where Luther found the authority. He preached God's Word and exulted, "While I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip (Melancthon) and (Nicholas von) Amsdorf, the Lord so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."<sup>1 7</sup>

#### Notes

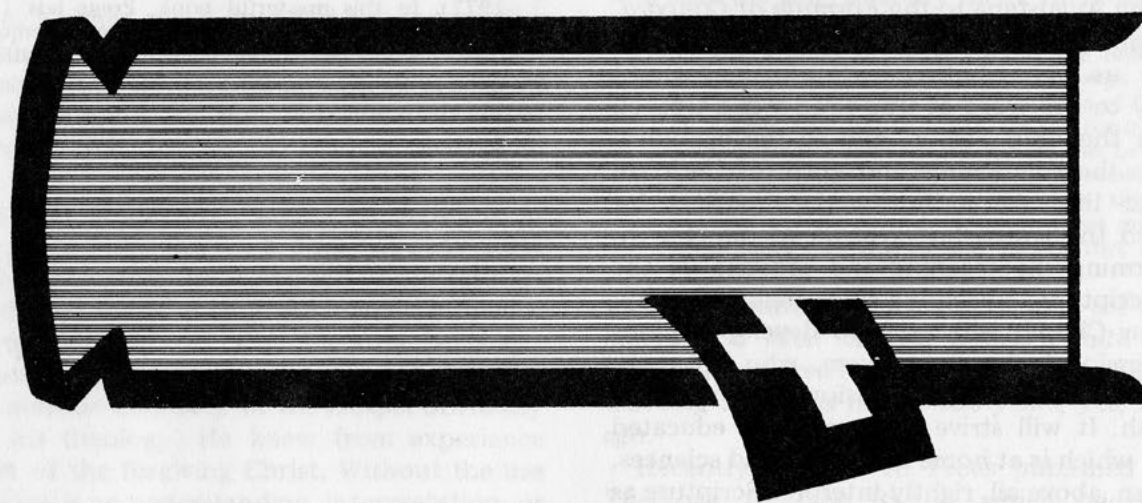
1. Constitution of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Article II, "Confession."
2. Hermann Sasse, *Here We Stand*, trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publ. House, 1938), p. 16.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
4. *The Book of Concord*, Trans. and ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 464:2.
5. *Ibid.*, S.D., 540:6.
6. *Ibid.*, Part II, Art. I, 292:5.
7. *Here We Stand*, pp. 69-70.
8. *Book of Concord*, 505:9.
9. Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: CPH, 1972), p. 42.
10. *Book of Concord*, 496:14.
11. *Gospel and Scripture*, CTCR Document, November 1972, p. 7.
12. Eric W. Gritsch and Robert W. Jensen, *Lutheranism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. vii.
13. Robert D. Preus, *Getting Into the Theology of Concord* (St. Louis: CPH, 1977), p. 25. This contribution to the literature on the theology of the Confessions is of valuable assistance for understanding the content of the Lutheran Confessions.
14. Herman A. Preus, *A Theology to Live By* (St. Louis: CPH, 1977). In this masterful book, Preus lets Luther speak "louder than all his interpreters" and demonstrates Luther's pertinence to modern theological questions.
15. *Book of Concord*, p. 13.
16. *Here We Stand*, p. 6.
17. *Lutheranism*, p. 24.





## The Book of Concord: A Textbook of Lutheran Theology

David P. Meyer



No celebration of the 400th anniversary of *The Book of Concord* would be complete without remembering the important role *The Book of Concord* has in the professional programs at the colleges and seminaries of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. *The Book of Concord* serves the student well by enlarging the student's ecumenical outlook, strengthening his commitment to Scripture as source and norm of all theology, and increasing his appreciation of the church's traditions. For these reasons alone *The Book of Concord* has much to say to the Lutheran student, the church, and the world.

### Lessons for the Ministry

Often students preparing for some form of professional ministry in the Lutheran Church are amazed to find that *The Book of Concord* is so highly regarded by teachers and professors and is required reading for total preparation for service in the Synod. Even though *The Book of Concord* is not a doctrinal textbook, it is doctrinal. Even though it is not a systematic textbook, it does reflect a systematic appreciation of the unity of Scripture. Even though it is a unique historic confession, it is neither time-bound nor antiquarian. Even though it is hardly a

textbook on rules of Biblical interpretation and a primer in exegetical method, it does provide a basic hermeneutics for Lutheran interpretation of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Even though *The Book of Concord* fits none of the mentioned categories well, it alone answers well the question, "What is it that Lutherans believe, teach, and confess?"

One might well ask, "Don't Lutherans simply teach all of the Bible and nothing but the Bible?" To which the Confessions would answer an emphatic "yes." But unlike those religious traditions which insist that they are truly teaching the Bible but are unwilling to substantiate their claim, the Lutheran Confessions provide a publicly accessible document and account by which its claims can be tested.

Again one could suggest that it is not what is said or written that really counts, but what is in a person's heart that really counts. And again the Confessions would agree; but while it is true that faith which holds to Christ truly saves, Jesus himself is not content with silent faith but calls for and expects a verbal confession (Matthew 16:15). It was not enough that Peter say, "I believe in You"; Peter had to spell out his commitment that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, promised in the Old Testament, and that He only was Son of God. Faith which clings to Christ and faith which confesses Christ go hand in hand. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9 RSV). For Jesus and Paul the confession of faith is but a natural and expected response to God's grace. In their response to grace, the Lutheran Confessions go beyond the request given to Peter, adding also what Lutherans confess regarding the nature of God's grace, justification, the church, the sacraments, and whatever serves the twin goals of "making people wise unto salvation in Christ Jesus" and "equipping them for the doing of good works." (II Timothy 3:15-17)

While it is true that faith saves, making one a Christian, it is only the confession which marks one as Christian. Just as the Bible cannot be our confession, since our confession is not the rule and norm of all theology; so it is also true that acceptance of the Bible does not tell anyone what one believes. For example, Jews, Moslems, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the Old Testament is their theological textbook because it is God's Word. But it is only their conflicting confessions and teachings which distinguish them one from the other. Just as the early Church's commitment to the New Testament set her apart from Judaism, so now it is only

the church's commitment to the Three Ecumenical Creeds — the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian — which sets her apart from Judaism, Moslems, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Not only does *The Book of Concord* serve a negative role, showing how we differ from those who teach contrary to Scripture, but *The Book of Concord* has something very positive to say about the way in which we can rightly read, learn, and inwardly digest the truth of God's revelation. Lutherans believe that *The Book of Concord* serves as a light, like that of the brilliantly shining moon, a light which shines back on Scripture and illuminates those truths of Scripture which ought to be observed before all others.<sup>2</sup>

And if the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church succeed in bringing order out of chaos, providing an instrument to resolve the seeming contradictories of Scripture — since it says at one time we are saved by works and at another that we are saved by faith — then *The Book of Concord* has served its role as a light well.<sup>3</sup> When the confessions touch the life of a Christian, a Lutheran Christian, he does not want to remain idle. He desires that all people share in such joy which the confessions helped him to find. And since *The Book of Concord* is but the reflected light of Scripture, he finds Scripture is much more a joy to read and study. And when perplexed with Scripture, a student may turn again to the reflecting light of the Confessions to see the way through.

As a student preparing for professional service in the church, the student learns early that upon assuming a professional role, he or she will be required to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions as a correct and true exposition and understanding of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> At first this seems to be a burden; but having studied the Confessions, the student finds that the theology and doctrine of the Confessions is precisely what he finds in Scripture. And such discovery is not one which comes by human will but by the Spirit, the Spirit working with the Word. For ultimately, it is the Word which works faith in the human heart and the Confessions demand that the reader test all that they declare by the Word. And if the student rigorously tests the Confessions by Scripture and finds that what is declared therein is true, he or she may find the word "Lutheran" too limiting, since what is taught therein ought to be the Confession of every Christian, not merely those who denominationally are named "Lutheran."

Genuine commitment to the Lutheran Confessions runs contrary to popular opinion. Often it is said that

the task of the Lutheran Church is to teach people to be Christians first and only incidentally Lutherans.<sup>5</sup> Others say, "Lutheranism is but one of hundreds of legitimate forms of Christianity." Moreover, the student has grown up in a society and culture which promotes egalitarianism, not only in the Christian tradition, but among world religions as well. Suggestions abound, among Christian as well as non-Christian authors, that every religion is just as right or just as wrong as any other. Once a diversity of confessions within the Christian tradition was counted a shame and disgrace, but now it is held to be praiseworthy, the belief being that out of many mutually contradictory Confessions an even higher truth may emerge. But no such spirit of doctrinal laxity and indifference is to be found in *The Book of Concord*. It will have none of this. The Confessions urge the student to test their truth by Scripture. If they are found untrue, he should reject them; but if found true, then all which contradicts them is false. But having tested them, as the Confessions demand, the student will find them in accord with Scripture and faith. Then Confessional subscription will not be a burden and yoke, but a cheerful response to what God has done for Him, and a promise to remain faithful to the God who has redeemed him or her in Jesus Christ.

#### Teachings on Ecumenicity

If one has conviction that the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions, *The Book of Concord*, ought to be universally believed, taught, and confessed by the whole church on earth, then one has also discovered the ecumenical nature of the Confessions. Their ecumenical nature is easily demonstrable.

*The Book of Concord* identifies with the truth of the *Three Catholic or Ecumenical Symbols*, the Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds. Secondly, it shows peaceableness — not hostility — toward the Roman Catholic Church. The posture of the Lutherans at Augsburg was charitable and friendly. Lutherans do not thrive on dissension and strife. To bring such to an end, Lutherans adopted this platform:

It was proposed to employ all diligence amicably and charitably to hear, understand, and weigh the judgments, opinions, and beliefs of the several parties among us, to unite the same in agreement on one Christian truth, to put aside whatever may not have been rightly interpreted or treated by either side, to have all of us embrace and adhere to a single, true religion and live together in unity and one fellowship and church, even as we are all enlisted under one Christ. (A.C./Preface/3-4/p.25)

Thirdly, the Confessions are anything but separatistic. Unlike the Anabaptists who denied the validity of the Roman Catholic sacraments, urging that they

alone could perform Christ's baptism, Lutherans considered Roman Catholic baptisms to be truly Christian. As late as 1530 Lutherans were shocked that Roman Catholic bishops refused to ordain Lutheran pastors into the ministry. Philip Melancthon in particular was hurt that the Orthodox Church did not see fit to acknowledge receiving the Greek translation of the *Augsburg Confession*.<sup>6</sup> Even though an imperial summons brought the Lutherans to Augsburg, they were eager to share a written expression of their faith, requesting also that others do the same, that peace may result.

Thus the matters at issue between us may be presented in writing on both sides, they may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ. (A.C./Preface/10/p.25)

A more peaceable and irenic appeal for unity in the church you cannot find in recent quests in ecumenism.

Fourth, the Confession's call for unity was neither a romantic unionism nor was it a perfectionist patronizing, neither of which can bring about unity in the church. Rather, Lutherans insisted that true outreach begins with a clear and lucid testimony and confession. Only then can true admonition and sympathetic understanding come about in the church. Only when both parties take seriously the claims of a conflicting confession can genuine steps toward unity of confession be made.

Fifth, the true quest for ecumenism does not cease when opposition arises and unfriendliness appears. This is an important lesson to learn from the Lutheran Confessions. The threat of war, repression, and bloodshed did not silence the confessors. Neither the Smalcaldic wars, the Thirty-Year War, nor 400 years of church history silence the witness of *The Book of Concord*. Lutherans, today as then, are ready to say, "We cannot surrender truth that is clear and necessary for the church. We must endure difficulties and danger for the glory of Christ and the good of the Church," (A.C./Preface/17/p.99)

Unfortunately, some are ready to break off ecumenical efforts simply because they seem to be unsuccessful. To the early Lutherans this made no difference. "If no results are attained, nevertheless we on our part shall not omit doing anything, in so far as God and conscience allow, that may serve the cause of Christian unity." (A.C./Preface/12-13/p.26)

Being successful or not did not concern those who were ready to die for their confession. When a clear and lucid confession of faith is what is called for,

Lutherans are ready to present *The Book of Concord* as that confession.

Finally, we should not forget that any theology deserving the name "ecumenical" has got to be a lay-theology. And that *The Book of Concord* is. Lay people endorsed the *Augsburg Confession*, town mayors, princes, and town councils. Young and old people alike learn the theology of the *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism*. And even the lofty theology of the *Formula of Concord* began with simple sermons preached to a congregation, showing them how false teaching had undercut the simple truths of the catechisms. Theology confessionals must be for the laity and masses, not just for sophisticated theologians, since Christ died and rose for all. As Scripture itself, the Confessions must serve the ministry of making everyone wise unto salvation and equipping them for the doing of good works. Those chief ends *The Book of Concord* serves well. And in serving those ends *The Book of Concord* shows itself to be truly ecumenical.

#### Commentary on Scripture

"From the beginning of *The Book of Concord* to the end, the Confessors pledge themselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear foundation of Israel (SD/Tappert 503)." Melancthon wrote at Augsburg:

We should not wish to put our own souls and consciences in grave peril before God by misusing His name or Word, nor should we wish to bequeath to our children and posterity any other teaching than that which agrees with the pure Word of God and Christian truth. Since this teaching is grounded clearly on the Holy Scriptures . . . (AC/XXI/Closing/1/p.47).

But the true genius of Lutheranism is not merely in such a commitment, since at that time Reformed and Roman Catholic thinkers made similar claims. The true genius of Lutheranism and the Lutheran Confessions is its approach to Scripture, which is so beautifully taught in the Confessions. The Lutheran approach is evident in the following respects.

*First*, Lutherans did not regard the Bible as only a historical document to be accepted as true by the Christian. Accepting truths of Scripture as historically true, was not enough. Such was mere historic faith. Melancthon insisted that accepting the truths of the Apostles Creed was not as yet faith, unless such truths were bound together with the free forgiveness of sins gained for us by Christ (Ap/IV/49-51/p. 114).

*Secondly*, the Lutheran Confessions do not regard the Word of God as a static and dead thing, but as it is, the Word of God filled with power. The Scripture contains power, the power to convict and convince,

the power to show sin and drive men to despair, the power to console and comfort. Scripture is that Word of God which God *spoke* and which God *speaks*; for in Scripture, we find the record of what God spoke and what God speaks to us. And what He speaks performs two works — the work of the Law and the work of the Gospel. For God addresses us, say the Confessions, performing both God's alien work of terrifying us to make room for consolation and also at the same time God performs his proper work of quickening us, making us alive through the Gospel.<sup>7</sup> While Catholicism suggested that real forgiveness and grace was limited exclusively to the Sacraments, Lutherans found active grace and power of God in Scripture's Word.<sup>8</sup> By contrast the radical Reformers found God's power and grace, not in the sacraments, nor in Scripture, but in faith itself. For faith constituted the sacraments and Scripture, i.e., a sacrament was a sacrament if and only if you really believed and the Scripture was Word of God if and only if one really believed. This separation of faith from the object of faith, the Word of promise in Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the Word of promise in preaching and absolution, and the Word of promise in Scripture, resulted in the fragmentation of non-Roman traditions.<sup>9</sup> In opposition to both traditions Lutherans affirm that Scripture as God's Word confronts all as demand and promise, Law and Gospel, exposing sin and offering comfort and grace to all.

Thirdly, the Confessions resolve the problem of conflicting demands and promises in Scripture. For it is true that at one time heaven is promised to those who keep the Law; and at another, it is promised freely and given freely for Christ's sake.<sup>10</sup> But once the light of the distinction between Law and Gospel has been shined upon Scripture, once what the Confessions seek to do has been evident to the reader, Scripture's truth becomes a unity, and contradiction disappears.<sup>11</sup> For what man could not do by the Law, Christ has attained; what only God's grace could provide, Christ has provided, giving to us His righteousness and giving to us salvation by grace through faith. Faith resolves the contradiction of Law and Gospel, a contradiction resolved for us admirably well in the Confessions. The Confessions, as did Luther before them, emphasize that only when God's alien work of showing us our helplessness had been completed can God perform His proper work of showing us Christ as our Redeemer. As the Confessions rightly observed, any interpretation of Scripture which takes away from the Gospel's comfort is contrary to Scripture, and any interpretation which does not highlight the main doctrine of Scripture,

justification, is contrary to Scripture.<sup>1 2</sup>

Fourth, the Confessions teach well the distinctions of the various functions of the Law. These distinctions ultimately are known only in the human heart and the life of faith. In any ultimate sense only the hearer of the Word becomes the decisive determinant as to how the Word of Scripture will be heard for him or her, but nonetheless the teacher and communicator of the Word should be aware of the varied consequences which could emerge from the teaching of the Law.<sup>1 3</sup> On the one hand, Luther in the *Smalcald Articles* described the Law as having two functions, the chief function being that of making original sin manifest and showing man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become (SA/Prt III/ii/4), and the first function, Luther says, is the function of maintaining civil righteousness. But not just a few Lutheran theologians rushed in, claiming that since there are named by Luther in the *Smalcald Articles* only two uses, there is no Third Use of the Law. Consequently, for anyone so persuaded, it would seem that the *Formula of Concord* goes beyond Luther, insisting when it teaches there are three uses of the law.<sup>1 4</sup> But any effort to make the witness of *The Book of Concord* contradictory is doomed to failure, since the *Apology* of Melancthon urges the doctrine of Works as rigorously as that of the *Formula of Concord* (cf. Ap IV/pp. 122-132). Moreover, the dogged insistence of Melancthon that the Law *semper accusat* (always accuses) is not silenced by the directives of Christ to do His will, since the Old Adam continually is with us and still clings to us, shrinking the totality of our response to grace. Faith which clings to God's mercy is also ready to hear Scripture's Word regarding our duties, responsibilities, and obligations in this life as they are summarized in the Ten Commandments. This is why Lutherans are able to ascend above the apparent contradictory Words of Scripture, affirming that St. James and St. Paul are not in conflict, for only faith which believes that salvation is by grace without the deeds of the Law, can do the works demanded by St. James. And since faith as trust in Christ remains invisible and imperceptible to the human eye, James does not err by claiming that absence of works shows that such faith which clings to God's promised mercy, is absent. This Luther himself observed saying, "It is therefore as impossible to separate works from faith as it is to separate heat and light from fire" (SD/IV/13/pg.553). For there is indeed, says Luther, a marvelous relation between faith and works, that while we are saved by faith alone, it is the case that faith is never alone.<sup>1 5</sup>

Finally, what words can sum up the Lutheran approach to Scripture which makes it so different from the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions? *The Book of Concord* says that the distinction between the Law and Gospel is a light, a brilliant light, serving the end that the Scriptures may be explained and understood correctly.<sup>1 6</sup> At the beginning of the Confessions Melancthon declared that the main doctrine of Christianity was at stake, so much so that any suggestion that works contributed to our salvation, buried Christ and put him back in the tomb.<sup>1 7</sup> To let Christ be our Deliverer only at the beginning of faith, was a damnable error, because as the *Formula* comments, we are saved through faith alone at the beginning, the middle, and the end of everything (17-SD/IV/34/pg.556). What distinguishes the Lutheran from other traditions in the final analysis is this — Lutherans are totally concerned to make all of our Bible reading Christ-centered, all of our theology Christ-centered, and all of our ministry to one another Christ-centered.

#### Guidelines on Traditions

Revere but do not worship; respect but do not listen uncritically is the motto of *The Book of Concord* with respect to traditions. Those traditions which can be observed without violation of conscience, the Gospel, and Scripture, can be retained for the sake of good order. But such a description doesn't say enough. The Confessions show that their formulators not only revered and respected tradition but were good students of church history. Not only does Philip Melancthon insist that there is a direct and obvious line of continuity between the confession at Augsburg and the early church, but from beginning to end the Lutheran Confessions insist that the substance of what is confessed is truly Catholic in nature, truly what the Church has always believed, taught, and confessed. Repeatedly the Confessions insist that the great and most grievous errors have only recently been introduced into the church. Even the final work of the Confessions, for many church theologians, was not complete with the *Solid or Thorough Declaration*, but was complete only with an additional appendix, the *Catalogue of Testimonies*, a careful collation and gathering of sayings of the early Church Fathers which demonstrated that the Lutheran doctrine of Christ adds nothing new to the confession of the ancient church.

The spirit of reverence and respect is found even in the *Large Catechism* where Luther suggests that the Spirit has always blessed the practice of infant baptism as evidenced in the lives of countless believ-

ers in the Roman Catholic Church. Later Martin Chemnitz, a key formulator of the *Formula of Concord*, adds that those who contradict the practice of infant baptism have the burden of proof since it was the tradition of the ancient church to do so.<sup>1 7</sup> Even the writings of *The Book of Concord* count themselves as but a part of the ongoing stream of church tradition, bearing testimony that the Spirit has not abandoned the church but continues to lead the church into all truth.<sup>1 8</sup>

#### Final Comment

What role has *The Book of Concord* in the preparation of a student for church service? In brief, it spells out what Lutherans believe, teach and confess. As such it provides a rule, second only to Scripture, by which true and correct teaching and preaching in the church may be judged. But just as a Lutheran takes up the responsibility of teaching what Scripture asks to be taught, so we take up the responsibility of teaching what is found in the Confessions, since nothing in the latter is not found in Scripture. Moreover, in assuming the task of being confessional, the student finds the treasure of what it means to be truly ecumenical in outlook and outreach, what it means to accept Scripture as source and norm of all theology, and what it means to have a right, but critical, appreciation of the church's traditions. For if *The Book of Concord* as a textbook serves the end of showing the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, the end of showing Scripture Christ-centered, the end of making us wise unto salvation and zealous to do good works, then the Confessions have served the ministry of Scripture itself, showing themselves not above Scripture but Scripture's obedient servants. No other role would they assume. So well have the Confessions served Scripture's purposes that they remain 'til this day Lutheranism's greatest contribution to our Synod, world Lutheranism, and the world.

#### Notes

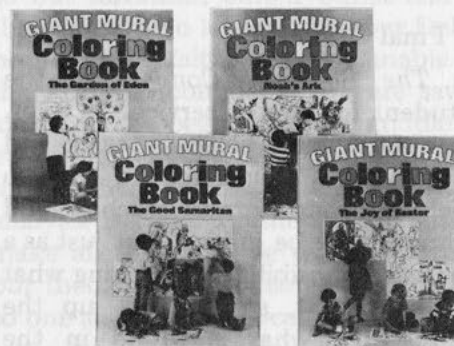
All citations from *The Book of Concord* will be indicated by asterisks; the first set of letters indicating portion of *Book of Concord* cited; the second numbered section; the third marginal numbers; and page nos. will be of the Tappert Edition: *The Book of Concord: the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1959. Standard abbreviations will be used.

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8. Aulen, Gustaf, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, translated by Eric Wahlstrom, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, c. 1960), p. 322.
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18. "Solid Declaration," *op. cit.* /Introduction/8-13/pgs. 505-506.\*

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**FORMULATORS OF THE FORMULA OF CONCORD**, by Theodore R. Jungkuntz. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977. **ANDREAE AND THE FORMULA OF CONCORD**, by Robert Kolb. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977.

These two monographs complement each other. They form an excellent dyad for the edification of anyone who yearns to be steeped in a review of the dynamic process of divine guidance and human interaction that eventuated in the *Formula of Concord*.

The first monograph, by Theodore Jungkuntz, traces the participation and contribution of the four chief formulators of the 1580 Formula. His section headings capulate the distinguishing feature of each formulator in a one or two word appellation. Thus Jakob Andreae is named the Supplanter; Martin Chemnitz is labeled the Confessor; David Chytraeus receives the designation Alter Philippus; and Nikolaus Selnecker is called the Weather Vane.

It is apparent that the author brought a wealth of scholarly investigation to the writing of this book. In addition to his examination of resources in American libraries, he spent a three year administrative stint in Germany and used the opportunity to research materials in libraries located in Tuebingen and Stuttgart. And his industry shows. The four personality profiles in the book are packed with an impressive amount of detailed data. The result is an in-depth analysis of the complicated process of political, ecclesiastical, sociological, and psychological forces that impinged on the formulators, a process in which they participated, and one that led providentially to the end result of a great and widely accepted Lutheran Confession.

The syntax sometimes seems convoluted. The content is nevertheless substantial and the picture that emerges provides a sense of reality and authenticity.

This book is an excellent illustration of the truism that a great ecclesiastical document is inevitably less than fully understood until it is seen in its larger socio-political-cultural setting. A sentence in the author's introductory remarks might just as fittingly have served as the concluding sentence of the book. It is: "Throughout the history of the church there has been evidence that conflicting theological positions have served not only the clarification of Christian truth but also the identification of conflicting social, cultural, and political types."

The second monograph, by Robert Kolb, complements the Jungkuntz study in that it focuses on the six sermons of Jakob Andreae which helped to break through the impasse that had virtually stalemated Lutheran unity efforts in the

early 1570's. People who are seeking Lutheran unity today should note that similar efforts in the 16th century were frozen on dead center until a dedicated and persistent pastor went back to the Catechism and published a book of sermons which discussed the points at issue in language geared to the vernacular of the laity.

Some of Kolb's discussion of the background leading to the six sermons overlaps with Jungkuntz's analysis of Andreae's role as a *Formula of Concord* formulator. This, however, provides an opportunity for comparing the two analyses and tends to be enriching rather than redundant.

W. Theo. Janzow

**GETTING INTO THE STORY OF CONCORD: A HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD**, by David P. Scaer; **GETTING INTO THE THEOLOGY OF CONCORD: A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF CONCORD**, by Robert D. Preus; **GETTING INTO THE FORMULA OF CONCORD: A HISTORY AND DIGEST OF THE FORMULA**, by Eugene F. Klug and Otto F. Stahlke. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977.

A special word of thanks and commendation is to be given to these authors for their remarkable and significant contribution to the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the signing and publication of *The Book of Concord*. No Lutheran parish, high school, college, or seminary should overlook these books. Designed primarily for adult study groups, they are well written, plain, unencumbered with technical jargon, and each provides an excellent set of questions for each chapter which should facilitate thoughtful discussion, insight and further study. In the case of Preus' book, a helpful glossary is provided. These books afford pastors and teachers a real opportunity to provide some historical and theological depth for disciples, and an adventurous discovery, rediscovery, or renewal of the joy of being a part of the Lutheran Confessional movement in the church.

In his book, *Getting into the Story of Concord*, David Scaer presents confessionalism in the wide context of the history of the church, clearly demonstrating that confession of faith is not only God's creative intent but also man's proper response to the Gospel. Confession also protects the truth of God's Word as we see in Scripture, the catholic creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds), and the Lutheran Confessions. As he moves us through the historic occasions for the various confessions in *The Book of Concord*, he ably focuses on the genius of Lutheranism in the use of

and concern for the Formal and Material principles. Scaer is tactful and sensitive in his historical descriptions, and he may be thanked for not inflaming with polemical rancor. In the Epilog, Scaer raises the question of whether the church needs additional confessional writings to deal with current doctrinal issues. One response may be that, should additional confessional statements be necessary, it is hoped that they will demonstrate *consistently* the centrality of justification by faith at least as well as did the sixteenth century Confessions.

Robert Preus's book, *Getting into the Theology of Concord*, is a strong, bold, occasionally agitated and, for the most part, quite lucid summary of the theology of the Lutheran Confessions. By such a summary Preus attempts to answer the question: "What really is a Lutheran?" In his discussions on Scripture one may wish for more definition and explanation in places. For example, in Chapter II Preus criticizes higher criticism. He could have defined this more clearly for his adult readers in order to avoid vague concepts which have become strongly emotional. No doubt he is referring to criticism in its extreme form. Since, however, he had chosen to mention this, he may well have done Lutherans a service in pointing out that Lutherans do not accept the other side of the spectrum either, namely, fundamentalism. Perhaps this could have been done by demonstrating how Lutherans consider the nature and character of Scripture in comparison with the assumptions and argumentation of both a radical higher criticism and a divergent fundamentalism. This, of course, is not to demerit the overall value of Preus' contribution. It is a book that merits repeated study among Lutherans as a superb discussion of major doctrines of the faith.

The third member of the trilogy presents a history of the Formula of Concord by Eugene Klug, and a fresh translation of the Epitome, a digest of the Formula, by Otto Stahlke. Their book, *Getting into The Formula of Concord*, is a crisp and moving account of those trying events after Luther's death which threatened to snuff out the light of Lutheranism. After reading this book, one cannot help but thank God that His Word prevailed, and so did the beloved Lutheran Confessions. The description of the historical events together with the rehearsal of the basic theological content of the Formula will lead the student to a humble response of thanksgiving for *Concordia*.

Allan Paul Vasconcellos

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## book reviews

(Continued from page 23)

**A CONTEMPORARY LOOK AT THE FORMULA OF CONCORD**, ed. by Robert D. Preus and Wilbert H. Rosin. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978.

The foreward of this anniversary volume, celebrating the Formula's 400th birthday, offers high expectations of its content. It hopes to, among other things, "provide the reader with a clear statement of doctrines treated in the Formula" and to offer some needed clarification for the 20th century (p.10). Associated benefits include contributions to a wholesome modern day ecumenical endeavor, a better understanding within the church of Christ, and furtherance of our common Christian mission (p.11).

Robert A. Kolb's lucid description of the "Historical Background of the Formula of Concord," is highlighted by his discussion of Jakob Andrea's contributions (pp.69-87). Kolb characterizes the Formula by describing it as a document that did not merely seek to stand in middle ground on every issue, though emphasis from various disputing groups found a place in it. It is not clear if Wilbert H. Rosin ("Looking at the Formula Today") has a different perception when he scores humanistic theology and

calls for an attempt similar to that of the late 16th century "to halt the present day erosion of Biblical doctrine" (p.92). He argues that the Lutheran Confessions provide a positive platform for Christian witnessing and for understanding God and His ways in the 20th century, but does not explain how the former of these two points is valid (p.94).

Other articles in this volume follow the same general trend, which is a very careful articulation of what is said by the Formula with some reference to the present. Very little attention is given to creative suggestions for moving the church toward unity. This volume is more of a "look at contemporary positions" than a "contemporary look" at the Formula which offers hope that the expectations of the foreward will be realized. For example, Eugene F. Klug's (Free Will, or Human Powers) clear presentation of FC II ends with the observation that mixing justification and sanctification is still the chief threat to Christianity, but he fails to document the relationship to the contemporary scene (p.136).

On the other hand, his article on "The Third Use of the Law" is directly tied to contemporary events. He critiques the theology of W. Elert, P. Althaus, and G. Ebeling for arguing that the Law has only a twofold function. He believes that these men represent a new wave of antinomian teaching (pp. 200-202). Likewise, Lowell C. Green ("The Holy Supper") includes an excellent application of the Formula as he critiques the "receptionist" view of

eating and drinking (p.223). David P. Scaer ("Good Works") argues that "setting forth isolated abstract theological phrases without clarifying explanations always opens the doors to misunderstanding." (p.170)

In two articles it is especially helpful "to be in the know" in order to know what is going on. H. Huth ("Rule and Norm of Doctrine in the Formula") addresses the question, "What does the term 'Word of God' mean in contexts of the Formula that deal with the rule and norm of doctrine?" His answer is that it always means all of the Holy Scriptures which have no dissimilarities, contradictions, and errors (pp.98, 100). Kurt Marquart ("Confession and Ceremonies") suggests that SD X 31 may be the most important ecclesiological pronouncement in the whole Formula (p.267). Comparing this with AC VII 2-4 he concludes that it is a serious misunderstanding to argue that unity means internal, spiritual unity in the Augsburg Confession and outward organizational harmony in the Formula. "The AC's pure preaching of the Gospel is clearly equivalent to the Formula's agreement 'in the doctrine and all its articles.'" (p.268)

That this "Book of the Twelve" provides readers with clear statements concerning the doctrines of the Formula is certain, but that it furthers the ecumenical endeavor and our common Christian mission will be hotly debated.

Ronald Vahl