

W E W H O L E H E A R T E D L Y S U B S C R I B E  
T O T H E  
L U T H E R A N B O O K O F C O N C O R D

I. ...AS A PEOPLE ENLIGHTENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

By Mr. Marlin Beekman  
 Messiah Lutheran Church  
 Eau Claire, Wisconsin

II. ...AS BELIEVERS WHO MUST OPPOSE ALL ERROR.

By Prof. Gordon Radtke  
 Immanuel Lutheran College  
 Eau Claire, Wisconsin

III. ...AS PASTORS AND TEACHERS WHO ARE CALLED TO  
 SERVE SOULS WITH GOD'S SAVING TRUTH.

By Pastor David Lau  
 Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church  
 Red Wing, Minnesota

OO  
 ( A Series of Essays ( )  
 ( addressed to the Thirteenth Convention of ( )  
 ( the Church of the Lutheran Confession at ( )  
 ( Immanuel Lutheran College, Eau Claire, Wi. ( )  
 ( July 10-14, 1978 ( )  
 ( Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the signing of the ( )  
 ( Book of Concord ( )  
 OOO



WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE  
TO THE  
LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD

I. ...AS A PEOPLE ENLIGHTENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Three years stand out in the history of the Lutheran Reformation: In 1517 Dr. Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg; in 1530 certain German Lutheran princes and other civil authorities presented to the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire a document known as the Augsburg Confession; and in 1580 the Book of Concord was signed and published.

The Book of Concord, or Concordia, is the title of the Lutheran symbols recognized and published under that name in the year 1580. A Christian symbol is a mark by which Christians are known. It is a rule of faith, a rule of truth. Symbols are not intended to supplant the Scriptures, but rather to set forth what has been at all times the unanimous understanding of pure Christian doctrine. At the same time they show convincingly from Scripture that our forefathers did indeed manfully confess nothing but God's eternal truth which every Christian is duty bound to do. The position accorded symbols is clearly established by the Book of Concord itself where we read "... other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them ..." Also, "Holy Scriptures alone is to be regarded as the sole rule and norm by which absolutely all doctrine and teachings are to be judged."

The Book of Concord includes ten separate or individual documents. Although these documents were written over a span of 1300 years---from 200 A.D. to 1580 A.D.---the official German edition of the Book of Concord was published June 25, 1580 at Dresden, Germany. The ten documents are:

The Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds (The Apostles Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Athanasian Creed); The Augsburg Confession of 1530; The Apology of the Augsburg Confession of 1530; The Smalcald Articles of 1537, including an appendix entitled "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope"; The Small Catechism; The Large Catechism; The Formula of Concord of 1577---both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration.

The Book of Concord was adopted by 3 electors, 20 princes, 24 counts, 4 barons and 35 imperial cities. The Formula of Concord, and with it the entire Book of Concord, was solemnly subscribed to by about 8,000 theologians, pastors and teachers. About two-thirds of the German territories which professed adherence to the Augsburg Confession adopted the Book of Concord. Their pledge reading, "Since now, in the sight of God and of all Christendom, we wish to testify to those now living and those who shall come after us that this declaration herewith presented concerning all controverted articles aforementioned and explained, and no other, is our faith, doctrine and confession, in which we are also willing by God's grace, to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment

seat of Jesus Christ, and give an account of it; and that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it, but, by the help of God's grace, intend to abide thereby: Therefore after mature deliberation, we have, in God's fear and with invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands."

Those who seek membership in our CLC are asked if they accept the Bible as God's Word --- and if they subscribe to the teachings of the Book of Concord.

The Book of Concord has faithfully preserved basic Scriptural teachings and has applied them to problems confronting the church. A thorough study of the Book of Concord will, under God's grace, provide a confessional reawakening and bring light to the controversies confronting our church body today. Permit me, therefore, to review briefly this Book of Concord which, as people enlightened by the Holy Spirit, we wholeheartedly subscribe.

### THE THREE UNIVERSAL OR ECUMENICAL CREEDS

The church grew rapidly in the second half of the first century. There is evidence in the New Testament that each of the territorial churches developed its own statement of faith. The simplest creed was, "Jesus is Lord." (1 Cor.12.3) Each time the Christians gathered to confess that Jesus is Lord, they were aware that this confession was motivated by the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor.12.3)

Baptism was never administered without a confession --- from this connection between Baptism and confession grew the custom of asking the adult candidate for Baptism if he believed in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The affirmative response contained the seeds for the three parts of the Apostles and Nicene Creeds used by Christians today. In a very explicit way the confession originally made at Baptism is repeated at any church service that begins with the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It is not an option for Christians to make confession of their faith --- it is a fruit of their faith. In Matthew 10:32-33 we read, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."

The first three creeds, the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian, have their roots extending back nineteen centuries to the early history of the church. These symbols were embodied in the Book of Concord primarily to declare agreement with the ancient church whose faith was expressed in the Scripture-based symbols; and also to underscore the fact that no new doctrine was being preached. Let us examine how each of these creeds came into existence and how they have been perpetuated.

#### The Apostles Creed

The foundation of the Apostles Creed was, in a way, laid by Christ Himself when He commissioned His disciples, saying in Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The formula of Baptism here prescribed, "... in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," briefly indicates what Christ wants Christians to be taught, to believe and to confess.

Scholars point out that the Apostles Creed in its final form as used today dates back to the 700's. There is striking similarity to the version used by the early church of Rome around the year 150 A.D., some 1800 years ago. It is a creed that grew within the orthodox church---a confession of faith that has not been destroyed by time or place.

The Apostles Creed, both as to its form and contents, is an amplification of the trinitarian formula of Baptism. The Apostles Creed deserved to be called the Creed of the Church. It was the first Christian symbol and the bond of fellowship of the early Christian congregations everywhere. The Christian who confesses its words gives evidence that the Holy Spirit has worked faith in his heart.

### The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed is the second most widely used confession --- customarily used in connection with the Lord's Supper. Whereas the Apostles Creed relates the rule of faith received through Baptism, the Nicene Creed came into existence in the 300's expressly to refute the error of denying the godhead of Jesus.

The confession expressed in the Nicene Creed nails down the doctrine of the deity of Christ. From the Council of Nicaea came these marvelous words describing Jesus: "The only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made." While the Council of Nicaea focused on the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Council at Constantinople in 381 focused on the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, by attributing to the Holy Spirit the status of equality with the Father and the Son.

### The Athanasian Creed

Of all the creeds, the origin of the Athanasian Creed is the most hidden. Luther considered it the most important theological document since the time of the apostles.

The creed has two sections, one dealing with the Trinity and the other with the doctrine of Christ. Concerning the Trinity this creed states all three Persons share all the divine attributes equally. Concerning Christ the creed holds that Jesus is both God and man, but only one Christ, one Person, and affirms that although both natures are united in one Person, they remain distinct.

### THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

In 1517 when Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses he stood fast in his confession that Scripture had priority over decisions of church councils in establishing doctrine. In the 1520's others were drawn to Luther's cause and were begun to be called "Lutherans."

On January 21, 1530, Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation proclaimed that a conference would convene at Augsburg on the 8th of April. The proclamation in part stated, "the diet is to consider what might and ought to be done and resolved upon regarding the division and separation in the holy faith and the Christian religion..."

In March the proclamation reached Martin Luther's prince, Elector John of Torgau. The elector (one of seven in the German nation), upon advice of

Chancellor Brueck, asked Luther and other theologians to prepare a document treating outward church customs, abuses, and especially faith and good works. This document which was presented at Torgau by Philip Melanchthon --- Luther's colleague on the theological faculty at Wittenberg -- was called the Torgau Articles and eventually became the basis for the last seven articles of the Augsburg Confession concerning abuses.

The Lutherans had participated in two previous meetings, at which confessions, i.e., statements of faith, were drawn up. In 1529 Luther and his colleagues had prepared the Schwabach Articles which in turn were incorporated in the Marburg Articles which resulted from a meeting that Luther had held with his opponent Zwingli. These two documents provided the basis for the first twenty-one articles of the Augsburg Confession concerning doctrinal matters.

On April 23, 1530, the elector and his theologians set out for Augsburg, while Luther, who was still under ban of the pope and emperor, remained behind in a castle at the nearby city of Coburg. The man who represented Luther at Augsburg was Melanchthon. During the preparation of the Augsburg Confession, Luther kept in close contact with his colleagues, evidenced by some 70 letters sent to Augsburg --- 20 of which were addressed to Melanchthon. Also during the writing Melanchthon was in contact with Elector John because of his importance as an elector and also because he was recognized as head of the Lutheran delegation.

The original intention of the Lutheran theologians preparing to meet at Augsburg was not to enter upon discussion of such doctrines as were not in controversy, but rather to defend Luther and his elector concerning the charges of abuses and immediately related doctrines, especially those of faith and good works. This plan was modified, however, when they reached Augsburg and read of 404 Propositions published by Dr. John Eck in which Luther was charged with every conceivable heresy. The expanded document became an all-embracing Lutheran confession which included defenses of Luther and his elector. This was done in an objective presentation of the principal doctrines held by the Lutherans for which the Marburg and Schwabach Articles served as models and guides. The confession was written in a conciliatory tone to not antagonize the emperor.

On June 23, 1530, the Augsburg Confession was signed by German princes and other civil officials. On Saturday, June 25, beginning at 3:00 p.m., the ever-memorable meeting of the Diet took place at Augsburg. The reading of the confession, which lasted two hours, was done by Dr. Christian Beyer who held the title of Chancellor of Saxony.

The Augsburg Confession, sometimes referred to as the Augustana, has as its central theme two chief doctrines: (1) the Scriptures, as the Word of God, are the source of all doctrine in the church, and, (2) justification through faith in Christ is the primary message of the Bible.

In the first 21 articles are found a thorough confession of scriptural doctrine concerning the following subjects:

- (1) God, (2) Original Sin, (3) The Son of God, (4) Justification,
- (5) The Ministry, (6) New Obedience, (7) The Church, (8) What the Church Is,
- (9) Baptism, (10) The Lord's Supper, (11) Confession, (12) Repentance,
- (13) The Use of Sacraments, (14) Ecclesiastical Order, (15) Ecclesiastical Usages,
- (16) Civil Affairs, (17) Christ's Return to Judgment, (18) Free Will,
- (19) The Cause of Sin, (20) Good Works, (21) The Worship of Saints.

The abuses covered in the last seven articles are:

- (1) Withholding of the cup from the laity in the Lord's Supper,
- (2) Celibacy, (3) False ideas and practices regarding the Mass,
- (4) The compulsory recital of all sins in confession, (5) Compulsory regulations concerning foods and various traditions, (6) Monastic vows, (7) The power of bishops.

As an act of faith, the princes and other officials who had signed the Augsburg Confession came forward to stand before the emperor and the assembly as it was read. Also representatives from several large cities adopted this confession as their own, which was a courageous act of faith because they were thereby siding with Luther, the confessor at Worms, and against the emperor and the pope.

When the emperor entered Augsburg, he stubbornly demanded that the Lutherans cease preaching their doctrine. Margrave George declared, "Rather than deny my God and suffer the Word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off." When Melancthon called to Elector John's attention the possible consequences of his signing the Augsburg Confession, the elector responded that he would do what was right without concerning himself about his electoral dignity; he would confess his Lord, whose cross he prized higher than all the power of the world. This characterized the pious and heroic faith of all who signed the Augustana in 1530.

Soon after the presentation to the emperor, the Augsburg Confession became recognized as the classical statement of the Lutheran faith that Luther had proclaimed since 1517. In 1540, however, Melancthon prepared a revised edition that clouded the doctrine which teaches that the bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. Those adhering strictly to Luther's view on the Lord's Supper insisted on subscription to the original version of the Augsburg Confession---thus the origin of the initials U.A.C. on church cornerstones signifying their acceptance of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. At Naumburg in 1561, the Lutheran princes declared that they would adhere to the original Augsburg Confession and its orthodox Christian declaration and norm.

Luther applied Ps. 119:46 to the confession, "I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed." This is the text which ever since has remained the motto appearing on all of its subsequent manuscripts and printed copies.

#### THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

On July 5, 1530, just two weeks after the reading of the Augsburg Confession, the emperor announced that a committee had been formed to prepare a formal response. This twenty-member committee, all solidly opposed to the Lutheran position, presented on August 3 a written rebuttal, called the Confutation. The Confutation was presented to the same general assembly and in the same room where the Augsburg Confession had been read 38 days earlier. The Lutherans, as honest and true Christians, had trusted the emperor's manifesto that both the Romanists and they would be regarded as a party summoned to trial, with the same emperor as judge. This simple trust had to be abandoned, however, as it became apparent that the emperor's real objective was for the Lutherans to submit and be obedient to the pope and thus establish political peace.

The Confutation contained the emperor's faith and verdict on the Augsburg Confession. The Confutation although read, was neither published, nor was a copy delivered to the Lutherans, apparently because the Romanists were not exactly proud of it. Luther said, "I praise God that He made the Confutation of the adversary so awkward and foolish a thing."

The Lutheran princes and other authorities serving as representatives at Augsburg refused to assent to this Confutation, and authorized the preparation of an answer. The first edition of this document was completed by Melanchthon in September of 1530 and would become one of the historic Lutheran confessions called the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.

The purpose of the Apology is, on the one hand, to disprove the Confutation, and on the other, a defense and elaboration of the Augsburg Confession. It is considered a masterpiece of theological scholarship demonstrating a full comprehension of the Holy Scriptures and the writings of the early church fathers. The Lutheran principle that doctrine is to be drawn solely from the Holy Scriptures is demonstrated through an elaborate exegesis of the Bible on the following subjects:

(1) God, (2) Original Sin, (3) Christ, (4) Justification, (5) Of love and the fulfilling of the law, (6) The Church, (7) Baptism, (8) The Holy Supper, (9) Confession, (10) Repentance, (11) Confession and Satisfaction, (12) The Number and use of the Sacraments, (13) Ecclesiastical Order, (14) Human Traditions in the Church, (15) Political order, (16) Christ's return to Judgment, (17) Free Will, (18) The Cause of Sin, (19) Good Works, (20) Invocation of Saints, (21) Both kinds in the Lord's Supper, (22) Marriage of Priests, (23) The Mass, (24) Monastic Vows, (25) Ecclesiastical Power and Order.

The real difference between the Lutherans and the Romanists was most evident in the matter of justification which is treated at length and with proficiency in Article IV, i.e., that we are saved alone through faith in Christ without works. In contrast to the gentle tone of the Augsburg Confession, which it seeks to defend, the tone of the Apology is much sharper --- also it is about seven times longer.

The Apology was accepted as a confessional document at Schweinfurt in 1532 when the Lutherans, in opposition to the papists, appealed to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology as the confession of their faith. Similarly in 1536, at Wittenberg, when Luther's colleagues met to work out an agreement with the Protestant theologians from Southern Germany, the Apology, along with the Augsburg Confession, was a document to which all subscribed.

#### THE SMALCALD ARTICLES

The irreconcilable differences between the two church bodies had grave consequences for the political rulers of the nation. Emperor Charles V, the elected head of the Holy Roman Empire, felt an obligation to the Catholic faith and sought to solve the problem of religious disunity by calling a council of representatives from both sides of the question, the Roman side and the so-called "heretics" (Lutherans). Subsequently after several years the new pope, Clement VII, set the date of May 8, 1537, for convening such a council at Mantua, an imperial city on the Italian side of the Alps. The stated purpose of the council was, "the utter extirpation of the poisonous, pestilential Lutheran heresy." Luther's enthusiasm for going to Mantua was not shared by all, especially the princes, since they were concerned about the political manipulations of the pope and the emperor.



The Lutherans had to resolve the question whether they could participate in a meeting if the purpose was to eradicate their beliefs. Elector John of Saxony, Luther's own prince, accepted the invitation under protest by objecting to any council prejudiced by the pope who was sufficiently informed on their teachings, cared neither for Scripture nor law and justice, and merely wished to be their judge and Lord. The situation had changed in the seven years since 1530 and the elector requested Luther to prepare a statement from Holy Scripture setting forth the essentials of the Lutheran faith to which could not be yielded without becoming guilty of treason against God even though property and life, peace or war, were at stake. This Lutheran confession became known as the Smalcald Articles, a part of the Book of Concord.

The Articles, as prepared by Luther and adopted by his colleagues, were presented to Elector John on January 3, 1537, with their ultimate destination being a joint gathering of Lutheran theologians and princes scheduled for the German city of Smalcald on February 8, 1537. The theologians were to once more discuss the Augustana and the Apology and to acknowledge both as their own confession while the princes in separate session at the council were to discuss the political ramifications. The theologians were also to enlarge on the Papacy. Since neither the Augustana nor the Apology contained an article against the Papacy, this request of the princes could only be satisfied by a special treatise entitled "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope," which was written by Melanchthon and is considered an appendix to the Smalcald Articles.

In writing the Smalcald Articles, Luther sharpened his expressions to clear the track for the whole truth in every direction against the Reformed as well as the Papacy, against false brethren who were within the party, as well as against the open enemies.

However, the ever-compromising Melanchthon desired more freedom with regard to both the Romanist and the Reformed than were offered by the Articles. Consequently he pushed for the adoption of the Augsburg Confession and the Wittenberg Concord as the basis for stating the Lutheran position on the Real Presence in the Lord's Supper. Although the Articles were circulated and privately read at Smalcald, Melanchthon succeeded in keeping them from coming up for debate. Luther who had become ill was not present at the meeting.

All the maneuverings at Smalcald proved to be academic, however, since the princes finally decided to decline the pope's invitation to the council at Mantua. After the assembly had adjourned, 44 of the 49 chief theologians in attendance remained to affix their signatures to the Smalcald Articles. Subsequently they were adopted by almost all of the princes and estates. Melanchthon signed, but under the compromising condition that he would acknowledge the pope's supremacy in the church if the pope would allow the preaching of the gospel and would admit that he held his position by human rather than divine right. The pope and Roman Catholics never gave this position any serious consideration.

When Melanchthon's doctrinal meanderings became even more noticeable after Luther's death, the Smalcald Articles were recognized as the expression of authentic Lutheranism. The Formula of Concord recognized the Articles as the correct explanation of the Augsburg Confession, with the added declaration concerning the Papacy, the absence of which had become increasingly troublesome. The Articles squarely attack the Roman Catholic Church in such matters as the Mass, monasteries, invocation of saints, and the Papacy itself by branding

the pope as the Antichrist in no uncertain terms. Luther's judgment against the Papacy as Antichrist was against the office or any institution which in God's name teaches doctrine contrary to what God has commanded. The Articles also struck a timely Lutheran note over against the Reformed and Unionists.

The Smalcald Articles are divided into three parts. Part I is a brief re-statement of the Trinitarian faith with sentences taken from the Apostles Creed. Part II has four articles in which Luther directly singles out what he finds most objectionable in the Roman Catholic Church. The main point is that the Roman Catholic doctrine and practices are destructive of the chief articles of justification by faith. Part III consists of 15 short articles on the material discussed in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.

Those who want to recapture the vital confessional spirit of Luther --- a confidence so grounded in God through the Holy Scriptures that it could defy pope and emperor --- can find it in the blunt and vibrant language of the Smalcald Articles.

### THE LARGE AND SMALL CATECHISMS

Luther had a continuing concern that the laity and not just the clergy would be knowledgeable of the great principles of the Reformation. His concern that all doctrine was for the people remained with him until his death.

Luther took part in the Saxon Visitation in 1528 and 1529. The idea of the Catechism had been with Luther for some time --- still it was these visitations that added the decisive impulse to put the idea into immediate action. In the Preface to the Small Catechism, Luther says, "The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism of Christian doctrine in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! What manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian doctrine, and alas, many pastors are altogether incapable, and incompetent to teach! Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, all have been baptized and received the Holy Sacrament. Yet they cannot recite neither the Lord's Prayer, nor the Creed, nor the Ten Commandments ..."

The blame, to a great extent, for this state of ignorance rested squarely with the Roman Catholic clergy because of their ineptness and neglect of Christian teaching. Some recited the mass in Latin with little idea of what they were saying. Even some of the priests sympathetic to Luther's Reformation lacked a full comprehension of the evangelical doctrine. This nearly universal spiritual ignorance among both the clergy and laity demanded an immediate program of religious education. It was toward this situation that Luther's two catechisms were directed.

The Large Catechism was begun before the Small. Like the Small Catechism, it originated in Luther's sermons of 1528-29 and consisted of five chief parts:

- (1) The Ten Commandments, (2) The Apostles Creed, (3) The Lord's Prayer,
- (4) Baptism, (5) The Sacrament of the Altar.

In his sermons Luther repeatedly declared that his purpose was to instruct the common people and the youth in those doctrines which he regarded as the minimum

every Christian ought to know. He did not abandon this purpose when he condensed his sermons into the Large Catechism. In particular, however, the Large Catechism was to provide sermon material for the less educated pastors to do justice to their sacred duty of preaching the fundamental Christian truths. It is evident, however, that Luther also intended the Large Catechism to serve the parents. People who read the Large Catechism will sense how directly Luther spoke --- i.e., to the common man in his own terms.

The Small Catechism like the Large was to serve all. The Small Catechism, however, above all was to be placed in the hands of the children who were to memorize it at home and bring it to church for instruction. For 450 years children preparing for their first participation in the Lord's Supper have studied and memorized its words and Christians have died recalling its comforting phrases. No other book has become and remained a document used for religious instruction as Luther's Small Catechism.

The Small Catechism underwent several revisions by Luther himself --- the version adopted into the Book of Concord has nine parts:

(1) The Ten Commandments, (2) The Apostles Creed, (3) The Lord's Prayer, (4) The Sacrament of Holy Baptism, (5) Confession and Absolution, (6) The Sacrament of the Altar, (7) Morning and Evening Prayers, (8) Grace at Table, (9) Table of Duties.

Luther's explanation to the Ten Commandments are positive expressions of God's holy Law. The commandment statement, "Thou shalt have no other gods," becomes a positive statement in its explanation, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

Also basic to Luther's approach in the Small Catechism is the total authority of the Holy Scriptures. In his explanation to the Third Commandment he warns against despising God's Word, but to hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

The Large Catechism appeared in 1529, a year before the Augsburg Confession, but it did not gain official confessional recognition until after Luther's death, although it was widely used.

The Small and Large Catechisms received official recognition in 1577 in the Formula of Concord and were incorporated into the Book of Concord in 1580.

The Epitome states, "because such matters concern also the laity and the salvation of their souls, we also confess the Small and Large Catechisms ... wherein everything is comprised which is treated at greater length in Holy Scripture, and is necessary for a Christian to know for his salvation."

In a sermon on November 27, 1530, Luther warns: "Beware lest you become presumptuous, as though, because you have heard it often, you knew enough of the Catechism. For this knowledge ever desires us to be its students. We shall never finish learning it, since it does not consist in speech, but in life..."

#### THE FORMULA OF CONCORD

When Martin Luther died on February 18, 1546, Lutheranism was an established

religious force. It had all happened in less than 30 years following the posting of the Ninety-five Theses by the then unknown monk.

The first 30 years of Lutheranism (1517-1546) are the history of Lutheran survival in the face of threats from Roman Catholicism and then the Reformed theology. The second 30 years (1546-1577) are the history of how Lutheranism managed to survive in the face of dissension. Perhaps the threats of the second 30 years were even more serious because now the enemies of Lutheranism called themselves "Lutherans," too.

After this second struggle there was a reinstatement of Luther's faith in the Formula of Concord, a document applying primarily and mostly to internal Lutheran problems. Its publication was accompanied by a reprinting of all the historical Lutheran confessions. After this there was no doubt what it meant to be a Lutheran --- it meant accepting the Formula of Concord and the other confessions listed therein.

The importance of the Formula of Concord can best be appreciated if we understand what happened between the time of Luther's death in 1546 and the adoption of the Formula in 1577. During this period Lutheranism suffered at the hand of deceitful theologians and princes bent on political intrigue to improve their lot. Within four months after Luther's death the emperor and the pope overcame their long standing animosity sufficiently to enter into an alliance whose purpose was to reimpose Roman Catholicism through political and military force. The pope acceded to the emperor's wish for a council, which was eventually held in Trent between the years 1545 and 1563 from which came the classical expression of Roman Catholicism. With his armies and council the emperor was determined to accomplish the dream of one Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. To achieve this goal the Smalcald League was dismembered. There were defections from the Lutheran side to the imperial cause. Elector John who had held the Lutheran cause together at Smalcald in 1537 was captured and imprisoned by the emperor. Prison did not daunt his faith, however, for he confessed his Lutheranism even more boldly. Wittenberg was surrendered to the emperor to save the elector's life. These were some of the most trying and tragic days for Lutheranism.

With his victories over the Lutheran territories accomplished, the emperor began quickly to reintroduce Roman Catholic doctrine and customs into the churches of the Reformation. The document bringing about this change was called the "Augsburg Interim" published in 1548.

As quickly as the force of Lutheranism declined, it was revived when the emperor's forces no longer menaced them. A treaty signed at Augsburg in 1555, called the Peace of Augsburg, granted religious liberty to the Protestants and gave the Lutherans equal footing with the Catholics in the Empire.

The restoration of political peace did not eliminate the false doctrine and unionistic principles which infested the church, however. Three different factions developed. One group, headed by the ever-wavering Philip Melancthon, was called the Philippist, and favored some types of reconciliation with the Reformed and Roman Catholics. This group of liberal and unionistic theologians was chiefly associated with the University of Wittenberg. At the opposite end of the spectrum was the so-called "Gnesio-Lutherans" (genuine Lutherans), led by a young theologian named Matthias Flacius. This group advocated an uncompromising adherence to Luther's view and unflinchingly opposed the modified and unionistic position of the Philippists. The third group, which was last to emerge, occupied a center position and was led by Brenz, Andreae, Chemnitz, Selnecker, Chytraeus and others. These

theologians were on the one hand opposed to all unnecessary controversies involving no doctrinal differences, and at the same time were careful not to take extreme positions themselves. On the other hand, however, they approved of all controversies really necessary in the interest of truth, rejected and condemned all forms of indifferentism and unionism, and strenuously opposed every effort at sacrificing, veiling, or compromising any doctrine for the sake of external peace. From this third group emerged the Formula of Concord.

Volumes have been written about the origin of the Formula of Concord --- we can touch on only a few of the highlights. Johann Brenz stated the distinct position of Lutheranism over against Calvinism. He died seven years before the Formula was written but is considered one of its fathers. Brenz's work was continued by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae, the latter the author of a document published in 1567 singling out in five articles the points of controversy among the Lutherans. Andreae also published a series of sermons in 1573 which in simple layman's language pointed out "as to what attitude a plain pastor and a common Christian layman should assume toward the dissensions according to his Catechism." At the suggestion of prominent theologians, Martin Chemnitz and others, Andreae edited his sermons into a document called the Swabian Concord. Chemnitz and Chytræus revised the document which became known as the Swabian-Saxon Concord. The discovery of Calvinists posing as Lutherans at the University of Wittenberg led Elector August to urge the writing of a document called the Maulbronn Formula and initiated the assembling of theologians from various territories at Torgau in 1576. These theologians, using the Swabian-Saxon Concord along with the Maulbronn Formula, produced the Torgau Book. This document was then circulated for opinion among the Lutheran territories and was favorably received. Andreae, Chemnitz and Chytræus worked through it again, reviewing the suggestions that had been made. The Torgau Book re-edited by these three theologians and reviewed by others became known as the Bergen Book. This document was finished in 1577 and became the Solid Declaration (or Thorough Declaration) of the Formula of Concord.

The Formula of Concord has 12 articles. Each of the articles has the same organizational structure. First, there is a statement of the chief controversy; second, a correct doctrinal response to that controversy; and finally, the false doctrine is pinpointed and condemned.

The twelve articles which confess the unaltered truths of the infallible Word of God are:

(1) Original Sin, (2) Free Will, (3) Righteousness of Faith, (4) Good Works, (5) Law and the Gospel, (6) The Third Use of God's Law, (7) The Holy Supper, (8) The Persons of Christ, (9) Christ's Descent into Hell, (10) Church Rites, (11) God's Eternal Election, (12) Other Factions and Sects.

The Bergen Book, or Solid Declaration, was criticized by some for what was considered excessive length. To answer this criticism, Andreae prepared a synopsis called the Epitome of the Formula of Concord. Together the Epitome and the Solid Declaration make up the Formula of Concord.

The subscription to the Formula of Concord throughout Germany was overwhelming. It was signed by 3 electors, by 20 dukes and princes, 24 counts, 4 barons, 35 imperial cities, and about 8,000 pastors and teachers, embracing about two-thirds of the Lutheran territories of Germany. True to its name the

Formula of Concord restored peace and harmony through doctrinal agreement.

To commemorate the restoration of doctrinal concord, the publication of all the Lutheran confessions in a document called the Book of Concord was scheduled for June 25, 1580, the 50th anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession.

### CONCLUSION

Although the age of the Reformation as such was coming to a close in 1580, the "church militant" can never expect to reach a plateau of theological peace --- this is reserved for heaven.

True Confessional Lutheranism involves not only a formal allegiance to the symbols, but it also means that the precious truths of the Holy Scriptures as confessed by these symbols are held fast, esteemed and effectually preached and taught. In Article 29 of the Brief Statements of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod of 1932 we read: "The orthodox character of a church is established not by its mere name nor by its outward acceptance of, and subscription to, an orthodox creed, but by the doctrine which is actually taught in its pulpits, in its theological seminaries, and in its publications." It is sad irony that the church body that authored the statement no longer carries it out in practice.

The story of Lutheran Confessional writings was not over with the Book of Concord --- nor is it over today. Confessional statements subscribed to by the Church of the Lutheran Confession, in addition to the Book of Concord include the aforementioned Brief Statement, the theses "Church and Ministry," and "Concerning Church Fellowship." The latter two, as we know, were developed by this church body and is current evidence that the confessional process does not end while time lasts.

May God bless our church and graciously keep her in the true and only saving Christian faith as set forth and confessed in the Lutheran symbols, whose paramount object is to maintain the gem of the Reformation, the blessed doctrine of salvation by grace alone, which most wonderfully magnifies the great glory of our God, and alone imparts solid comfort to poor sinners.

In closing may our prayer be that of Martin Luther in the hymn he wrote in 1541.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;  
Curb those who fain by craft and sword  
Would wrest the kingdom from Thy Son  
And set at naught all He hath done.

Lutheran Hymnal #261

WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE  
TO THE  
LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD

II. ...AS BELIEVERS WHO MUST OPPOSE ALL ERROR

Churches in the world of today are divided by two mutually exclusive bases. The orthodox (true) Christian Churches believe that all religious doctrine is revealed to man by God. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit," (1 Cor. 2:9.10). The heterodox (false) churches assume that man has the right and duty to determine, interpret, and invent the religious doctrine he wants to believe. Man attributes that self-determined doctrine to the mouth of God to make it appear divine. "Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith," (Jer. 23:31). Orthodox Christians believe, teach, and confess that the revealed Word from God is absolute truth. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," (John 17:17). The heterodox church members teach and confess (as God's words) only that which is pleasing and acceptable to their reason. They deny God's truth, but believe fables. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables," (11 Tim. 4:3.4). Orthodox Christians must ever be on guard against all error. "... that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive," (Eph. 4:14). The true believer has life alone in God's truth, without it he dies! "... to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," (John 6:68).

Over against the eternal, absolute truth from God stands error, false doctrine. False doctrine is every teaching contrary to the Word of God. Scripture warns against error: "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself," (1 Tim. 6:3-5). The Scripture also calls false doctrine a "... strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," (11 Thess. 2:11). The power of delusion lies with Satan, the father of lies, the inventor of all false doctrine. He is "... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world," (Rev. 12:9). Therefore God calls all His children to be on guard and to fight the good fight of faith. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith...", (1 Peter 5:8.9).

We have the example of the prophets, of Christ, and of the apostles who opposed error. Ezekiel of Old Testament time proclaimed by the command of the Lord: "Her priests have violated my law and have profaned mine holy things:

they have put no difference between the holy and profane ... and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them," (Ezek. 22:26). Jeremiah by inspiration laments the lamentation of God: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof," (Jer. 5:30,31).

Jesus named, corrected, and renounced the errorists in the church of His day. The Sadducees denied among other doctrines, the resurrection of the dead. Jesus rebuked them: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures," (Matt. 22:29). The Pharisees taught, in addition to many other errors, that their traditions were above divine Law. Jesus exposed their false teaching by a quote from the prophet Isaiah: "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men," (Mark 7:7,8). Jesus called them "hypocrites" and warned the people of the "heaven" of the Pharisees and the Scribes --- thereby mentioning the errorists by name and declaring error to be a most dangerous, pernicious, and permeating evil that ruins faith and destroys souls.

The apostles of New Testament time also opposed false doctrine. At an apostolic convention Peter testified: "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear," (Acts 15:10). Paul boldly opposed the errorists in his letter to the Galatians 1:7,8, "... there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." And recall how the Apostle Paul avoided any compromising dialogue with errorists: "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you," (Gal. 2:4,5). In the Epistles of James, John, Jude, Peter, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews we find a similar zeal and faithfulness in opposing all error. There is no place in Christian faith for compromising the truth from God!

The called servants of God since the time of the prophets, Christ, and the apostles have also been call-bound to proclaim to man, woman, and child God's revealed truth. "Preach the word," (II Tim. 4:2). "Preach the gospel," (Mark 16:15). "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," (Matt. 28:20). "He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully," (Jer. 23:28). The called ministers of God are also bound to use the Word from God to refute, to oppose error. Paul speaks of called servants of the Word when he admonishes Titus: "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake," (Titus 1:9-11). Pastor David Lau has developed this subject in the last part of this series of essays on the Lutheran Book of Concord. Let it suffice to say here that like Christ, every faithful pastor and teacher should be able to say at the close of his ministry: "I have given them Thy Word," (John 17:14).

Even as the prophets, the Savior, the apostles, the called pastors and teachers of the Church teach God's truth and oppose error, so every child of God will cling to God's Word, will oppose error, and will avoid religious fellowship with errorists. God's children are to avoid false doctrine. God states this most clearly wherever He exhorts us to abide in the truth, His truth. "But continue thou in the things



which thou hast learned and hast been assured of," (II Tim. 3:14). "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," (John 8:31,32). Continuing in God's truth and opposing error means that the believers cannot fellowship with those who believe, teach, or confess otherwise than God's Word teaches.

Truth and error cannot fellowship each other; neither can the children of truth and the children of deception. To give the appearance of indifference to error, or to let error stand along side of the truth as if they were compatible, is indeed sinful unionism. It gives the appearance of oneness, when in fact there is a division. How can the child of God walk together in fellowship with one whom he must condemn as an errorist? God has given the rule: "Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them, for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly. And by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple," (Rom. 16:17,18). God continues to counsel His children: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds," (II John 10,11). "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received from us," (II Thess. 3:6). "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject," (Titus 3:10). These terms of Holy Scripture: "avoid them," "shun," "receive not," "withdraw," reduced to terms of our day mean that we are to refuse to practice church fellowship with those who have departed from the truth of God.

Let us now apply these God given directives to the early history of the Lutheran Church. The church on earth by Luther's time had suffered much from the doctrines and the leadership of men. Reformers between the time of the apostles and Luther had been silenced for the most part by violent means. The church thrived politically and financially under one pope after another. Absolute rule and divine authority as "Christ's vicar on earth" gave way to doctrines and traditions made by men, yet declared necessary unto salvation.

As concern for the outward glory of the church became more and more intense, the material means for obtaining funds for such glory became more and more urgent. At the time of Luther, Pope Leo X became desperate in his greed for fantastic sums of money in order to keep the church at large in her glory, and in particular to renovate the great St. Peter's Cathedral. His solution of the problem was found in the selling of indulgences --- certificates assuring men of the forgiveness of sins in proportion to the amount of money given to the church. Luther, a Wittenberg professor and preacher became more and more worried about this practice. He came to discover that the people felt no need to be concerned about the Scripture teaching: He who does not believe shall be condemned. As long as a man could hold in his hand a receipt from Christ's vicar on earth that his sins were forgiven, who needed to worry about, or pay attention to Luther's "Scriptures"?

As we know, on the evening before All Saints Day, October 31, 1517, Luther made clear his objections to the practice of selling indulgences. He posted, for the purpose of debate, his formal statements (theses) regarding indulgences --- ninety-five theses in all. In a short time these became known far and wide, and Rome was determined to dampen the zeal of this Wittenberg church worker who, in effect, was robbing the pope's treasury of its forgiveness-for-sale receipts. Martin Luther, as the prophets, Christ, the apostles, and as faithful children of God in all ages, had witnessed the truth of God, and opposed error.

In Rome's attempt to silence Luther, that costly voice of opposition, the Emperor invited Luther to meet with the pope's representatives at Worms. At that meeting the papal representative immediately demanded nothing more of Luther (and nothing less) than that he promptly renounce and retract his theses against the indulgences. To this demand Luther replied that he could not do that unless the pope could prove to him from God's Word that he was wrong. Luther proclaimed to the assembly his firm stand upon the truth of God, and prayed God for the faith so to stand. Once again, as faithful children of God had done in every age, Luther simply declared God's Word, boldly opposed the error contrary to that Word, and let come what may. Luther was declared by Rome to be an outcast, an enemy of the Church --- he could be killed at any time, his life was in danger ... no, his life was eternally secure! For he clung in simple faith to the God revealed truth: The just shall live by faith. He spent his temporary years on earth opposing every error against this saving truth from God.

After the open break with Rome, Luther and those who, with him, recognized God's truth against the Church's errors continued to strengthen one another by searching the Scriptures. Prayerfully, they made bold confessions against one error after another: against Rome, against the errors of other reformers, and against errors which Satan very promptly seeded within the ranks of the young Lutheran Church.

Mr. Marlin Beekman, in the first part of this series of essays on the Lutheran Book of Concord, presented to us a fine historical review of these struggles and victories of faith. Based upon that review, let us now recall the several errors opposed by the confessions gathered in the Lutheran Book of Concord.

**THE LARGE AND SMALL CATECHISMS.** These works of Martin Luther were not confessional writings directed against a particular doctrinal error. The need for these catechisms arose because of the superstition so common among the church members, and because of the religious ignorance and immorality of both the clergy and laity. Superstition, of course, is doctrinal error against the first table of the Law. Ignorance of God's truth and immorality are doctrinal errors against God's Law and Gospel. In love for these wretched souls, Luther prepared two catechisms; the one for children and parents, the other chiefly for pastors and teachers. By these works, the truth of God was taught and confessed; and the errors of superstition, ignorance, and immorality were rejected.

**THE CREEDS.** The Apostle's Creed, to our best knowledge, was not drawn up as a final word of truth, and a rejection of error in connection with a particular confessional problem in the Church. This confession of faith "grew" out of the need for a short summary of the faith to be used for purposes of instruction, as well as a confession of the faith for candidates for Holy Baptism. It remains in the Church as a most beautiful summary of Christian doctrine --- a short, but clear statement. By it the faith was guarded against errors of doctrine and practice.

The Nicene Creed of the year 325 grew out of the immediate necessity for safeguarding the apostolic teaching concerning the deity of Christ against the Arian heresy. Arius was a Presbyter of Alexandria who denied the co-essentiality and the co-eternity of the second person of the Trinity with God the Father. He made the second person a philosophical figure, a fiction. In 381 the Creed was enlarged by extending the confession concerning the Holy Spirit. This was done against the error of those who followed Macedonius, who taught that the Holy Ghost was a mere creature, inferior to the Son. This was also known as the Pneumatomachian error,

adversaries of the Holy Spirit. In 589 the third council of Toledo added the words "and the Son," in Latin, filioque. This guarded against the error that the Spirit proceeded from the Father only.

The Athanasian Creed owes only its name, not its authorship to Athanasius, the "Father of Orthodoxy." This confession of faith sums up in terse theses and antitheses (positive and negative declarations) the doctrine of the Trinity, rejecting all shades of variation in doctrine concerning the Triune God.

We note that the General Creeds of the Church (Ecumenical Creeds) make a clear and forthright confession of God's truth concerning Himself, and at the same time they reject every error not consistent with God's revelation concerning Himself. Without the error-free doctrine of the Holy Trinity the First Commandment would have to remain an impossible mystery.

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AND THE APOLOGY (DEFENSE). These are the first two specific confessions of the Lutheran Church. The meeting at Augsburg was called by Charles V to adjust religious matters in Germany, a situation which had cracked wide open at the Protest of Spires in 1529. That Protest was against the fact that Charles V revoked the 1526 Diet of Spires which allowed Lutherans to practice their faith. He attempted instead, to enforce the edict of Worms of 1521. The Confession prepared by the Lutherans for the Augsburg Conference contained twenty-one Articles of Faith, and seven Articles Concerning Abuses. The following theses of correct doctrine were confessed, and opposing errors rejected.

"Our Churches with common consent do teach":

1. OF GOD: Condemning all heresies of the Manichaeans (who taught the principle of good and evil); the Valentians (a gnostic philosopher who taught the pagan concepts of the ideal man, ideal church, ideal Christ, and redemption as a cosmic process); the Arians; the Eunomians (Eunomius was a radical Arian); and the Mohammedans. This article also condemned the dynamic Arians known as the Samosatenes who contended that there was but one person, that the "Word" signified a spoken word, and that "Spirit" signified motion in created things.

2. OF ORIGINAL SIN: Condemning the errors of Pelagius who denied original depravity as sin, arguing that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason.

3. OF THE SON OF GOD: Rejecting all errors not honoring the Son as the Word (λόγος), denoting the generation of the Son from the Father.

4. OF JUSTIFICATION: Against the Roman error of reversing the order of justification and sanctification, making justification a result of sanctification, denying the declaratory act of justification.

5. OF THE MINISTRY: Condemning the errors of the Anabaptists and others who held that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external Word of God. Also rejecting the errors of Enthusiasm (Schwaermer) and Calvinism.

6. OF NEW OBEDIENCE: Rejecting all teachings which rely upon works to merit justification before God.

7. OF THE CHURCH: Rejecting the error that for unity in the Church it is necessary to agree upon human traditions such as rites and ceremonies.

8. WHAT THE CHURCH IS: Condemning the errors of the Reformed and Anabaptists; also rejecting the errors of the Donatists who held that only absolute purity of members and clergy through strict discipline allowed for the ministry of men in the Church.

9. OF BAPTISM: Rejecting the error of the Anabaptists who believed that children were saved without baptism.

10. THE LORD'S SUPPER: Condemning the teachings of all who hold otherwise than the words of Scripture concerning this Sacrament. Rejecting Calvinistic errors which deny the real presence in the Sacrament.

11. OF CONFESSION: Against the false practice of demanding that the confessor must enumerate all sins.

12. OF REPENTANCE: Rejecting the error of the Anabaptists who denied that those once justified could lose the Holy Spirit. Also rejected the error of perfectionism in this life. Also condemned the Novatians (Novatius taught severe rigorism --- God may pardon the fallen, but the church had no right to reinstate them to fellowship).

13. USE OF THE SACRAMENTS: Condemning those who teach that the Sacraments justify through the mere outward act, that faith is not required (against the Romanists and the Calvinists).

14. OF ECCLESIASTICAL ORDER: Against the Anabaptists' disregard of the regular "call" to teach publically (Gemeinschaftswegen) in the Church.

15. OF ECCLESIASTICAL USAGES: Rejecting the Roman use of human traditions, rites and ceremonies, as necessary to salvation.

16. OF CIVIL AFFAIRS: Rejecting the Anabaptist error that forbade civil offices to Christians. Also against the Roman error of Church over State, and the error of teaching Christian perfectionism by forsaking worldly offices.

17. OF CHRIST'S RETURN TO JUDGMENT: Condemning the Anabaptists who taught an end of the punishment of condemned men and devils. Also against the error that before the resurrection of the dead, the godly will take possession of the kingdom of the world (Jewish tradition).

18. OF FREE WILL: Against the Pelagians and others who teach that without the Holy Ghost we are able to love God above all things.

19. OF THE CAUSE OF SIN: Condemning the error of blaming God for being the cause of sin.

20. OF GOOD WORKS: Rejecting the false accusation that the Lutherans forbade good works. Opposed the Roman doctrine that good works justify and save.

21. OF THE WORSHIP OF SAINTS: Rejecting the error of the invocation of (praying to) the saints.

In the remaining articles of the Augsburg Confession the Lutherans reviewed the abuses which they had corrected in the Church. These so-called "abuses" were based upon and/or resulted in errors. "... it is evident that any custom introduced against the commandments of God is not to be allowed," (Triglott 61:9). The

following errors were rejected and corrections were made by the use of clear Scripture passages.

22. OF BOTH KINDS IN THE SACRAMENT: Rejecting the error of withholding the cup, distributing bread alone.

23. OF THE MARRIAGE OF PRIESTS: Condemning the papal command for celibacy of the clergy, against God's Word.

24. OF THE MASS: Condemning the ungodly nature of the Roman Mass, a perversion of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The Mass was also celebrated for the dead in purgatory. In the private Mass there was the misuse of prayer, and the celebration of it for lucre's sake. The Roman error was condemned, that Christ in His passion made satisfaction for original sin, and instituted the Mass wherein an offering should be made for daily sins, venial and mortal. (See Triglot 67:21).

25. OF CONFESSION: The Roman confession was condemned, for by it "satisfactions were extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ and the righteousness of faith no mention was made," (Triglot 69:5). This article also rejected the Roman insistence on the enumeration of sins.

26. OF THE DISTINCTION OF MEATS: Rejecting the Roman doctrine that the distinction of meats merits salvation, thus destroying the Gospel. This practice obscured the doctrine of salvation alone by grace, obscured the doctrine of the divine Law, and troubled the consciences of the people, who could never be sure of forgiveness and salvation.

27. OF MONASTIC VOWS: This article rejected the Roman monastic system with its pagan work-righteousness. In its doctrine of perfectionism reaching toward greater merit before God, many laws and vows had been invented. Among them the vow of celibacy.

28. OF ECCLESIASTICAL POWER: This article condemned the Roman doctrine that the bishops have power in both church and state. It rejected the power of the pope to rule heaven and hell by his claim as the divine head; and it rejected the power of the pope to rule the state by his control of political powers. The article also condemned the use of ecclesiastical power to establish ceremonies to merit grace and at the same time to burden consciences. The article concluded: "These errors crept into the Church when the righteousness of faith was not taught clearly enough," (Triglot 93:62).

THE APOLOGY OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION: After the presentation of the Lutheran Confession at Augsburg, the papists countered with a "Confutation," a document which had no arguments, no Scripture, only vilifications. Melanchthon and others wrote an Apology against the false accusations of the Confutation. The timid Melanchthon was inclined to make concessions, but bolstered up by Luther (from the Coburg) and by the laymen involved, a thorough defense and explanation of the Augsburg Confession was prepared and adopted. Its excellent defense is headed by the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, it is Thy Holy Gospel, it is Thy cause; look Thou upon the many troubled hearts and consciences, and maintain and strengthen in Thy truth Thy churches and little flocks, who suffer anxiety and distress from the devil. Confound all hypocrisy and lies, and grant peace and unity, so that Thy glory may advance, and Thy kingdom, strong against all the gates of hell, may continually grow and increase," (Triglot 103). At the conclusion of this fine defense of the truth of God, the Apology appends as it were a P.S. and confesses: "... but since our opponents would not tolerate the truth,

and dared to promote manifest errors by force, it is easy to judge who is guilty of scism. Surely all the world, all wisdom, all power ought to yield to Christ and His Holy Word. But the devil is the enemy of God, and therefore rouses all his might against Christ, to extinguish and suppress the Word of God. Therefore, the devil with his members, setting himself against the Word of God, is the cause of the scism and want of unity. For we have most zealously sought peace, and still more eagerly desire it, provided only that we are not forced to blaspheme and deny Christ. For God, the discernor of all men's hearts, is our witness that we do not delight and have no joy in this awful disunion. On the other hand, our adversaries have so far not been willing to conclude peace without stipulating that we must abandon the saving doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by Christ without our merit, though Christ would be most foully blasphemed thereby ... accordingly, we pray God to extend His grace to the end that His holy Gospel may be known and honored by all, for His glory, and for the peace, unity, and salvation of all of us. Regarding all these articles we offer to make further statements if required," (Triglot 451).

THE SMALCALD ARTICLES: Pope Paul III on June 4, 1536, called a general council to meet at Mantua on May 8, 1537. But he called it for the express purpose of "the utter extirpation of the poisonous pestilential Lutheran heresy." Luther was asked by Elector John Frederick of Saxony to write an ultimatum to be considered by the Estates when meeting at Smalcald in February. In these Smalcald Articles, the first part briefly treated a matter not in dispute --- "The High Articles of Divine Majesty." The second part treated the articles that "pertain to the office and work of Jesus Christ, or our Redemption. Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin. 'For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,' says Peter in Acts 4:12. 'And with His stripes we are healed,' (Is. 53:5). And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practise in opposition to the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt: for otherwise all is lost, and the pope and devil and all things gain the victory and suit over us," (Triglot 461:5). This second part of the articles begins with a magnificent confession of the truth of our justification by faith; then proceeds to condemn the Roman errors contrary to it: the Mass, the Invocation of Saints, Chapters and Cloisters, and the Papacy.

Part three of the Smalcald Articles condemns the following Roman errors: Of Sin, Of the Law, Of Repentance, Of the Gospel, Of Baptism, Of the Sacrament of the Altar, Of the Keys, Of Confession, Of Excommunication, Of Ordination and the Call, Of the Marriage of Priests, Of the Church, How One is Justified Before God and Of Good Works, Of Monastic Vows, Of Human Traditions.

The Smalcald Articles concluded with a tract by Melanchthon on "The Power and Primacy of the Pope." This confessional statement declared that the power and primacy of the pope must be denied, since he teaches contrary to Christian doctrine and is the AntiChrist. This bold rejection of the visible head of the Church of Rome was made on the basis of Galatians 1:8, "Though an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." "We ought to obey God rather than men," (Acts 5:29). "... who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God," (11 Thess. 2:3).

THE FORMULA OF CONCORD: The Formula has two parts, the Epitome and the

Thorough Declaration, each treating the same twelve articles. The introduction confesses the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice, and also accepts the Lutheran Confessions hitherto adopted.

Article I, ORIGINAL SIN: Rejects the exaggerations of Flacius (a statement by Flacius that original sin belonged to the substance of human nature, and was not a so-called accident).

Article II, FREE WILL: Rejects all synergism (the teaching that there are three cooperating causes in conversion --- God's Word, the Holy Ghost, and man's will not resisting the Word).

Article III, RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH BEFORE GOD: Stresses the forensic act and character of justification, and separates it from sanctification which follows justification.

Article IV, GOOD WORKS: Condemns the error that good works are necessary to salvation, and is against the error that they are harmful to salvation.

Article V, LAW AND GOSPEL: Rejects the confusion of Law and Gospel.

Article VI, THIRD USE OF THE LAW: Shows that the Christian still needs the Law for his old Adam, rejecting the error that Law (as set forth in the positive statements of the article) is not to be urged upon Christians.

Article VII, THE LORD'S SUPPER: Upholds the real presence in the Sacrament, received by all who use the Sacrament. Rejects the errors of the Sacramentarians, Calvin, Zwingli, and the papistic error of transubstantiation.

Article VIII, PERSON OF CHRIST: Rejects the errors of Nestorius, Eutyches, Arius, Marcion, Calvin, Zwingli, and Kenoticism (that all power was restored to Christ according to His divine nature at His resurrection and ascension, as if He had according to His divinity abandoned all power in His state of humiliation). Note: all the errors listed above are briefly defined in the Article, (Triglot 823:19ff).

Article IX, CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HELL: Rejects the error of Aepinus of Hamburg that the whole Christ did not descend into hell to proclaim the victory.

Article X, CHURCH RITES: The Article deals with adiaphora, matters of indifference. It confesses all such to be wrong when they involve undue insistence on conformity, violate Christian liberty, or yield truth to the enemy.

Article XI, PREDESTINATION: Rejects the Calvin doctrine of reprobation, the error that teaches against the truth that salvation is due alone to God's grace --- damnation alone to man's fault.

Article XII, OTHER HERESIES: Condemns the Anabaptists, Schwenkfeldians (against justification by faith, the means of grace, infant baptism, etc.), New Arians (denying Christ as God), and the Anti-Trinitarians (the Father alone is properly and truly God).

It is obvious from this review of the contents of the Lutheran Book of Concord that the Lutheran Church, in her attitude towards truth and error, has been obedient to the Scriptures. The Confessions of the Lutheran Church underscore

true doctrine and reject all error. In the controversies which called forth the confessions, it would have been more expedient (humanly speaking) if the Lutheran Theologians had overlooked the differences in question and joined hands in the critical day in which they were living. But the genuine Lutherans of the day would not yield for a moment, that the truth of the Gospel might be upheld. They loved the truth and would not enter upon relations of church fellowship with those who espoused the untruth. Although many thought that only minor errors were involved, the Lutherans stated that "the controversies which have occurred are not, as some would regard them, mere misunderstandings or disputes concerning words," (Triglott 849).

Therefore the Formula of Concord, which settled the controversies, states: "From this our explanation, friends and enemies, and therefore everyone, may clearly infer that we have no intention of yielding ought of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquillity, and unity ... still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and on our part are sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Ghost is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ," (Triglott 1095).

Because our Lutheran Confessions clearly set forth God's truth against error, we too profess that AS BELIEVERS WHO MUST OPPOSE ALL ERROR, WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE TO THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD.

Our Church of the Lutheran Confession, by the grace of God, has followed the confessional Lutheran Church in its attitude towards truth and error. God's Word is believed, taught, and confessed as the only religious truth for man, and the only truth that can save his soul. Faith worked by the Word of God must and will, therefore, reject all error!

By this same faith, same Spirit, same means of grace believers today witness the truth against error. It was this faith and concern that saw pastors, teachers, members, and congregations leave the fellowship of the Synodical Conference Lutheran Churches some 15-20 years ago. They took their stand upon the truth and made their bold confessions against the errors concerning Church Fellowship, and concerning Church and Ministry. The truth compelled separation from errors and errorists.

This same faith and concern has consumed much time and prayerful effort on the part of the members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession in searching the Scriptures, consulting together as brethren, and discussing so thoroughly the issues concerning the third use of the law, polygamy, and unionistic fraternal life insurance organizations. Nor will the need for confessing truth against error cease among us when these issues are settled!

In love for the Word of God, our faith must firmly confess the truth of God concerning these issues, and boldly condemn any and all errors that arise, be they ever so "insignificant" to the minds of men. Thus alone the true unity of the church is served, God is honored, and His truth is preserved among us. To this help us, dear Father in Heaven, Amen!



WE WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE  
TO THE  
LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD

III. ...AS PASTORS AND TEACHERS WHO ARE CALLED  
TO SERVE SOULS WITH GOD'S SAVING TRUTH

Introduction

"After its adoption by the Lutheran electors, princes, and estates, the Formula of Concord, and with it the entire Book of Concord, was solemnly subscribed by about 8,000 theologians, pastors, and teachers." (F. Bente, Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, p. 8)

The signed pledge included the following statements:

"This declaration herewith presented ... is our faith, doctrine, and confession, in which we are also willing, by God's grace, to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ."

"We will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it, but, by the help of God's grace, intend to abide thereby."

"Therefore, after mature deliberation, we have in God's fear and with the invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands." (Concordia Triglotta, p. 1103 --- hereafter abbreviated C. I.)

The question that confronts us 400 years later is whether we who are 'ministers of the new testament' (2 Cor. 3:6), called by God's people to proclaim and teach and apply God's saving truth, can still seriously and honestly subscribe to every one of the confessions contained in the Book of Concord. Can it be said of the pastors and teachers of the Church of the Lutheran Confession that "this Christian Agreement is not the confession of some few of our theologians only, but is the unanimous confession of each and every one of our ministers and schoolteachers"? (C. I. p. 14)

In this essay we hope to explain in a brief way why we who are pastors and teachers in the CLC should WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUBSCRIBE TO THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD.

I

Those 8,000 theologians, pastors, and teachers subscribed to the Lutheran Book of Concord because "the explanation of the controverted articles agreed with the Word of God." (C. I. p. 13) This must still be our basic reason for subscribing to these confessions: THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD IS IN AGREEMENT WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

That this should be so is not at all self-evident. All of the creeds in the Book of Concord were drawn up by fallible men. We do not claim that our confessions were directly breathed out by the Holy Spirit, as is true of the Holy

Scriptures. The persons responsible for the content and wording of our confessions were not always preserved from doctrinal error in their other writings. The times in which they lived were times in which the winds of false teaching were blowing fiercely. Therefore we can only regard it as a miracle of God's grace that the Book of Concord is in full agreement with the Word of God.

The age in which the Apostles' Creed developed was not a time of pure orthodoxy. In his study Reconciliation and Justification (Concordia Publishing House, 1938) Theodore Dierks points out how the doctrine of justification by faith was corrupted already in the first centuries of the New Testament. Yet this corruption did not find its way into the Apostles' Creed.

The fourth century, the time in which the Nicene Creed was formulated, was a time when the false teaching of Arius, that Jesus is not eternal God, found strong support. Yet the Nicene Creed was preserved from this false teaching and in fact is a very clear and Biblical refutation of it.

The origin of the Athanasian Creed is still a mystery. We can be sure that the spirit of Antichrist, which later attained its full development in the Roman papacy, was already present in the years of its formation. Yet the Athanasian Creed itself is a clear and concise statement of the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the nature of Christ, in full agreement with the Word of God.

The specifically Lutheran confessions in the Book of Concord were written in a time of fierce doctrinal controversy. The two catechisms of Martin Luther, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, and the Smalcald Articles were all written between the years 1529 and 1536. It is to be expected that such bitter opponents of the Roman Catholic system and the papacy would overreact and would go beyond Scripture in opposing the Roman errors. In other words, the danger was that they would throw out the baby with the bath water.

But our gracious God marvelously preserved Luther and Melancthon from such overreaction when they were writing our confessions. It is no secret that Martin Luther sometimes spoke in haste and bitterness. But his uncouth language with regard to the papacy (Luther's Works, Vol. 41, pp. 263 ff.), his ill-considered suggestions concerning the treatment of the Jews (Against the Jews and Their Lies, 1543), and his repeated declarations that false teachers should be punished by the government as blasphemers (for example, L. W. Vol. 13, p. 61) are not found in his catechisms and the Smalcald Articles.

Other confessions of the Reformation age did not fare as well. For example, in reacting against the Roman Catholic superstitions connected with the Lord's Supper, the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) says: "We do not join the body of the Lord and His blood with the bread and wine, as though we thought that the bread is the body of Christ. ... The body of Christ is in the heavens, at the right hand of the Father." (Creeds of the Churches, edited by John Leith, p. 174) But Martin Luther and a later generation of Lutherans were given grace to discard the superstition of transubstantiation without abandoning the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, thus remaining faithful to God's Word.

The Second Helvetic Confession, in agreement with the spirits of those times, likewise declares: "We teach that the care of religion does chiefly appertain to the holy magistrate. Let him, therefore, hold the Word of God in his hands, and look that nothing be taught contrary thereunto. ... Let him suppress stubborn heretics." (Creeds of the Churches, pp. 190-191) Such sentiments were sometimes

spoken and practiced by Lutherans also, but the Augsburg Confession, by a special miracle of God's grace, clearly taught the distinction between church and state (Article XXVIII, C. I. pp. 83 ff.) in a time when this doctrine was almost completely unknown and certainly unpracticed.

When the reformers rejected the false Roman Catholic policy of setting tradition above Scripture and accepted the principle of Scriptures alone as their rule for faith and life, they were still in danger of failing to distinguish between what God says to all in the Scriptures and what He said only to the Jews. In other words, they were in danger of subjecting God's people to all the Ten Commandments as given to Moses. The Reformed branch, following the lead of men like John Calvin and John Knox, succumbed to this temptation. So the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) says: "God hath appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which ... from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week. ... This Sabbath is kept holy unto the Lord, when men ... do not only observe an holy rest all the day, ... but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." (Creeks of the Churches, p. 218)

When we now turn to Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment in his Large Catechism, we find there a totally different spirit, one that recognizes the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. "According to its literal, outward sense, this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other ordinances of the Old Testament connected with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ. (Col. 2:16)" (Luther's Large Catechism, Fischer translation, Fortress Press, 1959, p. 20)

To me it is simply a marvel of God's grace that our Lutheran Book of Concord was preserved from such false teachings as were current in those days. For these false ideas are found in the Reformed confessions and occasionally can be detected even in the writings of Luther and Melancthon and the other writers of our confessions. Most Reformed pastors and teachers today, even the most conservative and faithful of them, cannot honestly subscribe to every teaching in their confessions. For they have learned that some of the statements of their fathers cannot be made to agree with God's clear Word.

But what doctrine in the Lutheran Book of Concord is unscriptural and thus outdated for us? In spite of John Calvin's theory of double predestination and Melancthon's synergistic theory of the three causes of conversion (the Holy Spirit, God's Word, and man's yielding will) the Formula of Concord of 1577 follows the Bible without being misled by human logic. The Formula teaches an election of grace as the cause of the salvation of God's people, but at the same time rejects Calvin's horrible doctrine of predestination to damnation. The Formula accepts Calvin's doctrine of original sin and total depravity, for that is the teaching of the Bible, and rejects Melancthon's synergistic theory, even though Melancthon was the author of the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. The Formula teaches God's love for the world in Jesus Christ and the seriousness of His Gospel invitation to all, and does not make God the cause of any man's damnation. Man is lost by his own fault, even as the Bible says.

Perhaps the one teaching of the Book of Concord that is considered outdated by most Lutherans today is Article IV of the Smalcald Articles, on the Papacy, together with the attached treatise on the power and primacy of the Pope. According to the survey of beliefs entitled "A Study of Generations," only 6% of the Lutherans

in America today believe that the Pope is the Antichrist.

In the overheated polemics of the Reformation age we grant that it is highly probable that Luther and Melanchthon would overstate their case against the papacy and indulge in all kinds of fantastic exegesis of Daniel and Revelation in order to prove their point, even as the premillennial dispensationalists are doing in our time. But by God's grace Luther and Melanchthon proceeded soberly, comparing the facts of history with Paul's description of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2, and drawing the obvious conclusions: "The Pope is the very Antichrist." (C. I. 475)

The four centuries that have elapsed since that time have, if anything, established even more firmly the truth of their declaration concerning the papacy. In 1958 the dying Synodical Conference reaffirmed this teaching by saying: "We identify this 'Antichrist' with the Papacy as it is known to us today, which shall, as 2 Thess. 2:8 states, continue to the end of time, whatever form or guise it may take. ... This teaching rests on the revelation of God in Scripture which finds its fulfillment in history. ... Since Scripture teaches that the Antichrist would be revealed and gives the marks by which the Antichrist is to be recognized (2 Thess. 2:6, 8), and since this prophecy has been clearly fulfilled in the history and development of the Roman papacy, it is Scripture which reveals that the Papacy is the Antichrist."

We are not embarrassed that our Lutheran confessions declare the papacy to be the Antichrist, but we are embarrassed and appalled that today's Lutherans have neglected or abandoned this confession.

The time at our disposal at this convention does not permit us to examine all the teachings of the Lutheran Book of Concord and compare them with Scripture. Our pastors and teachers, however, do make such a thorough study of these confessions as part of their training, and of course, we must keep on studying these things during our entire ministry.

May it be said of us that our subscription to the Book of Concord is honest and sincere. "The doctrinal decisions of the Symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our church has made them nor because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself. ... He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church. ... All doctrines of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture." (Brief Statement of 1932)

||

As pastors and teachers in the CLC, we are 'ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' (2 Cor. 3:6) We are called to serve souls with God's saving truth. Above all else, we are to be proclaimers of the Good News of Jesus Christ. We agree with Dr. Walther: "The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching." (C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, pp. 403 ff.) The passages Walther uses to prove this point are Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Tim. 4:5; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Cor. 15:3; and 2 Cor. 1:24.

The question then is whether our subscription to the Lutheran Book of Concord

hinders us or helps us in our calling as Gospel ministers. Even if these confessions are in agreement with the Word of God and no false teachings are contained in them, is it possible that our emphasis on them (as evident even in the name of our church body) has a tendency to lead us away from the main theme of the New Testament and get us to major in minor and comparatively unimportant themes?

On the contrary, we believe that it is especially as Gospel ministers that we should wholeheartedly subscribe to the Lutheran Book of Concord, because the central theme of the Bible, THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST (GOD'S SAVING TRUTH) PERVADES ALL THE CONFESSIONS. What F. Bente says of the Formula of Concord is true of all our confessions. It is "truly Scriptural, not only because all its doctrines are derived from the Bible, but also because the burden of the Scriptures, the doctrine of justification, is the burden of all its expositions, the living breath, as it were, pervading all its articles." (F. Bente, op. cit. p. 255)

The article on justification itself in the Augsburg Confession is very short. "It is taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Rom. 3:21-26 and 4:5." (Augsburg Confession, Art. IV)

But this same theme reappears in almost every other article, whether the subject is good works or repentance or the sacraments or monastic vows. Over and over again we hear that we obtain forgiveness, not by our own merits, but by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith.

As we might expect, the Church of the Pope condemned Article IV of the Augsburg Confession. But even this was used by God for our good, for this condemnation led Melancthon to defend and prove the Gospel teaching from the Bible in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession.

Perhaps the Apology is not our favorite portion of the Book of Concord, for Melancthon does tend at times to become a little long-winded and repetitious. Yet he certainly does succeed in proving the doctrine of justification from the Bible. Robert Preus calls the Apology "one of the most Biblical, convincing expositions of justification by faith every written." (R. Preus, Getting into the Theology of Concord, CPH 1977, p. 50) In the process Melancthon explains many difficult Bible passages and concepts in the light of this chief doctrine. As he himself says in the Apology, this doctrine "is of especial service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures." (C. I. p. 121) "This proposition, that we are justified freely by faith, is the principal matter ... of the entire Scriptures." (C. I. p. 147)

Do we have trouble understanding the concept of civic righteousness? Read the Apology. (C. I. pp. 121 ff.) Do we have trouble with Jesus' statement to the sinful woman: "Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much"? (Lk. 7:47) Read the Apology. (C. I. p. 163) Do we have trouble with James's statement about justification by works? (Js. 2:24) Read the Apology. (C. I. pp. 189 ff.) Do we have difficulty understanding the use of the term "reward" in the Scriptures? Read the Apology. (C. I. pp. 217 ff.) Do we have a problem distinguishing between the fear of God that should be cast out and the fear of God we should retain? Read the

Apology. (C. I. p. 261) Do we know how to explain what a sacrament is, especially since this is not a Bible term? Read the Apology. (C. I. pp. 309 ff.)

Melanchthon's explanations of all these matters are valuable, not because the Holy Spirit directly inspired his words, but because the doctrine of justification by faith permeated his thinking.

After Luther summarized the doctrine of justification in the Smalcald Articles, he went on to say: "Upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the whole world." (C. I. p. 463) This is the emphasis in all of the Lutheran confessions. That is why they are able to distinguish between Law and Gospel. That is why they are able to explain the sacraments and the customs and traditions of the church in an evangelical way instead of in the legalistic way which adheres to our human nature.

And of course this is why we ministers of the new testament who are called to serve souls with God's saving truth can still subscribe to the Lutheran Book of Concord with a clear and joyful conscience. The Book of Concord is not a book of rules and regulations. It is not a textbook to help us handle cases of casuistry. It is a confession of faith in the everlasting and unchanging Gospel. It is a treasure house filled with the sweet scent of Gospel truth permeating every crevice and corner of doctrine, whether it be purgatory, the marriage of priests, or the duties of the government.

To be sure, God's Law and the Ten Commandments are explained at length, especially in Luther's Large Catechism. But never is anything attributed to the Law that only the Gospel can accomplish. The Apology says: "The Law always accuses. For who loves or fears God sufficiently?" (C. I. p. 169) The Large Catechism says: "No man can achieve so much as to keep one of the Ten Commandments as it ought to be kept." (Large Catechism, p. 52) "God wants our hearts to be pure, even though as long as we live here we cannot reach that ideal. So this commandment remains, like all the rest, one that constantly accuses us and shows just how upright we really are in God's sight." (Large Catechism, p. 51)

To such souls condemned by God's Law the Good News of Jesus Christ comes as good news indeed. In the confessions we have no halfway Gospel that declares that God will do His part of saving us if we first do our part of believing. The Gospel of the confessions is the true Gospel of God's grace, summarized in these clear words from the Formula of Concord: "The righteousness which is imputed to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ. ... His obedience, not only in suffering and dying, but also in this, that He in our stead was voluntarily made under the Law, and fulfilled it by His obedience, is imputed to us for righteousness. On account of this complete obedience, which He rendered His heavenly Father for us, by doing and suffering, in living and dying, God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous, and eternally saves us. ... This righteousness is offered us by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and in the Sacraments, and is received through faith. ... This faith is a gift of God." (C. I. pp. 919-921)

"It is remarkable how consistently our Confessions emphasize this central theme of the Gospel, how all their discussions support and lead to this theme of salvation by free grace through faith in Christ. Melanchthon 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

spiritual powers of man's will before conversion, 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. When Melanchthon speaks out strongly and at such length against the legalism and work-righteousness of the Roman Church of his day, it is only because 'the Gospel must be retained in the church' (C. I. p. 155). And when he insists so vehemently that a sinner is justified by faith in Christ, it is because to deny or undermine this great fact 'completely destroys the Gospel' (C. I. p. 155) ... This is why our Confessions, like Scripture itself, are always contemporary and useful. If we share this Gospel spirit, we will see how helpful and exciting our Confessions are and we will read them with avidity and profit." (R. Preus, Getting into the Theology of Concord, pp. 25-26)

### III

As pastors and teachers who are called to serve God's people in this modern age, we find that much of our time is taken up with counseling, educating, and comforting. For guidance on all these matters we should turn first of all to the Holy Spirit's book, the Bible. But we should also be aware that THE LUTHERAN BOOK OF CONCORD IS STILL USEFUL IN CONSIDERING QUESTIONS OF CONSCIENCE, IN TRAINING THE YOUNG, AND ESPECIALLY IN COMFORTING TROUBLED SINNERS. Also for this reason we pastors and teachers should wholeheartedly subscribe to the Lutheran Book of Concord.

Among the questions of conscience that arise from time to time are marriage problems, problems in dealing with our neighbor's sins, and the most basic issue of all, idolatry. Because of our sinful flesh we Christians do not always know how we should think and act in these matters. Because of our sinful flesh we ministers of Christ's Church do not always know what advice we should give.

"If the believing and elect children of God were completely renewed in this life by the indwelling Spirit, ... they would do of themselves ... what they are in duty bound to do according to God's will. ... However, believers are not renewed in this life perfectly or completely; for although their sin is covered by the perfect obedience of Christ ... and also the mortification of the old Adam and the renewal in the spirit of their mind is begun through the Holy Ghost, nevertheless the old Adam clings to them still. ... Therefore, because of these lusts of the flesh the truly believing, elect, and regenerate children of God need in this life ... the daily instruction and admonition, warning, and threatening of the Law." (Formula of Concord, C. I. pp. 963-965)

So we study God's Word together with our people when they come to us with their marriage problems, their problems with their neighbors, and their problems with themselves (idolatry). We instruct, admonish, warn, and threaten. We find Luther's two catechisms especially useful in dealing with such questions.

For example, consider this on the question of idolatry. "That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God. ... Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property. ... Such a man also has a god - mammon by name. ... It is the most common idol on earth." (Large Catechism, p. 9) How useful such expressions are when we have difficulty in terminating our membership in unionistic fraternal organizations!

Then there is this on marriage matters: "We should not despise or disdain marriage as the blind world and the false clergy do, but view it in the light of

God's Word. ... For marital chastity it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable." (Large Catechism, pp. 37-38)

On dealing with your neighbor's sin: "Let this be your rule, then, that you should not be quick to spread slander and gossip about your neighbor but admonish him privately so that he may amend. Likewise, if someone should whisper to you what this or that person has done, teach him, if he saw the wrongdoing, to go and reprove the man personally, otherwise to hold his tongue." (Large Catechism, p. 46)

Here we have blunt, simple, Scriptural guidance that will never be outdated. For advice on marriage questions we can also turn to Articles XXIII and XXVII of the Augsburg Confession, and the corresponding articles of the Apology. On the subject of idolatry the Apology is especially helpful as it calls our attention to sins that the world completely overlooks: "namely, to doubt concerning God's wrath, concerning God's grace, concerning God's Word, to be angry at the judgments of God, to be provoked because God does not at once deliver one from afflictions, to murmur because the wicked enjoy a better fortune than the good, to be urged on by wrath, lust, the desire for glory, wealth, etc. These evils are wrapped up in man's skin." (C. I. p. 117)

With regard to the training of the young the ancient creeds and Luther's Small Catechism come to mind at once. We still use them in our regular instruction, and our children can still understand them. (Incidentally, the one section in Luther's Small Catechism that is the most difficult for the children to learn, the questions on the Ministry of the Keys, is not part of Luther's original catechism and is not included in the Book of Concord.)

But again it is Luther's Large Catechism that gives the most thorough instruction to parents and teachers as to how to train the children entrusted to them. First of all there must be the good example. "I am a doctor and a preacher," says Luther, "Yet every morning I read and recite word for word the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Creed. ... Nothing is so effectual against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it." (Large Catechism, p. 4) But what do we Americans do? We watch television, 5 hours a day on the average, according to some reports.

"Therefore, I once again implore all Christians, especially pastors and preachers, not to try to be doctors prematurely and to imagine that they know everything. ... Let all Christians exercise themselves in the Catechism daily, and constantly put it into practice. ... Let them never stop." (Large Catechism, p. 5)

"We should constantly teach the catechism, and require young people to recite it word for word. ... However, it is not enough for them simply to learn and repeat these parts verbatim. ... They should also attend preaching, ... that they may learn the meaning of every part." (Large Catechism, p. 8)

"Our young people should be strictly required and trained to hold the commandments in high regard. Whenever they transgress, we must be after them at once with the rod, confront them with the commandment, and continually impress it upon them, so that they may be brought up not merely with punishment but in the



reverence and fear of God. ... When they are allowed to do as they please, no good will come of it. It is evident that the world today is more wicked than it has ever been." (Large Catechism, pp. 17-18)

This, of course, is just a sampling of Luther's advice for parents and teachers. He does not always refer to a specific Bible passage as the basis of his advice. But Luther was so filled with Scripture that anyone who searches diligently will discover that what he says is Biblical.

Last of all we consider how helpful the Lutheran Book of Concord is in comforting troubled sinners. Since Luther and Melanchthon themselves were troubled sinners always in need of Gospel comfort, their writings are directed towards giving Gospel assurance to other sinners in need. Both of them, especially Luther, had experienced the horrors of uncertainty that plague all serious-minded people who are caught up in a work-righteous religion. Melanchthon says in the Apology: "Works can never render a conscience pacified, but only the promise can. ... In the Gospel promise timid consciences ought to seek ... justification. By this promise they ought to sustain themselves, and be confident that for Christ's sake, because of His promise, they have a gracious God." (C. I. p. 171)

Luther knew that directing a troubled sinner to his own experiences would leave him in the same uncertainty as directing him to his own works. The emphasis therefore is always on the means of grace. "God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren." (C. I. p. 491)

Again Luther says: "God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word. ... God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments." (C. I. pp. 495-496)

To be sure, no comfort is given in our confessions to unrepentant sinners. Melanchthon's refrain in the Apology is that "faith is the work of the Holy Ghost; it does not coexist with mortal sin, but, as long as it is present, produces good fruits." (C. I. p. 139)

Likewise Luther insists in the Smalcald Articles, that when men "happen to fall into manifest sins, as David into adultery, murder, and blasphemy, that then faith and the Holy Ghost has departed from them." (C. I. p. 491)

But when sinners are led to genuine repentance, concerning which our confessions have very much to say, all the comfort of the Gospel is laid out before them. Again and again sinners are urged to consider the voice of the absolving pastor as a "voice from heaven." (C. I. p. 249, p. 261) Baptism and the Lord's Supper are presented not as good works or acts of obedience on our part but as vehicles of God's abundant grace.

As a fitting conclusion to this compendium of Gospel comfort we quote from Article XI in the Formula of Concord, which treats of God's eternal election. "Since everything in God's Word has been prescribed to us, not that we should thereby be driven to despair, but 'that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope,' Rom. 15:4, therefore it is without any doubt in no

way the sound sense or right use of the doctrine concerning the eternal foreknowledge of God that either impenitence or despair should be occasioned or strengthened thereby. Accordingly, the Scriptures teach this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word; exhort to repentance; urge to godliness; strengthen faith and assure us of our salvation." (C. T. p. 1067)

"In Christ we are to seek the eternal election of the Father. ... We know assuredly that out of pure grace, without any merit of our own, we have been elected in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of His hand. He has not only promised this gracious election with mere words, but has also certified it with an oath and sealed it with the holy Sacraments, which we can call to mind in our most severe temptations, and take comfort in them, and therewith quench the fiery darts of the devil. Besides, we should use the greatest diligence to live according to the will of God, and, as St. Peter admonishes (2 Pet. 1:10), 'make our calling sure,' and especially adhere to the revealed Word; that can and will not fail us." (C. I. p. 835)

### Conclusion

With such rich comfort as this in the Lutheran Book of Concord, we as ministers of the new testament should have no difficulty at all in subscribing to it wholeheartedly. May we all then be willing to join the Lutheran confessors of 1580 in saying: "We indeed have wished, in this work of concord, in no way to devise what is new, or to depart from the truth of the heavenly doctrine which our ancestors have acknowledged and professed. We mean that doctrine ... which is contained in the three ancient creeds, in the Augsburg Confession, ... then in the Apology, ... in the Smalcald Articles, and lastly in both the Catechisms of that excellent man, Dr. Luther. Therefore we also have determined ..., the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of the pure doctrine." (C. I. p. 23)

"As a manifest testimony of this, we have with great consent subscribed our names."

"In cuius rei evidens testimonium nomina nostra magno consensu subscripsimus."

"Zu Urkund' haben wir uns mit einmütigem Herzen unterschrieben (lassen)."