

**We Believe, Teach, and Confess:
A Twentieth Century Tribute to the Formula of Concord**

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A Four Hundredth Anniversary tribute to the *Formula of Concord* may well begin with a definition. Our customary conception of this document is that of a carefully worded statement designed to restore religious harmony among Lutherans of the 16th century. But what, really, is a formula? Our *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word in this way: "A set form of words in which something is defined, stated, or declared. or which is prescribed by custom or authority for use on ceremonial occasions. In recent use, after Carlyle, often applied disparagingly." Recent usage is reflected in the first definition of the word 'formula' in Webster's *New World Dictionary of the American Language* as follows: "A fixed form of words, especially one that has lost its original meaning of force and is now used only as a conventional or ceremonial expression."

Our anniversary observance this year has a special urgency because of a realization that subscription to the *Formula of Concord* has taken on the character of a disparagingly "formal and ceremonial gesture," on the part of many Lutherans. Everyone who takes the *Formula of Concord* seriously will, therefore, find this opportunity for consideration and reexamination of this great Lutheran Confession a salutary and edifying study. We will not diminish either the validity or the value of the *Formula of Concord* by the admission that its present relevance is impaired because the historic setting of its adoption in the 16th century is unlike the religious orientation of the church in the 20th century.

We believe that the substance of the *Formula of Concord*, that is, the biblical truths asserted in it are as true and valid now as they were 400 years ago. Indeed, the more those truths are challenged, the greater our need to know and confess the *Formula*. The 16th century confessors used the oft-repeated phrases, "We believe, teach, and confess." We join them in our faith, in our preaching, and in our testimony. We shall not permit the *Formula of Concord* to become a mere "conventional or ceremonial expression" in our homes and churches.

Looking back today it is not too much to say that the *Formula of Concord* was the dynamic that prevented the abortion of the Lutheran movement, the mutilation of a theology that had restored apostolic doctrine to the Christian Church. Conceived only sixty years before the adoption of the *Formula of Concord*, the frail human hope of Lutheranism had rested in the mortal frame and the highly endowed intellect of one man, Martin Luther. When he died at age 63 he left a church not yet capable of a full realization of the spiritual and theological potential of his work as a reformer.

But the church has never rested on the strength and the wisdom of one man. Another generation, capable only of a gradual reception and absorption of the depth of meaning of the Gospel message of the heroic monk of Wittenberg, was to face the ultimate test. Despite Luther's qualities of leadership, despite the eloquence of his preaching, despite the solid substance of his doctrinal statements, the annihilation of Lutheranism was a near thing. But God, who has assured us that his word "shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it," (Is. 55,11) sent the Holy Spirit to that wayward generation and provided appropriate Christian leadership for the tasks that lay ahead.

A review of the intellectual atmosphere and the political realities of the 16th century may help us to understand the near collapse of the heterodox Lutheran faith. We may recall.

first, that the flowering of the Renaissance had spread its invigorating influence all over Europe. In this movement the brilliant performance of the painters, sculptors, and architects was just the tip of the iceberg. More enduringly significant was the sparkling with and the effervescent creativity of a literary Renaissance that was expressing a profound interest in man and his past, and was expressing itself in the lively imagery of the vernacular languages.

Broad interests in an infinite range of subject matters tended to depose theology as the queen of the sciences and to dethrone the Latin language as the single vehicle for learned discourse. This by no means implied that the Renaissance was anti-religious. but rather that the Christian religion was being influenced by a wide range of economic, cultural, and scholarly forces. All of this may be encapsulated in Luther's intellectual experience in which medieval scholasticism and mysticism, and Renaissance humanism were brought into focus and service in his personal experience and achievement.

Medieval scholasticism, so well illustrated in the 95 Theses and in Luther's published disputations, had been an effort to apply the philosophical methodology of Aristotle to the study and understanding of biblical theology. In the hands of such intellectual giants as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas scholastic theology had proved fruitful, within its own limitations, and had achieved new and heightened understandings of Scripture. It was an advance in understanding of Scripture that was in marked contrast to the simplistic theology of a worship, or at least adoration of saints, encouraged by Gregory the Great at the turn of the seventh century.

Medieval mysticism was essentially a reaction against the tendency of scholasticism that offered so little to the spiritual lives of the masses of the people. St. Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Sienna illustrate this train of practical spirituality that is later seen in *The Imitation of Christ* of Thomas a' Kempis, the German Theology of Tauler, and the *Devotio Moderna* of the Brethren of the Common Life. In their educational strivings and in their domestic piety these mystics characterized the spirituality of much of medieval Christendom.

Humanistic studies had been at the very heart of the Italian Renaissance. European students were flocking to Italian universities from places as far distant as England, while fledgling centers of learning like Wittenberg were introducing the "new learning." Language studies were reopening the vistas of ancient wisdom, critical studies were exposing literary frauds like the Donation of Constantine, while Dante and others were under the spell of fresh new literary creativity.

From all the moods and nuances of scholastic, mystic, and humanistic strains Dr. Martin Luther was distilling the essence of a new biblical scholarship. While the discipline of a theology practiced under the fine-tuned methodology of the masterful Aristotle was guiding the course of his studies, the linguistic and critical skills of the humanists was giving depth and substance to his convictions and teaching. All the while the mystic strain that touched him so intimately at home and in his school years was a constant reminder to him of his own humanity and the abyss of the sinner's fall from the presence of God's love. Only one man at that time, Ignatius Loyola, came even remotely near to Martin Luther in a suffering and anguished grasp of the utter desolation of the curse of sin.

Among the reformers, however, Luther stood alone in the nature and the depth of the motivation driving him onward to reform. He alone saw fully the love of a smiling God overreaching and covering the miasma of sin in his encompassing love of sinful man, revealed in his own incarnate Son. Luther stood alone among the reformers of his time in his ability to see and to set the limits of the validity of scholastic methodology, mystic spirituality, and the critical perspicuity of Renaissance humanism.

Erasmus of Rotterdam, the acknowledged prince among the Christian humanists, was at least Luther's intellectual peer, and Wittenberg's Melancthon was scarcely inferior. But neither had Luther's sense of the limits of reason in biblical exposition and the formulation of credal statements. Neither Zwingli nor Calvin came to their enterprise as theologians and reformers from anything like Luther's sense of anguish under the accusing burden of sin. Both Zwingli and Calvin approached theology largely as an intellectual exercise, a fact abundantly attested by such rationalizing constructs as predestination and a symbolic representation of the elements in the Lord's Supper, to cite only two examples. Both reformers found it impossible to let doctrine rest on Scripture alone. Neither was ever able to shed the spirit of a rationalizing humanism.

And so we return to the essential mystery, the remarkable collapse of Lutheranism at the very graveside of Dr. Martin Luther. We ask again, how, in view of 34 years as a lecturer on the books of the Bible, and almost as many years as court preacher; how, in view of his massive correspondence and literary output; and how, in view of his commanding and authoritative presence in the conspicuous setting of the Reformation of the 16th century, could the next generation of Lutherans have turned to doubts and misgivings about the fundamental teachings of Holy Scripture?

No satisfactory answer can ignore the Renaissance setting of the 16th century Reformation. We can only respond to the question in terms of Martin Luther's ability to use all the contemporary paraphernalia of scholarship and yet subordinate himself absolutely to the written Word. He alone among the Christian scholars of his time, was capable of using an outstanding competence in unquestioning and reliant trust in the written revelation of God to man. No authority, methodology, or spirit, least of all the persuasions of his own reason, was permitted to stand in the way of what God has said to man in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures.

When Luther died on February 18, 1546, and his presence was no longer at hand, the spirit of the Renaissance returned to its sway over many of the theologians of the time. Luther's capacity for accepting God's Word in its simplicity and complexity had been unique. It would take another generation before Lutherans would return to the ground on which the Wittenberg monk had stood so steadily and so steadfastly. Words spoken by Luther in 1546, the very year of his death, suggest that he would not have been surprised by a reading of the religious history of Germany during the generation following his death. His premonitions were expressed thus:

"Up to this time you have heard the real, true Word; now beware of your own thoughts and wisdom. The devil will kindle the light of reason and lead you away from the faith, as he did the Anabaptists and the Sacramentarians ... Therefore pray earnestly that God may preserve the Word to you, for things will come to a dreadful pass." (Quoted in Bente, *Hist. Int.* 93)

What Luther did not foresee was the history of political events which were to occur after his death. During his active years as a reformer from 1517 to 1546, Luther and his reforms had been the beneficiaries of the external events and the political developments of the time. We shall see that military and political history after Luther's death were to militate against the preservation of Lutheran orthodoxy.

A superficial view of the Reformation all too often takes a simplistic view of Luther's struggle against two main adversaries, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, on one hand, and the four incumbents of the papal throne, Leo X, Adrian VI, Clement VII, and Paul III, on the other. While it is true that both the emperor and the papacy were hostile to the Lutheran

Reformation, nothing could be further from reality than the thought that papal and imperial power worked in harmony to destroy a common enemy.

A brief review of the history of those years will illustrate how the envy and the conflicting political interests of pope and emperor was the ground and opportunity on which an incipient Reformation was nurtured in its first thirty years.

When Luther nailed his challenging 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg in 1517 the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, was an old man nearing the end of his life. He had been emperor since 1493. The obvious candidate to succeed him was his grandson, Charles, but the pope opposed his candidacy on the grounds that the personal wealth and political inheritance of Charles was certain to be a threat to the power of the papacy. The young Charles, born in 1500, had come into an unparalleled inheritance. He was the heir of four grandparents, each leaving a legacy that would make Charles the potential master of all Europe. His inheritance included Spain, with its holdings in the New World, the Netherlands, Burgundy, the Hapsburg Empire, and many lesser holdings scattered over Europe.

The pope was determined to prevent the election of Charles at all cost, and bent every effort to that end. The years 1517-1519 turned out to be the last two years of the life of Maximilian. They were busy years for papal maneuvers toward preventing the election of Charles. They were also the critical years in which a fledgling Lutheran movement was first stretching its wings. The pope had no time to waste on a heretical monk in Wittenberg, with the danger of the election of Charles an imminent threat.

Once history had taken its course in the election of Charles in 1519, papal political power was reduced to something not much greater than nuisance value. It could anathematize and excommunicate Luther. The time was past when it could act effectively against the Reformer.

Emperor Charles, despite conflicts of interest with the papacy, was a pious son of the church, a man of simple and sincere faith. Lacking any real grasp of theology, he was incapable of even entertaining the idea that a simple monk could be right and the established church as wrong as the reformers said it was. In the confrontation at Worms in 1521 the worst that Charles could do was to sign a futile imperial ban against Luther. He could not enforce it because he was in a personal bind which made it impossible for him to take effective steps against a growing reformation movement.

His predicament lay in the fact that Francis I, the King of France, threatened by the vast power of Emperor Charles, had provoked a war with the imperial forces. That conflict, known as the Hapsburg Wars, lasted during intermittent periods, from 1519-1559. While Charles was thus faced with a war on a western front, he was simultaneously threatened in the east by the resurgent power of the Ottoman Turks under a new leader, Suleiman the Magnificent. All of this meant that Charles was compelled to deal gingerly with the German Princes. The emperor desperately needed their full support in supplying men and money for his military campaigns in western and eastern Europe. It was no time to act aggressively toward Luther, the darling of the Smalcaldic princes. Luther's presence at the Diet of Worms in 1521 was only an incidental episode in a meeting to which the emperor had come for the primary purpose of currying favor with his princes, the men who provided him with the sinews of war. The same was true at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, well remembered by Lutherans for the reading of the *Augsburg Confession*, but important to Charles for the military and financial support which he sought.

Secondary to these military logistics Luther remained quite safe and entirely free to pursue his own strategy of reform. He was protected by the Electors, successively, of Saxony, who were loyal supporters of Charles in the wars against the French and the Turks. It was also fortunate for Luther that the elector, Frederick the Wise, was especially influential in the

counsels of Charles V. Never an avowed Lutheran, Frederick was universally respected as a man of the highest religious and political integrity. He had stood so high in the esteem of the papacy as to have been the current pope's candidate for the office of Holy Roman Emperor in 1519. Frederick maintained a posture of strict neutrality with respect to Luther's theology. It was an attitude that protected the elector from overt attack by pope and emperor, both of whom needed Frederick's support too much to place it in jeopardy by making an issue of Luther's theology.

By 1537 pope and emperor had come to temporary terms with their mutual hostility and they agreed on the calling of a general council of the church to be convened at Mantua. Charles had hoped that such a council might reconcile his Lutheran and Roman Catholic subjects. When the time came for the actual opening of the council, however, the pope had second thoughts about a council that might give a secular ruler, Charles V, undue influence in religious matters. The result was that the council did not assemble at all. The Council of Trent, convened ten years later, under changed political circumstances, was clearly under papal authority. It was supported by the Society of Jesus, the strong arm of the church, but not by Spain and Charles V.

Almost immediately after the death of Luther the Holy Roman Empire and France entered into a peace treaty, and a temporary truce ensued. There was also a cessation of imperial conflict with the Turks. Charles could breathe again, and he set out to resolve some of his own imperial affairs. This brought him into a disciplinary confrontation with some of the German princes. At the beginning of this encounter religion was not a primary issue. It soon became paramount, however, and the Smalcaldic War which followed pitted Lutherans against the emperor. The pope suddenly became friendly toward Charles. With financial assistance from Rome the Lutherans of the Smalcaldic League were crushed. Duke John Frederick of Saxony and Philip of Hesse were captured and imprisoned.

At this point Charles acted unilaterally to impose a religious settlement on the Lutherans. The Diet of Augsburg, 1547, compelled the Lutherans to compromise their faith by the terms of the Augsburg Interim which was to be operative until a church council might achieve a permanent settlement. The reaction of the Lutherans was so hostile to the Augsburg Interim that it was modified by the subsequent Leipzig Interim, a new document composed with the concurrence of Melancthon and some other Lutherans.

Charles V had won a war, but he had neither reformed nor pacified the true Lutherans. Matters went from bad to worse for him until the Religious Peace of Augsburg, 1555, which gave Lutherans an unrestricted religious liberty and the right to formulate their own doctrinal statements in principalities which, through the rulers, chose the Lutheran faith as the official religion of their principalities. Charles V abdicated his crown the following year.

It was in the context of these events after Luther's death, the Smalcaldic War, the Augsburg and Leipzig Interims, and the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, that the *Formula of Concord* was conceived, written, and adopted.

Many studies, some of them quite recent, have traced the story of the internal conflict among Lutherans from 1546 to 1577, and have called attention to the specific differences that divided the people who considered themselves the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation. The theologians who worked so carefully and patiently to restore the unity of the church and to revive and reestablish Lutheran doctrine have been honored in these writings. Let it suffice for us that we now review what these men said; that we take a summary look at each of the twelve articles of the *Formula of Concord*.

To be sure, four hundred years have elapsed since the *Formula of Concord* was adopted by the majority of German Lutherans. Our generation faces serious new theological problems,

but the basic doctrinal presuppositions of our faith are stated in the *Formula of Concord*. The fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion on which we stand today are stated in the clearest terms. And, above all, *The Formula of Concord* provides us with the primary rationale and methodology for our study of the Word of God. Our task is the same as the confessors of the 16th century, namely, to search the Scriptures, and to do it in all humility, acknowledging the limitations of our reason. We shall not dismiss the *Formula of Concord* as irrelevant because of the “different social and economic settings of the 16th and 20th centuries. Nor shall we dismiss it as a mere recording of the religious history of another age, no longer applicable to us. Our subscription to the *Formula of Concord* is given freely and taken seriously.

The Formula of Concord: Article I. Of Original Sin.

The doctrine of original sin was treated in a simple and explicit statement in Article II of the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530. Quite remarkably its wording anticipated problems that were to arise later. Reference was made to a time “since the fall of Adam,” and to men begotten in “the natural way.” The words pointedly excluded Adam and Eve before the fall, and Jesus, the Son of God, from the stigma of original sin. Original sin was referred to as “truly sin,” and as “condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost.”

In their formal response to Article II of the *Augsburg Confession* the Roman Catholic adversaries of the Lutherans rejected the Lutheran theology in these words: “It is manifest to every Christian that to be without the fear of God and without trust in God is rather the actual guilt of an adult than the offense of the newly born infant, which does not yet possess the full use of reason...” (Confutation II, Jacobs II, p. 210) The Confutation also rejected the concept, which the church had earlier condemned out of Luther’s writings, that “sin remains in a child after Baptism.”

The initial exchange, *The Augsburg Confession* vis-a-vis the Confutation, as well as Melancthon’s defense of *The Augsburg Confession*, made it plain that a theological difference of the first magnitude existed between Lutherans and the Roman Church with respect to their view of the doctrine of original sin. It is interesting to observe now that the beliefs affirmed in the *Confutation* are conformable to the view of most contemporary Protestants, many Evangelicals included, who find it impossible to accept the idea that God charges all men, as well as every infant, with the guilt of sin, and holds them all alike to its consequences, namely, death and damnation.

The conflict between Lutherans after 1546, however, ran along other lines. It became a struggle featured by misunderstandings in terminology, by the use, without discrimination, of literal and figurative phraseology, and by the failure to specify exact shades of meaning of the terms employed in theological constructs. That is not to say that the debate was characterized by mere semantic misunderstandings, or that the controverted issues were inconsequential. On the contrary, for example, the Epitome of the *Formula of Concord*, Art. I. par. 3 explicitly says that false teaching about original sin places in jeopardy “The chief articles of our Christian faith concerning creation, redemption, sanctification, and the resurrection of our body, and cannot co-exist therewith.”

The disputed question ran to the relationship of original sin to the *essence* of man. With the hindsight of the present we may now concede that the word “original” is unfortunate, if not misleading, in the context of the subject at hand. “Inherited sin” might have been better terminology because our sin did not originate in the creation of man. It originated in his fall into

sin. There was, therefore, a time between creation and the fall when man was not possessed of the stain and guilt of original sin, as *The Augsburg Confession* had plainly stated.

In spite of the clear and specific assertion of *The Augsburg Confession* some Lutheran theologians insisted that sin *is* of the very essence of man. The authors of the *Formula of Concord* rejected that view using theological terminology to refer to original sin as an “accident of history.” They called original sin a corruption of the original holiness of man, not an essential element in his being, humanity, and manhood.

Difficulties also arose from the use of the term “nature” of man as a synonym for the “essence” of man. Both Luther and Scripture refer to the “sinful nature of man” in figurative expressions descriptive of his present corrupted state, not of the created essence of his manhood. As the Solid Declaration of the *Formula of Concord* points out, Luther had said of sinful man, “Thy birth, thy nature, and thy entire essence is sin,” that is, sinful and unclean. Luther himself explains that by nature-sin, person-sin, essential-sin, he means that not only the words, thoughts, and works are sin, but that the entire nature, person, and essence of man are altogether corrupted from the root by original sin. That, clearly, was figurative language, not precise and discriminating speech.

Because if, as the adversaries said, sin is of the essence of man, then God created sinful man. Further, if sin is of the essence of man then Jesus Christ was either a sinful man or else not a man at all. On the contrary man was created holy and sinless, and Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, was the sinless Son of God.

The antitheses of the first article of the *Formula of Concord* warns against errors condemned by the ancient church and against current tendencies that in any way diminish either the seriousness, the consequences, or the personal responsibility of sinners for their own spiritual corruption. Original sin is referred to as “the root and fountainhead of actual sins.” The statement adds: “This hereditary evil is so great and horrible that only for the sake of the Lord Christ can it be forgiven before God in the baptized and the believing. Moreover, human nature, which is corrupted and perverted thereby, must and can be healed only by the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost, which, however, is begun only in this life, but will not be perfect until the life to come.

In our time few biblical doctrines have suffered more emphatic rejection than that of original sin. Not only mainline Protestants, but even serious Christians who accept the Bible without reservation have failed to grasp the fact that man is conceived and born in sin. When we see the Evangelical preacher, Billy Graham, with a world audience in the mass media, failing to proclaim a divine law that includes the doctrine of original sin we have some measure of the responsibility we bear to the world in our confession of the doctrine of original sin, and our testimony to the truth of Article I of the *Formula of Concord*.

The Formula of Concord: Article II. Of Free Will.

The title of Article II is somewhat a misnomer because the article deals most comprehensively with what Luther calls “The Bondage of the Will.” One may also add that the article is essentially a statement relating to the process of conversion. The authors of this article considered it a most important part of their confession because they believed that the views of their adversaries respecting the biblical doctrine of conversion were destructive of the concept of justification.

The article itself is couched in words that are simple and direct. It begins by asserting that the will of man may be considered in four time settings. The first of these is the will of man before the fall; the second, since the fall; the third, after regeneration; and the fourth, after the

resurrection. Only the state of man's will since the fall, they said, is at issue in a discussion of the doctrine of conversion. The question is; What powers does man have of himself in the spiritual realm? Is he able, before his regeneration by the Holy Spirit, to "dispose and prepare himself for God's grace," and, of himself, "accept the grace offered through the Holy Ghost in the Word and Sacraments?"

Their answer to this question was negative. If they had responded affirmatively their answer would have been in conflict with their previous statement in Article I of the *Formula of Concord* which had confessed the total moral and spiritual corruption of Adam and his heirs. The confessors said:

1. In spiritual things the reason and understanding of man is blind and understands nothing.
2. The unregenerate will of man is not only turned away from God, it is the enemy of God.
3. The inclination of unregenerate man is desire for that which is evil and contrary to God.
4. As little as a dead body can quicken itself to earthly life, so little can unregenerate man, who is spiritually dead, raise himself to spiritual life.
5. Conversion is effected by the Holy Ghost through the Word and the Sacraments.
6. Through the outward means of the Word the Holy Ghost opens hearts so that they are thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost. This conversion is solely the work of the Holy Ghost.
7. Christ says, John 15,5: *Without me ye can do nothing*. These words deny free will its powers and ascribes everything to God's grace; in order that no one may boast before God.

Contention with the religious adversaries of the confessors resulted from their view that there are three efficient causes of conversion, the Holy Spirit, his instrument, the Word, and third, the will of man. In other words, ignoring the total corruption of the will of man, they were saying that his will is able to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in bringing about conversion. Because of this view these people were called "synergists." The word is derived from a Greek term meaning "working together", a word that is part of scientific as well as theological terminology. The purpose of the authors of the *Formula of Concord* in this article was to affirm with all vigor that there could be no "working together" between God and man in the process of conversion, because since the fall the will of man is totally corrupt and the congenital enemy of God. Since synergism took many forms, the statement in the *Formula of Concord* became very lengthy, inasmuch as it was necessary to reject each of them in clear and precise Scriptural terms.

The erring views of the opponents generally fell between the following extremes: 1. The fatalistic view that all human experience is foreordained, and that men do what they do by the inner compulsion of that for which they are predestined. 2. The Opposite extreme was the belief that man is able, independently of the Holy Ghost, to grasp the Gospel and to be obedient to God's law. Between these extremes were the following points of view:

1. Man can make a beginning toward conversion which is then brought to completion by the Holy Ghost.
2. God draws those *who are willing* to himself and brings them to faith through the Holy Spirit.
3. Man can not begin his conversion, but by the aid of the Holy Ghost he can cooperate effectively in the process and completion of his own conversion.

4. After his conversion man can fulfill God's law perfectly, because God has exterminated the Old Adam within him.

5. God works conversion in sinners without the necessary use of the means of grace.

All these views notwithstanding, and in opposition to all of them, Article II of the *Formula of Concord* declares that there are only two effective or efficient causes in conversion, namely, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. "This Word man is to hear; however it is not by his own powers, but only through the grace and working of the Holy Ghost that he can yield faith to it."

In view of the popular rejection of the doctrine of original sin it is inevitable that human reason also turns away from the biblical doctrine of the bondage of the will. Just as Roman Catholics find a refuge from the full penalty of sin in purgatory, so many Protestants, and not a few Lutherans, find comfort in the notion that some freedom of their will, some merit in their character, assures them a personal advantage in the quest for salvation.

Here too, then, Article II of the *Formula of Concord* is a relevant statement for our time. Whoever places even the smallest reliance on himself for the attainment of eternal salvation is doomed. Our joy is that, our own enslaved will notwithstanding, our souls are secure in the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ and in the ministry of conversion effected by the Holy Ghost.

The Formula of Concord: Article III. The Righteousness of Faith Before God.

This article, treating the doctrine of justification, was included in the *Formula of Concord* primarily for the purpose of rejecting aberrations that had developed among Lutherans since the adoption of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530. The treatment of the doctrine of justification in the earlier confession was responsive to false Roman Catholic doctrine. Now, a generation later, some who had accepted the *Augsburg Confession* were modifying their views by saying that Christ is our righteousness only according to his divine nature. Others declared the opposite, that our Lord is our righteousness only according to his human nature.

Article III of the *Formula of Concord* responded to these errors by saying that "the entire Christ according to both natures" has "merited for us forgiveness of sins and eternal life." Article III further asserts that "God forgives our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding, present, or following." These words ruled out a meritorious disposition toward faith, meritorious works of any kind whatsoever, and the fruits of faith. Faith was called the instrument whereby we lay hold on Christ. An explicit warning was given to avoid the suggestion that a preceding contrition and that following good works were in any way to be conceived of as a part of the process of justification in which God in his grace imputes to us the righteousness of Christ.

In addition to warning against a separation of the divine and the human natures of Christ in the judicial declaration of the justification, Article III also warns against every tendency to confuse justification with that which follows it, namely, sanctification. No one should confuse the outcome of the new life of the regenerate with the operative function of the redemption which is the sole and single act of God which is effective in the justification of sinners.

The publication of a *Study of Generations* a few years ago and the persistence of Robert Brinsmead, editor of *Present Truth*, are eloquent reminders to us of the appalling fact that only a minority, even among professed Lutherans, really understand and truly believe the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Hence the testimony of Article III will continue to be a vital confession among us. Together with similar statements in the other confessions (AC IV, Ap IV,

SA III, 13), it is our bulwark against the temptations of reason, and a loss of faith in the explicit terms of God's plan of salvation.

The Formula of Concord. Article IV. Of Good Works.

While the idea that man can earn his salvation through good works was rejected by the first generation of Lutherans in the *Augsburg Confession*, that document did not include an article under the specific heading of good works. The concept of salvation through faith, without the deeds of the law, was central in Reformation theology. Almost all Christians who accepted the principles of the Reformation were agreed that good works are the fruit of faith, not the basis for forgiveness and salvation.

Yet, aberrations even in the vital doctrine of good works were soon to appear. A number of people were saying that since good works are the consequence of justification, and that the regenerate always do good works, it could be said that good works were necessary to salvation. This was a manner of speaking that was dangerous, because it so readily confused the efficient means of salvation, namely the redemption, with what was only a consequence of faith, that is, good works.

Others, in an excess of zeal, went to the extreme position of saying that good works are detrimental to salvation. This was true, of course, but only when good works were relied on to achieve salvation. Though both phrases, "good works are necessary to salvation," and "good works are detrimental to salvation," could be rightly understood, the offending phrases could also be taken in an erroneous sense. Article IV was, therefore, at great pains to indicate that good works have no causal role in effecting salvation but, equally truly, that good works resulting from faith are not detrimental to justification, but, on the contrary, constitute sinful man's obedience to the law of God.

Thus Article IV put good works in the perspective of justification and warned against the mischievous phraseologies of "the following modes of speaking; when it is taught and written that good works are necessary to salvation; also that no one has ever been saved without good works; also, that it is impossible to be saved without good works." The warning was also given that "We reject and condemn as offensive and detrimental to Christian discipline the bare expression, when it is said: Good works are injurious to salvation."

Having offered these correctives for words and phrases that are so readily misunderstood, Article IV admonished Christians to "Exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith and gratitude to God."

Though the *Formula of Concord* was primarily concerned with differences within the ranks of the Lutherans, it also took notice of errors emanating from Switzerland, as in the statement: "We also reject and condemn the dogma that faith and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost are not lost by indwelling: sin, but that the saints and elect retain the Holy Ghost even though they fall into adultery and other sins, and persist therein." The concept of the perseverance of the saints, the idea that "once a Christian, always a Christian," an integral part of Calvin's doctrine of predestination, was not acceptable to the Lutherans.

Misconception with reference to justification by faith leads inevitably to a faulty understanding and definition of good works. It is so tempting to think that we can, in some way, please God by the good that we do and say. We like so much to think that God will be satisfied if we do our best. But Article IV of the *Formula of Concord* is a much needed reminder that the best we can do is only sin in God's sight and that he takes pleasure only in the words we speak and the deeds we do out of love for our Savior. *The Formula of Concord* does not, on

that account, devalue the worth of good works, but admonishes Christians to “exercise themselves in good works as a declaration of their faith and gratitude to God.”

There never was a greater need for our testimony to the truth that the basis for our salvation is the merit of Christ. But, the measure of our faith is the performance of good works done out of love, for the glory of Christ. We must remember, too, that the unredeemed can not see our faith. They do see the works that we do.

The Formula of Concord: Article V. Of the Law and the Gospel.

Article V, like the first four, continues the confession’s treatment of God’s plan of salvation. While the *Augsburg Confession* had been clear and comprehensive in affirming that the sinner is not saved by his own merits or good works, a problem had developed as to the meaning of the word “Gospel.” The Holy Scriptures as well as the theologians had sometimes used the word Gospel as denoting the whole counsel of God for the salvation of men. That usage included the concept that God does indeed will that men obey the law. It referred to the preaching of the law as a necessary preparation for the hearing and the preaching of the Gospel.

The experience of the generation after the adoption of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530 and the reading of the *Smalcald Articles* of 1537 had made it necessary to define both law and Gospel in more precise terms so as to make the distinction between them explicit.

In formulating their definitions the authors of the *Formula of Concord* were at great pains to declare, first of all, that it is essential to divide the Word of God rightly, that is, to be careful about discriminating between the essence of the law, and the exact meaning of the word, Gospel.

They therefore said that though the law is a doctrine of God and that preachers ought to reprove sin and everything that is contrary to God’s will, nevertheless the Gospel, given in Word and Sacraments, stands alone as the means by which God conveys his grace to sinful men. The Gospel does not warn or reprove, it does not make demands, it only comforts and brings those who have not kept the law to the redeeming satisfaction of the death of Jesus Christ. suffered under the guilt of the law. The Gospel, narrowly and precisely defined, is not a preaching of repentance and reproof, but purely, and only, a preaching of grace, the offer of the merit of Christ and the love of God.

Making a proper distinction between law and Gospel has never been a simple matter. It is not now. We are well advised, therefore, to read, and reread Article V of the *Formula of Concord*. It is excellent instruction in this vital matter.

The Formula of Concord: Article VI. Of The Third Use of the Law.

This article was included in the *Formula of Concord* because certain extremists, desirous of outdoing Martin Luther in Lutheran orthodoxy, were saying that since the regenerate, namely converted sinners, are freed from the curse of the law by the blood and death of Jesus Christ, the law is therefore not applicable to them.

The article distinguished, first of all, the three uses of the law. First, the maintenance of outward order and decency in society; second, its use in leading men to a recognition of their sin, so they may turn to the Gospel for salvation; and, third, that Christians might have a divine directive for the conduct of their lives and their relationships with men in society.

The article conceded that while it is true that Christians are freed from the coercion and threat of the law, and are no longer under its bondage, they ought, in view of their redemption, to exercise themselves in the observance of the law. The law ought to be preached continuously and effectively, both to the regenerate and the unregenerate. God’s expectation for us, indeed

his will with respect to us, continues to be that we constantly exhibit the fruit of our faith in our obedience to the law and our love for our neighbors. In considering the fruits of faith we are to remember that all good that is done from personal vanity or in response to threats of punishment, are not good works in the sight of God. Only that is good which proceeds from a love of God.

Article VI of the *Formula of Concord* has most urgent insights for us right now. Looking at it carefully we may well be constrained to confess that our greatest weakness as orthodox Christians and confessional Lutherans has been the failure, in our personal lives, of measurable responses to the Gospel. It may suggest that we look carefully to our outward performance as believers. Contributions to charities and church treasuries is only one form of expression of a love to God. There are many others. But this is one that is measurable. Internal Revenue Service statistics show that the American population contributes to the church and to charities at the rate of about two and a half cents out of each dollar of income. Our own synodical reports indicate a response at about the same rate. We who believe that we have the truths of God, and know how blest we are, have reason to reexamine ourselves in the light of St. Paul's word: "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Rom. 13,10.

The Formula of Concord: Article VII. Of The Lord's Supper.

Although the doctrine of the Lord's Supper had been treated extensively in all of the earlier Lutheran confessional statements, the subject was included in the *Formula of Concord* because its authors feared the intrusion of Zwinglian and Calvinistic theology among the Lutherans. That danger, perhaps the most serious of all the menacing threats to Lutheran orthodoxy, was a reality that had to be dealt with again even though clear doctrinal lines had separated the Lutheran and Reformed theologies at the time of the adoption of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1530. Historically, it may be remembered, the primary role of the *Augsburg Confession* had been to reject sacramentarian tendencies that had originated in Switzerland and were spreading into Germany.

In support of their views regarding the Lord's Supper the authors of the *Formula of Concord* quoted the earlier confessions, and especially Luther's *Large Catechism*. The point at issue is explicitly made in this reference:

"whether in the Holy Supper the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present, are distributed with the bread and wine, and received with the mouth by all who use this Sacrament, whether they be worthy or unworthy, godly or ungodly, believing or unbelieving; by the believing for consolation and life, by the unbelieving for judgment? The Sacramentarians say No; we say Yes."

In the words of Article VII the Roman doctrines of Transubstantiation, the mass, and the adoration or worship of the elements are explicitly denounced. So also are the errors of the secret or hidden Calvinists in the Lutheran Church, as follows: 1. That only a symbolic interpretation of the words of institution may be made; 2. that only a symbolic presence of Christ exists in the Sacrament; 3. that the bread and wine are merely symbols of fellowship; 4. that they only represent the body of Christ; 5. that unworthy communicants do not receive the body and blood of Christ; and 6. that proper preparation for the Sacrament makes the sinner worthy. These heresies were rejected and the Scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper was expounded with reference to the earlier confessions.

Perhaps in no other instance was the humanistic tendency of the 16th century toward intellectual rationalization more apparent than in the Reformed interpretation of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Turning from the fantasy of the Roman Catholic Mass, the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the denial of the cup to the laity, the Reformed theologians had gone to the other extreme of draining the Lord's Supper of all sacramental meaning. In their symbolical definition they deprived communicants of all sense of both the mystery and the reality of Christ's sacrificial love.

Attempts to unite all Protestants in a common front against Roman Catholic political power and religious authoritarianism made it tempting to gloss over the differences in Reformed and Lutheran theology with respect to the Lord's Supper. In God's mercy the authors and supporters of the *Formula of Concord* stood fast, and faith in the real presence was preserved in Article VII which also confirmed the earlier statements in previous confessional affirmations.

We are going to need to be fully as zealous as they were. Unionistic altar fellowship is rapidly paving the way toward the subversion of this precious Sacrament of God's grace.

The Formula of Concord: Article VIII. Of The Person of Christ.

The great Lutheran Theologian, Charles Porterfield Krauth, has praised this article of the *Formula of Concord* in the following statement: "In all confessional history there is nothing to be compared with it in the combination of exact exegesis, of dogmatic skill, and fidelity to historical development. Fifteen centuries of Christian thought culminate in it." (*The Conservative Reformation*, p.316)

As Krauth suggests, the doctrine of the person of Christ had been debated from the very beginning of the New Testament Church. The *Ecumenical Creeds* had treated the subject, and Lutherans had made specific statements in the very first years of their existence as a unified religious group. When the *Formula of Concord* was in preparation it was not so much a matter of Lutheran internal disagreement as it was the danger of heretical views emanating from the disciples of Zwingli and Calvin. Indeed false doctrine concerning the two natures of Christ stemmed from errors that had developed in association with the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

In its simplest terms it really was a question as to whether there were two Christs, one human, the other divine. The confessors answered the question in twelve positive statements which we may summarize as follows:

1. There is one Christ. He is both the Son of God and the Son of man.
2. The divine and human natures are not mingled with respect to their substance.
3. All the properties of divinity are in Christ.
4. All the properties of humanity are in Christ.
5. Though the properties of divinity and humanity both exist in Jesus Christ, they are not mixed together, but they are together, as in the case, for example, of the body and the soul of the human being.
6. In Christ God is man, and man is God.
7. Mary bore a man-child who is the Son of God. Therefore she is the mother of God.
8. It was not a mere man who suffered for us, it was God incarnate in His Son, who, in his exaltation, exercised the divine majesty.
9. The person of Christ is not to be divided, but neither are his properties to be confounded with one another. His human nature is not annihilated, nor is one nature changed to the other. Christ is, and remains to all eternity, God and man in one undivided person. This truth, next to the Holy Trinity, is the highest mystery, upon which our only consolation, life, and salvation depends.

A rigorous doctrinal discipline and painstaking theological scholarship led to the precise statement of Article VIII of the Formula of Concord. We shall neglect its careful reading at our great peril. We have seen how misunderstandings of this article nullified the sacramental character of the Lord's Supper. Any infringement of it, now or at any other time, tends toward the negation of salvation theology. The article is fully relevant now because if Jesus Christ is not what he said he was, then we have no hope of salvation.

The Formula of Concord: Article IX. Of The Descent of Christ to Hell.

This article appears to have been included in the *Formula of Concord* to put a stop to fruitless speculations as to the physical facts of Christ's descent into hell. There had been some debate as to whether Christ descended into hell in his human or his divine nature, or whether it was in both natures. Was the descent a part of his exaltation, or a feature of his humiliation? Was his descent into hell a part of the atonement?

The confessors simply asserted what was taught in Scripture, namely, that "the entire person, God and man, after the burial descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his might." Unlike the other doctrinal statements in the *Formula of Concord*, the authors of this brief ninth article did not offer proof texts from Scripture. They were content to make reference to evidence in a sermon Martin Luther had preached on the subject at Torgau in 1533. (See the text of this sermon in H. E. Jacobs, *The Book of Concord*, Vol. II, 249-53)

The Epitome of the *Formula of Concord* declared that since the article of faith dealing with the descent of Christ into hell can not be comprehended by the sense or by our own reason, but must be grasped by faith alone, "it is our unanimous opinion that there should be no disputation concerning it, but that it should be believed and taught only in the simplest manner."

In his sermon at Torgau Luther had said that it was enough to know that Christ had destroyed death and the power of the devil. He quoted Matthew 16, 18 which says that in view of the atonement "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against the church. He refused to speculate on the physical "how" of the descent into hell, saying that it sufficed to believe what the Scriptures taught and the *Apostles' Creed* affirmed, namely that "before he arose and ascended into heaven, and while yet lying in the grave, he also descended into hell, in order that he might deliver us from it who were prisoners in it; just as he became subject to death and was laid in the grave; just so that he might deliver us therefrom."

The Formula of Concord: Article X. Of Church Rites, Which Are Called Adiaphora Or Matters of Indifference.

From the very beginning of their religious experience the Lutherans had made much of the Christian liberty, encouraged within a broad frame, which the Holy Scriptures sanctioned. Luther taught that Christians might establish religious practices and formularies of worship within the limitation that no clear instruction or command of God be violated. The Calvinists, on the other hand, had been extremely restrictive in insisting that in the church Christians may only carry out such rites of worship as God specifically demands. The Roman Church had taken another course in making some features of worship compulsory even though they had no divine command.

In response to these attitudes, the writers of the *Formula of Concord* declared that they recognized the existence of rites "instituted for propriety and good order." They also recognized the right of an individual congregation, "according to its circumstances, to change

such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God" so long as frivolity was avoided and forbearance exercised toward the weak. It added that no congregation should criticize another because its external ceremonies differ from their own. No practice or rite, however, should be declared an *adiaphoron* unless it was genuinely a matter of indifference as far as the Word of God was concerned.

Debate had been stimulated over the *adiaphora* because the Interims had demanded that Lutherans give way in external practice as a ploy that really envisioned the surrender of substantive doctrinal positions. In such cases, the confessors declared, even the *adiaphora* should not be surrendered. They should be retained as a witness to their convictions in doctrinal matters so as not to "make a show or feign the appearance, as though our religion and that of the papists were not far apart, thus to avoid persecution, and eventually fall into departure from pure doctrine of the Gospel and true religion."

We still live under that same freedom of expression and liberty of personal preference that characterized the Lutheran Reformation from Luther to the *Formula of Concord*. It is readily forgotten at a time when some of us may have looked on with stolid disapproval where efforts have been made to modify the sounds and rubrics of worship.

The Formula of Concord: Article XI. Of God's Foreknowledge and Election

Calvin's doctrine of predestination had been in print for some time before the writing of the *Formula of Concord*. That is the likely reason an article on this subject, God's Foreknowledge and Election, was included in the *Formula*. There had been no dissension about this article among the Lutherans.

The article begins by making the appropriate distinction between the two terms, 'foreknowledge, and 'election.' To know that an action will occur in the future, it was said, is not the same as being the effective cause of that action. The article further asserted that foreknowledge applies to all men, election applies only to the godly.

The writers of the article say that there is no need to ask frivolous questions about the secret counsels of God, but rather to be content with what God has revealed to us, namely:

1. That God desires the salvation of all men.
2. That Christ calls all sinners to himself.
3. That election and salvation are the gifts of God's grace.

4. The fact that many are called and few chosen simply means that many do not hear God's Word, but despite it and harden their hearts, and in this manner foreclose the ordinary way to the Holy Ghost, so that he cannot perform his work in them, or, when they have heard it, make light of it again and do not heed it, for which not God or his election, but their wickedness is responsible.

The *Formula of Concord* rejected the idea categorically and absolutely that:

1. God does not desire the repentance and salvation of all men; and that
2. God is not really sincere and in earnest about his call to all men.

While affirming their rejection of these views the confessors warned against any thought that there is in some of us a cause, or reason for God's election, that lies within us. Rather, they said, the mercy of God and the holy merit of Christ is the only basis for our election.

As in the case of the doctrines of the person of Christ and the real presence in the Lord's Supper, Reformed theologians were following the intellectual bent of the Renaissance in their inability to take God's Word, in plain view in Holy Scripture, as ultimate authority with respect to the doctrine of election. They were not capable of setting philosophic logic and human wisdom aside in favor of God's superior wisdom. They just could not accept a divine logic that

defies human understanding. If there was an election to salvation then, they thought, there must be a consequent predestination to damnation. They took the abhorrent view that God has predestined an unknown number of sinners to everlasting damnation.

In 19th century America some Lutherans fell prey to a modified Calvinism that believed that God elected some sinners in view of their faith. Thank God the election controversy among Lutherans came to an end. And praise Him also for the fact that new generations of theologians and churchmen developed a renewed commitment to the *Formula of Concord*.

The Formula of Concord: Article XII. Of Other Factions and Sects

At the conclusion of the Epitome of this article we are told that the *Formula of Concord* was devised as a "brief and simple explanation of the controverted articles, which for a time have been debated and taught controversially among the theologians of the *Augsburg Confession*."

As a matter of fact, however, only the first six, and the ninth and tenth articles conform to that rubric. Articles VII, of the Holy Supper, VIII, of the Person of Christ, and XI of God's Foreknowledge and Election were promoted by doctrinal positions originating in Calvin's theology. The last article, XI, Of Other Factions and Sects, is a kind of catch-all included in order to take note of heretical theologies outside the pale of the mainline groups, The Roman Catholics, The Reformed, and the Lutheran. This was done in the way that a modern theologian might refer to Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian Scientists, Unitarians and Universalists, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and some even more exotic contemporary cults.

The listing of these sects in Article XII includes the Anabaptists, the Schwenckfeldians, the New Arians, and the Anti-Trinitarians. Apart from the specific enumeration of the false teachings of these groups, this polemic is a reminder of the political setting of the 16th century Reformation. Staunch Roman Catholic kings and princes, including Henry VIII of England, had pointed to the politics of the Anabaptists and said that their rebellion was the inevitable outcome of religious reformation. Lutherans were at great pains to dissociate themselves from the anarchy of the Anabaptists and to say that religious reform by no means included political revolution.

Glancing at the errors cited in the faith and the practice of the four groups referred to we may take for granted a faulty Christology, rejection of the apostolic doctrine of the Trinity, rejection of the means of grace in their biblical sense, and a distorted view of God's plan of salvation. What gives added interest to references to some of these sects is the manner in which 16th century Lutherans revealed their social and political attitudes. Very early the Anabaptists had given the Reformation a black eye by saying that secular government is not pleasing to God, that a child of God can not participate in political affairs, and that it is sinful to take an oath of homage to a political prince. Oaths, for any purpose whatever, were forbidden by the Anabaptists. They denied the government the right to impose capital punishment. Christians were denied the right to possess personal property and were compelled to surrender their goods to a socialistic common treasury. Even more restrictive was the Anabaptist view that Christians could not serve as innkeepers, merchants, or manufacturers of arms or the instruments of war. On the other hand, divorce was permitted anyone whose spouse did not share the Anabaptist faith. It is easy to see what consternation these views of the Anabaptists would create, and more than tragic to recall that a hundred thousand lives were lost in a blood-bath resulting from their anarchy and their revolutionary attitudes.

We may note, however, that the writers of the *Formula of Concord* were considerate enough to express sympathy for these groups which "had been victims at a time when no place

or room was given to the pure Word of God and all of its sincere teachers and confessors were persecuted, and the deep darkness of the papacy still prevailed, and poor simple men... embraced whatever was called the gospel and was not papistic."

As we look at the censure of these 16th century sects in a 20th century perspective we are bound to observe that many of the condemned social, political, and religious doctrines and ideologies are still alive and well. Arianism and Anti-Trinitarianism are probably stronger than they ever were. The denial of original sin, the virgin birth, the efficacy of the Sacraments and the real presence in the Lord's Supper is widespread in the mainline Christian denominations. Recently they have also been infecting the Lutheran Church. The socialistic principles of the Anabaptists, so strongly condemned by 16th century Lutherans, is now the way of life of the Communist nations of the world.

Even the cursory look we have here taken at the doctrinal content of the *Formula of Concord* reveals how extensively it is concerned about Jesus Christ as Savior and Redeemer. The twelve articles boldly and clearly acknowledge Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, as the Savior of sinners. Its emphasis is on his person and work.

The Formula is really not a treatment of religious reform as is the case in many of the articles of the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology*. It has little to say about the church as an ecclesiastical structure, about civil government, about monasticism or other practical arrangements. It is, in a way, a careful exposition of the Second Article of the *Apostles' Creed*, an enlargement of Martin Luther's explanation of the Second Article.

In the second place, the *Formula of Concord* is firmly based on the Holy Scriptures. Though neither this nor the other confessions have a formal article on the Bible, the whole document is explicitly derived and structured from the Scriptures, and from nothing else. Even Luther's *Catechisms*, not specifically written in opposition to error, do not make specific confessional statements about the Bible. The reason is the fact that in the 16th century all Christian groups accepted fully the divine origin and content of the Bible. Intellectual challenges to the total veracity of the Word were to come later. The 16th century confessors felt no need to labor a point that was not in dispute.

In his remarkable and important book, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions* Ralph Bohlmann says: "For the Confessions, Holy Scripture is the divinely authored and infallible Word of God throughout which God speaks the condemnatory word of Law and the forgiving word of Gospel in order to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. As God's own speech, the Scriptures have God's own authority and power, not only as the church's doctrinal and ethical norm, but also as the content of God's message, which awakens men from the death of sin to the life of Christ." (p. 137)

The authors of the *Formula of Concord* asked that their doctrinal statements be judged by the "prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament alone" as the only "test stone" as to "whether they are good or evil, right or wrong." They referred to the *Augsburg Confession* as having been "thoroughly grounded in God's Word," and they undertook to "reduce to a brief compass" a summary of doctrine "brought together from God's Word."

Their first statement, under the heading, "The Foundation, Rule, and Standard Whereby all Dogmas Should be Judged According to God's Word," was this: "First, we receive and embrace with our whole heart, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged."

In order to apply the ground-rule of commitment to the revealed and written Word of God they were, of course, obliged to proceed to exegetical treatments of the passages of

Scripture to which they turned for evidence and authority for the confessional statements which they made. They knew, as Dr. Bohlmann has stated it, that: "What God is saying in his Law and Gospel can only be heard through the ears of a Spirit-illuminated grammatical exegesis that employs principles of interpretation consonant with the nature, contents, and purposes of God's Book of Life." (p. 124)

The confessors of 1577 also recognized and reaffirmed the truths of the classic doctrinal summaries that had been produced by previous generations of Christians. They bound themselves confessionally to the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed* in which, they said, "the true Christian doctrine, in a pure, sound sense, was collected from God's Word into brief articles or chapters." Referring to the *Augsburg Confession* they said that "since in these last times God, out of special grace, has brought the truth of his Word to light again from the darkness of the papacy through the faithful service of the precious man of God, Dr. Luther, and since this doctrine has been collected from, and according to, God's Word into the articles and chapters of the *Augsburg Confession*... we confess... (this) as our symbol for this time... because it has been taken from God's Word and is founded fully and well therein..." They added, similarly, that the *Apology* is "confirmed by clear, irrefutable testimonies of Holy Scripture."

The confessors accepted the *Smalcald Articles* in which, they said, "Some articles are explained at greater length from God's Word..." They also confirmed Luther's *Catechisms* "because the Christian doctrine from God's Word is comprised in them in the most correct and simple way and, in like manner, is explained as far as necessary."

Taking the previously mentioned confessions as a single unit the confessors said that "In the pure churches and schools these public common writings have been always regarded as the sum and model of the doctrine which Dr. Luther, of blessed memory, has admirably deduced from God's Word..." In conclusion they confessed that "As we lay down God's Word, the eternal truth, as the foundation, so we introduce and quote also from these writings as a witness of the truth and as the unanimously received correct understanding of our predecessors who have steadfastly held to the pure doctrine."

An observance of the 400th anniversary of the *Formula of Concord* ought to be something more meaningful than the mere remembrance of the addition of another symbol to the catalog of Lutheran confessions. The *Formula* does indeed, as we have seen, have its own high intrinsic merits, and we value this last Lutheran confession highly. But beyond that, the truth is that the adoption of the *Formula of Concord* had the broad value of preserving the integrity of the Lutheran faith so articulately presented to the world by the first generation of reformers at Wittenberg. Martin Luther's restoration of apostolic doctrine, his proclamation of a Christ-centered Gospel based on the words of Holy Scripture, had proved to be a fragile heritage, so soon beset by so many effective assaults of Satan.

The *Formula of Concord* restored that heritage, saved Luther's *Catechism*, the *Augsburg Confession*, and its *Apology* and the *Smalcald Articles* from oblivion. It is not even too much to say that the *Formula of Concord*, with its Christological and soteriological emphasis, preserved the three *Ecumenical Creeds* in their ancient sense and meaning.

As we have seen, the restoration of religious peace brought about by the adoption of the *Formula of Concord* followed a thirty year period of theological anarchy. Melancthon himself, as strong and as theologically perceptive as the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology* had shown him to be, fell into the snare of rationalizing self-deception. Others, most zealous of their loyalty to Luther, fell into the trap of a self-defeating excess of zeal that nullified and obscured the very truths they sought to uphold. The outstanding American Lutheran theologian, Theodore E.

Schmauk, wrote that ultimately these conflicts penetrated “to the difference between faith, divinely born, and truth, humanly grasped, as ultimate sources of spiritual life.” (p. 462) A new theological scholasticism was bending to the vanities of reason and the interests of political expediency.

The adoption of the *Formula of Concord* not only turned theology back to submission to apostolic and prophetic witness, it blocked the road that had been leading to a false ecumenicity between Lutherans and Calvinists. Political interests had long sought a union between Protestants to counter the papacy and the Catholic states of Europe. Queen Elizabeth I of England was sputtering in anger over the pope’s recent gratuitous action in excommunicating her. She was prepared to give financial assistance to support a leveling of religious conviction in favor of a united Protestantism. The *Formula of Concord* stopped that movement in its tracks.

Schmauk declares that “The *Formula of Concord* saved the church from Roman attacks and Romanizing teaching on one side, and the Reformed tendencies on the other, that were creeping in from without. It preserved the church both from the extremely rigid partisans of Luther and from the compromising Philipists who were agitating and destroying it from within.” (p. 825) In truth, the *Formula of Concord* gave the Lutheran Church a new vitality, a new unity, a new self-reliance, and the dignity of its reaffirmation of total dependence on the Word and the love of God. Indeed the *Formula of Concord’s* historic significance has been scarcely less than its inner intrinsic value. C. P. Krauth is hardly exaggerating when he calls it “the amplest and clearest Confession in which the Christian Church has ever embodied her faith.” (p. 302)

The first six signatures on the *Formula of Concord* were those of its principal editors, Andreae, Chemnitz, Selnecker, Chytraeus, Musculus, and Cornerus. Within two years the rulers of eighty-five principalities and cities and over eight thousand theologians, pastors and teachers had signed the document. They represented a majority of the Lutherans in Germany. The signatories actually stood for a broader formal concurrence than had prevailed for the *Augsburg Confession* or, for that matter, for any single Protestant confessional statement. The disintegration of Lutheranism had been stayed. Before the end of the century Denmark, Sweden and Hungary had approved the *Formula of Concord*.

Despite the *Formula of Concord’s* frequent use of the word ‘unanimous’ the adoption of the confession was by no means unanimous. Rulers and pastors with Calvinist leanings declined. Some others found the confession acceptable in its theological terms, but refused their signatures on political grounds. A few said that a new confession was not needed, that the *Augsburg Confession* sufficed. While some of the original signers later withdrew their commitment, many more who had refused to sign before 1580, did so at a later date.

Lutheran immigrants to America brought their *Book of Concord* with them, but, more frequently than not, a full and formal subscription to the *Smalcald Articles* and the *Formula of Concord* was withheld. This was true in the confessional commitment of our forbears in the Norwegian Synod, founded in 1853. Today a full subscription to the entire *Book of Concord* is made by the Lutheran bodies formerly joined in the Synodical Conference.

Outside these Lutheran denominations confessional subscription tends to be perfunctory. The American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America make a distinction between the *Ecumenical Creeds*, the *Augsburg Confession* and Luther’s *Small Catechism* and the later confessions. The Lutheran World Federation makes a similar distinction. But, as we have said, the subscription of these bodies to the Lutheran Confessions is perfunctory. Fellowship among them is not contingent on any serious enquiry as to whether each does, in fact, teach and preach the Word in conformity with the spirit and the letter of the Lutheran Confessions. No questions are asked about whether the fellowshiping denominations take the

attitude toward Scripture that is the ground and the hallmark of the Lutheran Confessions. The trend among liberal Lutherans is to make extremely vocal statements about subscription to the Lutheran Confessions while negating their modern relevance on the ground of the inapplicability of the conditions of life of the 16th century to those of our time. They accept the Confessions as historical documents of great value which, however, are not literally binding upon the church of the 20th century.

I believe that our Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and those in fellowship with us, do take the confessions seriously. I believe that we concur both in word and practice with the serious challenge of Ralph Bohlmann's stricture: "Subscription to the Lutheran Confessions means that the contemporary Lutheran interpreter of the Scriptures accepts not only the conclusions of the biblical exegesis that constitutes the doctrinal content of the confessions, but also the hermeneutical principles employed by the confessors in reaching their conclusions." (p. 36)

Among those who have chronicled and interpreted the history of the church few have equaled the massive volume and scope of the work of Philip Schaff, the author of the twelve volume *History of the Christian Church*, (1883-93) and the editor of the *Creeds of Christendom* in three volumes.

For Schaff the adoption of the *Formula of Concord* was a tragic event because it blocked, or at least delayed, the ecumenical unity of Protestantism. He regretted the failure of a union of Lutheran and Reformed churches in the 16th century. He was willing to accept a sublimation of distinctive Lutheran doctrine to the rationalistic persuasion of a broad Reformed synthesis. But, fortunately, history is not enacted in terms of the wishes of historians. But in Schaff's case we must confess that wishful thinking has come depressingly near to prophetic reality. In his *Creeds* Schaff says:

"The spirit of Melanchthon could be silenced, but not destroyed, for it meant theological progress and Christian union. It revived from time to time, in various forms, in Calixtus, Spener, Zinzendorf, Neander and other great and good men, who blessed the Lutheran Church by protesting against bigotry and the overestimate of intellectual orthodoxy, by insisting on personal, practical piety, by widening the horizon of truth, and extending the hand of fellowship to other sections of Christ's kingdom. The minority which at first refused the *Formula of Concord* became a vast majority, and even the recent reaction of Lutheran confessionalism against rationalism, latitudinarianism, and unionism will not be able to undo the work of history, and to restore Lutheran scholasticism and exclusivism of the 17th century. The Lutheran Church is greater and wider than Luther and Melanchthon, and, by its own principle of the absolute supremacy of the Bible as a rule of faith, it is bound to follow the onward march of biblical learning." (Creeds I, p. 339 f)

In looking back over this extended quotation we may question the equation of "theological progress" with "Christian union." We may challenge what we think Schaff means by the phrase, "overestimate of intellectual orthodoxy." But most serious of all, indeed the reference which clearly shows where the dog lies buried, is the historian's comment about "widening the horizons of truth." In our understanding truth is truth. New truths may be discovered. Truths may become better understood. The application of a truth may be broadened. But truth is simply truth. While we may expand our knowledge and understanding of biblical truths, we cannot augment nor expand the truths themselves. We have the truths that

God has revealed to us, no more, no less. We make no contribution to truth by the combining of disparate theologies.

Yet we must, alas, unhappily confess that Schaff was historically prescient about our present time when he said that “the minority which at first refused the *Formula of Concord* became a vast majority.” For so it is. Perfunctory subscription to the *Formula of Concord*, notwithstanding, a majority of Lutherans today abandon the basic premise of the authority and veracity of Holy Scripture and have thus refused the great confession which we commemorate this year. They have indeed become a vast majority. Applying the same principles of hermeneutics which they apply to the Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, in their hands, become putty for molding into the convenient shape of contemporary religious thought.

Schaff’s words include a forecast of modern postures toward the written Word. Using the pejorative term “Lutheran scholasticism,” and faulting Lutheran confessionalism for its stand against “rationalism, latitudinarianism, and unionism,” he says that the Lutheran Church is greater and wider than Luther and Melancthon,” and that it is “bound to follow the onward march of biblical learning.” This the overwhelming majority of Lutherans have done, but it has been the learning of theologians who no longer engage in biblical studies in the spirit and under the assumptions of the Lutheran Confessions. Like countless thousands of people who mouth the words of the *Apostles’ Creed* with reservations about the virgin birth of Christ, the preponderance of Lutheran scholarship operates in an intellectual atmosphere foreign to that which informed and nurtured the learning” of the authors of the *Formula of Concord*.

We recall that by the eighth decade of the 16th century Lutheranism, as Wittenberg had known it, was hanging by an extremely slender thread. Scandal and villainy had robbed Elector John Frederick of his power to influence events. The Smalcaldic League, once Lutheranism’s right hand, had ceased to exist. The University of Wittenberg was in the hands of heterodox theologians. Lutheranism was all but done for. The *Formula of Concord* changed all that.

But that was 400 years ago. What is the state of Lutheranism today? In this year, 1977, the public press continues to report on doctrinal dissension among Lutherans. Only a handful of 20th century Lutherans subscribe fully to the word and intent of the Lutheran Confessions. A majority of the body of Lutherans are in the toils of the rationalistic and unionistic tendencies which brought the church to its knees after Martin Luther’s death. Lutheranism’s present virus is not so much a rejection, in explicit terms, of the distinctive doctrines defined in the Confessions as it is a hidden and malign renunciation of the formal foundation, the source of the theology of the Confessions.

How this comes out in theological parlance may be seen in Peter Brunner’s discussion of “The Present Significance of the Lutheran Confessions,” in the book, *The Unity of the Church* (Rock Island, Augustana, 1957, 1.90) where we have this tell-tale sentence: “The apostolic Gospel is not written letters, but the living Word.” Now it is true that Jesus Christ, the living Word, is the subject, indeed the very essence of the apostolic Gospel. To say, however, as Brunner does, that the apostolic Gospel is not written letters is to demean God’s revelation to man, actually to deny its divine origin and function. The truth is that apart from the written words of the Bible we have no living Word, no Savior Jesus Christ. It is patently deceptive to separate or make a distinction between words, and what those words say. An ulterior motive immediately suggests itself, that is, a desire to dispense with inconvenient words, to set aside ideas that may seem unacceptable. But any sensible and rational mind must recognize that if what any given words say is true, then the words themselves are true in the structure of the sentence in which they appear.

We may say, for example, that there is water in a bucket, and we may further wish to drink of that water. It would obviously be silly to say that we drink the water, not the words telling us about it. However, if a drink of water is unavailable to me apart from the words which tell me where I can get a drink, then the words and the water stand on the same level of credibility and utility. In a literal sense we may agree that Jesus Christ, the Savior, is infinitely greater than mere printed words. But since Jesus is inaccessible to us except through the printed words of the Bible, the value of those words take on infinite proportions. They assume a credibility equal to the Gospel enshrined in the words.

Another device used by some theologians as a hedge for rejecting unacceptable portions of Scripture is to say that the written Word is not the Gospel, it is only a witness to the Gospel. The inference that is made from devious reservations of this kind is that those words of Holy Scripture which do not perform the function of witnessing to the Gospel may be challenged on rational and scholarly grounds.

By this means, the virgin birth, miracles, including creation, and the record of historical events, not immediately related to the Gospel, may be called in question. Thus a historical-critical methodology, completely at variance with the principles of interpretation employed by the writers of the Lutheran Confessions, is used to reach conclusions not justified by the clear word of Scripture itself. The confessions, however, offer no reservations as to the revelation that God has transmitted to us, through verbal inspiration, in the prophetic and apostolic Word of the Old and the New Testaments. The Confessions not only refer to the Scriptures as an irrefragable authority, they also confess the entire truthfulness of the words that constitute those Scriptures.

In the *Apology* (XV, 17) we have the plain statement that “nothing can be affirmed of God’s will without God’s Word. Jesus said, ‘Search the Scriptures... they testify of me.’” The confessors did not consider theology a license to play games with words in such a way that a Gospel content is sought in words which, themselves, have something less than full credibility.

We are commemorating the *Formula of Concord*, a statement of faith which is in the highest magnitude of importance for authentic Lutherans. We are celebrating an event that took place four hundred years ago, the last such confessional declaration produced by the Lutheran Church. Does that fact explain the dismal state of Lutheranism today? Have we neglected, too long, the defenses of our doctrinal heritage?

Are we suffering now the penalty of regarding the Lutheran Confessions as a closed canon, the *Formula of Concord* its final statement? But even the authors of that last confession offered to make a more complete statement, to provide a fuller exposition of Scripture, if it should prove useful. C. P. Krauth has said that “As a rule of faith, the written revelations of God have been enlarged by successive additions, from the early records which form the opening of Genesis, on through the Old and New Testaments, until the finished temple stands before us in the Bible; so may the church, as God shall show her need, enlarge her confessions, utter more fully her testimony, and... express more amply her one unchanging faith. (p. 269f)

One of the objections that was raised against the proposal for a formal adoption of the *Formula of Concord* was the view that another confession was not needed; that the *Augsburg Confession* sufficed for the needs of the church. But it had not sufficed. And false teachers kept insisting that they accepted the statements of the *Augsburg Confession*, however much their own personal testimony disproved it. As it was, the errors of the zealots among the Lutherans, as well as Reformed and Roman influences demanded a further explication of the older confessions. History shows that the *Formula of Concord* quickly demonstrated its value as a harmonizing and unifying instrument, as well as being an effective new defense against false

doctrine. C. P. Krauth spoke the truth when he said: “Hopeless division, anarchy, ruin and absorption were the perils from which the *Formula of Concord* saved our church.” (p. 328)

Modern Lutheran scholars have confirmed the idea that new confessions may be needed for our time. In his *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* Robert Preus has said that we “need to study the conflicts of the past to settle similar controversies of our own day.” (I, 92) The most inclusive expression of this idea is in Edmund Schlink’s *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*. It is worthy of our most careful attention. He says: “Even the most solemn reaffirmation of the Confessions may be a denial of them, if the errors of the day are passed over in silence. Hence no confession of the church may be regarded as definitive in the sense of precluding the possibility of further confessions. All the confessions had their origin in confrontation of errors—this fact is inherent in the very concept of confessions, as the Confessions themselves and particularly the programmatic introduction to the *Formula of Concord* declares—and to admit this is to acknowledge that the *Book of Concord* cannot be regarded as the final and conclusive confession. At the very least the church, confronted with new heresies, will have to furnish up-to-date and binding interpretations of her official confessions. But also beyond this we must soberly reckon with the possibility, perhaps even the necessity, of meeting the invasion of new errors with the formulation of new Confessions.”

Schlink goes on to caution, however, that: “A single dogmatician cannot create new confessions; he cannot even provide binding elucidations of the existing valid confessions. Only the church, in the consensus of the faithful, can do these things. and it can do them only with the power of the Holy Spirit, who gathers, enlightens, and preserves the church. The dogmatician must, however, by discerning the spirits, alertly prepare, demand, and formulate those decisions of the church.” (p. 31)

It is neither inappropriate, nor without significance, that this convention should be observing both the 400th anniversary of the *Formula of Concord* and the 50th anniversary of Bethany Lutheran College. Some of us here are old enough to remember the tentative and fearsome undertaking of establishing an educational institution for the “little Norwegian” Synod. There were financial problems, and problems of leadership and management as well. There was no question about the purpose and the objectives envisioned for the college. The intervening time has brought our church the rich rewards of the dreams of our fathers. We are grateful that God has permitted our witness to the truth, our confession of faith, to continue these fifty years despite the formidable economic burdens that private education has faced everywhere.

There may be a difference in size, scale, and influence, but the purpose and witness of this college and seminary has been exactly the same as that of the University of Wittenberg from 1517 to 1546. If the comparison seems pretentious, it is not for lack of Bethany’s confessional purpose, only in the measure of our accomplishment as confessors.

Confession is the day to day, the continuing function of the Christian Church and all its authentic agencies. It takes place in the college and the seminary classroom, no less than in the congregational sanctuary. It is manifest in the spoken word and on the pages of Christian writing.

The published works of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, and later those of the confessors of the *Formula of Concord* were their quintessential confession. These men were uniquely qualified by special gifts of God. Our gifts may be of lesser magnitude, but our present obligation is no less. The members of a college, and even more, a seminary faculty have a primary obligation to their students. But beyond that is one not to be shirked, an obligation to scholarship itself. They owe the world, and more specifically those who support them, an

accounting of the time and resources of scholarship that their teaching roles give them. I am not thinking in such simplistic terms as the egregious demand "publish or perish!" I am thinking of the special obligation of members of the Bethany College and Seminary faculties to use the gifts that God has given them to make the kind of written scholarly confession that Luther and Melancthon made at Wittenberg. These are undertakings for which pastors and teachers may be qualified. But, given the growing complexity and the time-consuming nature of parish activity the burden of nurturing the church through written confessions of faith must rest primarily on faculties of Christian colleges.

Remember! It is four hundred years since the publication of the last formal Lutheran Confession. Consider that in that period of time the Holy and precious Word of God has come into intellectual disrepute. Rationalism, modernism, neo-orthodoxy, historical-critical hermeneutics and a flow of similar waves of doubt have washed over a once-solid belief in the verbal inerrancy and the total integrity of the Word of God.

The confessors of the 16th century faced the misinterpretation of Scripture relative to Christology and soteriology. Our scholars now face a threat to the divine Word itself. Our theologians and scholars must now be prepared for the grindingly hard work of shoring up faith in the Book of Life, a faith now near to extinction before the persistent assaults of Satan himself.

A restatement and redefinition of our biblical assumptions must now be made, and that in the best tradition of truth-seeking scholarship. Its final form must be readable, comprehensible, attractive and undeviatingly based on the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. Profound, scholastic, dry-as-dust exposition will not do. Simple and understandable assertion, always based on the biblical text, must take the place of vocabularies and phraseologies that defy understanding.

We justly rail at those who find religious values in speaking in glossolalic terms. But most modern theological monographs are almost as lacking in intelligibility. If anyone thinks that religion is so complex that it must be expressed in a scholastic gobbledygook he should take another look at the extraordinary lucidity of Luther's *Catechisms*, his sermons, or, for that matter even his doctrinal treatises.

American Lutheranism's contribution to theology has been negligible in relation to its extraordinary resources. Mention Walther, Schmauk, and Krauth and one begins to furrow one's brow over a lengthened list. In recent years much of the significant Lutheran literature has been produced in foreign countries, especially with reference to the Confessions. Though, fortunately, some of these works are now available in the English language, translations, more often than not, are crude and awkward.

Our problem is not merely that of making biblical and confessional learning palatable to reluctant readers, it is a matter of writing in such a way that God's Word becomes available to our people. The Bible itself teaches us how to communicate in simple and understandable terms. The Confessions show us how to write clearly and explicitly. Consider the explanation of the Second Article of the *Apostles' Creed*. It has been referred to as the most comprehensive sentence in the English language. We may not fully understand the wonders that those words relate. We are in no doubt about what they say.

Thus I return to my plea that professors and teachers, above all others, take in hand the vital task of Christian confession, the imperative duty of defending the Holy Scriptures against the sophistries of those who throw up road-blocks to simple and fervent faith in the words which God speaks to us. Our teachers in our own college and seminary have challenging

opportunities that are in no way less significant than those which faced the teachers at the University of Wittenberg in the 16th century.

Our synod, too, has grave responsibilities as a confessor of God's precious Word. We may not hide the candle of light and truth under a bushel; we do not have the option of permitting an unimpressive numerical strength serve as an excuse for silence before the sinister voices of those who subvert the Scriptures and the Confessions. We must realize that there are only a few of us left, only a fragmented cadre of confessors who still take the *Formula of Concord* and the other Lutheran Confessions seriously. Today the one doctrine that everyone in the 16th century accepted, the doctrine of Scripture, is openly defiled by professed Christians, and Lutherans as well.

It will not do to just stand and wring our hands. It is not enough to engage in a guerrilla war against false doctrine, taking cheap shots at our favorite heretics from the shelter of our obscurity. What is needed is that we take the example of the people who produced the *Formula of Concord*. Just remember the simple and sincere beginning of Andreae's six sermons, the revision of those sermons into plain doctrinal statements, and then the conferences, the editing, the re-writing, the gradual process of further editing, re-writing and refinement. To what purpose? To state clearly, and in true biblical terms, a true theology with respect to the important subjects treated.

Just that is what we need to do now. Simplistic references to old dogmatics texts, appeals to a fancied "old Missouri", or deference to elder statesmen in our religious heritage will not do. The battle must be taken to the enemy with the full armor of the Word. He must be met on his own ground. The words of our adversaries, their practices, their literature must be taken into account and analyzed carefully. It must be discredited where it is wrong and accepted where it conforms to Scripture. Nor can we face the heresies of our time under the assumption that all of our traditional verbalizations of doctrine are either absolutely correct, or beyond the need of restatement. We may find, even in the flawed statements of our opponents that we have said either too much or too little in certain of our positions, or that we have taken firm and unbending postures on the basis of inadequate study and application to God's Word.

We must be equally watchful of the Flacians, the zealots among us, in their falsifying exaggerations of orthodoxy. A biblical theology, painstaking in its attention to every nuance of biblical evidence, must be the goal of the exacting exegesis prerequisite to valid doctrinal formulation.

All of this is by no means to imply that the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has been negligent in either its teaching or its confessing mission. It has spent much time recently, for example, in an effort to arrive at a biblical statement on the doctrine of church and ministry. Doctrinal and exegetical studies are regularly on the programs of annual conventions, pastoral conferences and local church meetings. It is now preparing and distributing studies on the Lutheran Confessions which will appear in a five year sequence. It is sponsoring the publication of a harmony and resource book to make the content and the resources for study of the Lutheran Confessions more accessible. At its last two conventions the synod has instructed its officials to take steps to join with confessional Lutherans in America and abroad to produce a *Twentieth Century Formula of Concord* that will deal, as the official synodical resolution specified, "in precise biblical terms with the heterodoxies of our time, and that will establish the truth in accordance with Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions."

While it may seem pretentious to undertake a task of this magnitude, it is evident that nothing less will suffice to unite the small remnant of Lutheranism which still is serious about

its avowed acceptance of Scripture and its unqualified and unreserved subscription to the Lutheran Confessions.

The confessors of the 16th century reached out to people, some touched by Calvinism, some retaining vestiges of Romanism, some afflicted by extremist orthodoxies, and a host of others merely muddled by all the religious conflict. If Andreae, Chemnitz, and the other leaders had insisted on doctrinal discussions only and exclusively "within the framework of fellowship," there would have been no *Formula of Concord*. Their appeal was to all who wished to know and confess the true Word of God.

In past years our synodical officials and the members of the doctrinal committee have reached friendly hands across the Atlantic for the purpose of doctrinal discussions and the strengthening of the common bond of faith. Such relationships should continue in expanded terms. Special efforts should be made to refute false teaching by erecting the solid defense of clear and agreed-upon doctrinal statements which shall confess our Lutheran faith in well-conceived words, clearly and unambiguously expressing the truths of Scripture. Only thus can we expose the pseudo-Lutheranism which is so rapidly losing its Lutheran identity in the shoals of a spurious intellectualism and a now familiar Protestant syncretism.

Remember! There are only a few of us left. On this 400th anniversary of the adoption of the *Formula of Concord* there is only one way for us to make an appropriate and fruitful gesture of appreciation and remembrance. That way is to resolve to join hands with all who take the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions seriously and to declare our joint faith in new formulations of doctrine which shall take account of the errors and sects which imperil the church today. We have the example of Andreae, Chemnitz, Chytraeus, Selnecker, Musculus, and Cornerus and the host of confessing Lutherans who prepared the *Formula of Concord* at a time of great peril to the church. Their efforts produced great, wonderful, and divinely blessed results. God give us their patience, their resolve, their skill, and their determination. With God nothing shall be impossible.

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