

An Evaluation of the Lutheran Confessions

by Harold Wicke

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Sooner or later the human heart cries out as did David in Psalm 130: “Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” The converted heart well knows, “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” The Gospel announced in this Psalm alone can bring it comfort, “But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.” Then, in true fear and love of God, it goes forward to serve the Lord and to share the Gospel joy with others.

The Lutheran Confessions are filled with that Gospel joy. Already as children we became acquainted with one of the Confessional writings of the Lutheran faith, *Luther’s Small Catechism*; and as adults, as pastors, members and delegates of Lutheran congregations, we still rejoice in those words, for Luther taught us to say: “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death; that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness; even as He is risen from death, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.” We must look far indeed to find a more comforting summary of the Gospel than this, and we have no intention of ever giving it up.

The Gospel preaching instituted and initiated by the authors of the Lutheran Confessions has always brought forth visible fruits of faith. We of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod are a product of these Confessions. So is the Apache Mission, in whose midst this convention is being held. Sixteen years ago it was my privilege to visit the mission for the first and only previous time. On Saturday, April 29, 1950, I stood at a grave in the Peridot cemetery. There on a simple wooden cross was nailed a piece of tin. On it a grieving husband and father had meticulously engraved as fine a confession of faith in the face of death as is found in the annals of the saints of God: “Here lie asleep in Jesus my beloved wife and daughter.” Then follow the names and the date. It was 1936. “I love them forever. With God and Jesus I’ll be with them in heaven. When my time is up, O Lord, save my soul. I am your son. Amen.” A few days later in Lower Cibecue I was privileged to visit a tepee with the missionary. As we left, the lady, who knew that we had come many miles, said to me: “I hope the Lord will bring you safely back home.” Those words have stayed with me all this time. During the years that have passed, the fruits of the Gospel faith have increased visibly at this mission, as regular congregations have been established and are gradually assuming the support of the Gospel ministry in their midst. The Gospel confessed in the Lutheran Confessions has produced the fruit the Lord promised when He said that His Word would not return void.

So also in the world back home. I well remember an Easter Monday some years ago. The church was large, the service attended by only 23. The preacher felt sorry for himself, and angry because so few were present to appreciate his efforts. As he left the church, he walked behind a group of four elderly widows. One said to the other, “Since I heard the sermon this morning, I’m no longer afraid to die.” Six months later she was dead, and the preacher thought of her words and of his sin, as he conducted the funeral; but also of the power of the Gospel word which had consoled and strengthened her despite the preacher.

Memory recalls two services at St. Mark’s, Watertown, Wisconsin, which were of more than local interest in God’s kingdom. The one was conducted on May 14, 1961. Guests of honor were three men who had been in the ministry a total of 151 years, 140 years of which they had been members of St. Mark’s and on the faculty of Northwestern College, preparing young men to go into the world to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ as confessed in the Lutheran Confessions. The other was dated October 4, 1964, and observed the

anniversaries of four veteran teachers of St. Mark's Christian day school, who between them had taught 162 years in the Christian day schools of our Synod—162 years of teaching from that gem of all confessional writings, *The Small Catechism*, thus planting the souls of children committed to their spiritual care beside the living waters of the Gospel.

By way of contrast and in a much more personal way, I recall another church service, a service without liturgy and without formal sermon, as a family sat beside the banks of the St. Lawrence River on a Sunday morning, read and discussed the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, and then said its prayers. This was a Lutheran service in an area where there was no Lutheran church for many miles. It was minus the traditional forms, but nevertheless in the true Augsburg tradition, for Article VII of the *Augsburg Confession* states: "And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, etc. Eph. 4:5, 6." They had come to expect the pericopes, but it was a good change, as I Timothy became something new and alive for them.

Even Rome has suggested an increase in the number and the scope of the Scripture lessons read in the services. It states in its *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*¹: "In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from Holy Scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable." Even the sermon is again to come into its own, for we read: "Since the sermon is part of the liturgical service, the preferred place for it is to be indicated even in the rubrics, as far as the nature of the rite will allow; and the ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources. Its character should be that of a proclamation of God's wonderful works in the history of salvation, that is, the mystery of Christ, which is ever made present and active within us, especially in the celebration of the liturgy."² We are quite aware of false elements even in these words; nevertheless we rejoice whenever people hear more of the Scriptures and the Gospel of Christ. The power is still that of the Gospel. "Back to the Scripture" has, of course, always been the basic principle of the Lutheran faith. That is the thrust of each of the Confessional writings. It remains to be seen just how much more scriptural Rome will become. If the Gospel begins to shine forth more clearly, we shall rejoice as did Paul in Philippians 1:18: "What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." If, despite more Scripture and more preaching, the Gospel is even further diluted or sidetracked, we shall have to say with Paul in Galatians 1:8, 9: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

The Necessity of Confessions

But this points up the need for confessions. It is not enough to say: "I teach what Scripture teaches." Practically all churches are ready to state that, despite a multitude of heresies and other gospels. So that others may know where we stand and may be convinced of the truth of our position, it is necessary to demonstrate how we understand the Scripture and that that understanding, that theology, agrees with the inspired Word. Otherwise those who hear us have no assurance that we are indeed preaching the way of salvation as Scripture has revealed it. Confessions therefore are a matter of pastoral concern.

In dealing with the Lutheran Confessions this essay will attempt to evaluate them over against the age in which we live, especially in its theological aspects. We of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod find ourselves on the outside of most trends in the modern church world. This fact could give rise to serious misgivings on our part. At any rate, it should ever make us question our stand, lest we simply drift along with

¹ All quotations from the documents of Vatican II will be taken from *The Documents of Vatican II*, published by Guild Press (New York), America Press, and Association Press, copyright 1966 by The America Press. The above quotation is found on page 149.

² *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 149-160.

and call valid what our church body is doing or has done in the past few years without being totally convinced that this is what Christ, the Gospel, and the Confessions demand of us. We cannot simply ignore events such as the writing of the *Presbyterian Confession of 1967*, the formation of The Lutheran Council in the United States of America, or Vatican II. Professor Carl E. Braaten of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, writing in the June 1966 issue of *Una Sancta*, wonders out loud whether a need still exists for Protestantism as an independent movement running alongside the Roman Catholic Church, or whether it may not rightly be incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church, continuing to work as leaven of reform within that body. Suggestions like these cannot but touch us deeply. They affect our consciousness of being church, our transmission of the Gospel to the coming generation, our efforts to strengthen others in a conservative position, and our mission activities. Since any decisions we make also involve the consciences and hopes of our members, this is a matter of profound pastoral concern to us.

Vatican II

This essay, in an attempt not to go too far afield, will give primary attention to the documents of Vatican II as compared with our Lutherans Confessions of the 16th century. In 1962 almost 100 years had passed since the convening of the last previous ecumenical council—ecumenical, of course, in the Roman Catholic sense. With over half the Christian world under the control of Rome, Vatican II naturally caused quite a stir. And it will continue to intrude upon the life in our parishes, especially among our young people. Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, was quite correct when he wrote in January of this year (1966): “The Council is over; the Council has just begun.”³ The story of the Council was told in extensive newspaper accounts, in millions of words in national magazines, and in numerous books. It also brought forth an immense literature of its own, the 16 texts of the Council running to approximately 103,000 words.

The impact these words make upon a person when they are read attentively over the period of a few weeks is impressive. There is something imposing about the way in which the Roman Church with its centralized teaching authority stands over against a shifting theological world. With its visible oneness it seems to afford the rock and anchor the world so sorely needs. Its appeal to return to a renewed and reformed church, to a church that says *Pater peccavi* for also having been guilty in the “schism” of 400 years ago, tugs at one’s heart. Witnessing the Pope gathered with the great of all Christian faiths shortly before the close of the Council in a prayer service; reading the repeated call that issues from the Vatican documents for the preaching of the Gospel; hearing the bishops reminded to take seriously their servant relationship to priests and laity; seeing the church spoken of as a pilgrim church on the way to eternity—a son of the Reformation may almost be put into a theological tailspin, and may almost find himself supporting the view of Professor Frederick C. Grant, professor emeritus of Biblical Theology of the Union Theological Seminary, New York City, an official observer at the Council, when he writes: “What I really wish is that we could all go back to the days of Erasmus and work together in harmony, especially in biblical studies, and forget all about the intervening four centuries of confusion, distrust, and antagonism.” Can he be right when he continues: “Thank God, a brighter path is now opening before us than any our fathers were compelled to tread”?⁴ Is there an answer?

Yes, there is! Some more reading! This time read the *Book of Concord*, not in sections, but as a whole, from the opening words of the Apostles’ Creed, with its “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,” to the concluding paragraph of the *Formula of Concord* where it is stated, “Since now, in the sight of God and of all Christendom, we wish to testify to those now living and those who shall come after us that this declaration herewith presented concerning all the controverted articles aforementioned and explained, and no other, is our faith, doctrine, and confession, in which we are also willing, by God’s grace, to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, and give an account of it; and that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary

³ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. xv.

⁴ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 132.

to it, but, by the help of God's grace, intend to abide thereby: therefore, after mature deliberation, we have, in God's fear and with the invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands."⁵ And, having read, you most surely will be willing to attach your own signature and, as it were, reaffirm your ordination vow: "Dost thou hold and profess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as laid down in the Symbols contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, to wit, the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the same, the Smalcald Articles, the Small and the Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord, to be the true doctrine of the Holy Scriptures?"—"I do so hold and profess."

How joyous to be home once more with Christ the Lord, and to lay aside the documents of Vatican II, in which if it was not the Pope, it was Mary, and if not Mary, then the Pope. Those who take the Lutheran confession of the Gospel seriously can die at peace with God; those who follow Vatican II to the letter can but despair. Having read both, we shall once more be convinced that that which really stands between Paul the Apostle and Paul VI is II Thessalonians 2. As a result, none of these decrees, constitutions, and declarations are either truly apostolic, truly evangelic, or truly catholic, though they claim to be all. The great stumbling block is still Vatican I, which wrote Amen to the verdict of the *Smalcald Articles*. The one recurring premise is that Peter was appointed head of the church, vicar of Christ, and that the Pope is his divinely appointed successor and the supreme teaching authority in the church.

As you read the Lutheran Confessions and the Vatican documents from cover to cover, you cannot avoid the impression that among all the official observers at Vatican II the most official one was one long dead, Martin Luther. Despite statements to the effect that the Counter-Reformation has come to an end, Vatican II is still a reaction over against the Lutheran Confessions, though they are never mentioned by name. The Roman Church still demonstrates herself as Mother and Defender of all the abuses cited in our Confessional writings. In the documents of Vatican II the un-Biblical theory of merit is still reacting to the core of the Gospel proclamation, justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Though a Lutheran divine boasted that he had attended Vatican II and had come back alive, does that mean that the situation has changed to such an extent that we should be ready to accept Rome's invitation to return? Can you imagine any circumstance under which you would be ready to accept the Pope as your spiritual head short of a total revolution in the Roman Church and an outright repudiation of the papal claims from Boniface VIII (1302) and his *Unam Sanctam* down to Pius IX of Vatican I?

The Papacy

Perhaps you have not read the two main resolutions of that Council lately. Here they are. Chapter III reads, in part: "Now, therefore, if any one say that the Roman pontiff has only the function and office of inspection or direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the Church universal; not merely in things pertaining to faith and morals, but also in those which pertain to discipline and government of the Church as diffused throughout the world; or that he has only the chief parts, the more potent attributes thereof, yet not, indeed, the entire plenitude of this supreme power; or that such his authority is not ordinary and immediate, whether alike over all and sundry churches, or over all and sundry pastors and faithful; let him be anathema." Chapter IV concludes: "The sacred council thus approving, we teach, and so define as a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*; that is, when in the discharge of his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians, and in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine on faith or morals, to be observed by the entire ecumenical Church; thereby using the divine assistance to him vouchsafed by promise to blessed Peter; he then brings to bear that potential infallibility wherewith the divine Redeemer desired and willed that His Church be instructed in such definition of doctrine on faith or morals; and therefore the like definitions by the Roman pontiff are absolute, or unalterable in themselves, as by intrinsic force, and not by concession of the Church. Now, therefore, if any were to presume (which may God

⁵ *Concordia Triglotta*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1921, p. 1103.

avert) to contradict our definition; let him be anathema.”⁶ That is what lies between. Or does it? Someone has said: “Protestants (and Anglicans) who would have braced themselves defiantly before new *anathemata* (in the vein of Trent), will find little here that offends and much that edifies.”⁷

Lest we be misled, it may be well at this point to let you feel the full force of the papacy as it reveals itself in each of the separate documents of Vatican II. Then we shall be ready to refresh our souls with the Gospel of Christ so rich and abundant in the Lutheran Confessions. In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* it is stated: “In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the force and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff, and of his infallible teaching authority, this sacred Synod again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful.”⁸ The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, following in the footsteps of the councils of Trent and Vatican I, states: “The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church, ...”⁹ In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* even decisions as to the use of the vernacular, arrived at by “competent, territorial ecclesiastical authorities,” must be approved or confirmed by the Apostolic See.¹⁰ In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which roams over a multitude of subjects and is addressed “to the whole humanity,” Vatican II elevates the Supreme Pontiff over all men: “Because the human race today is joining more and more in civic, economic, and social unity, it is that much more necessary that priests, united in concern and effort under the leadership of the bishops and the Supreme Pontiff, wipe out every ground of division, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God.”¹¹ Paragraph 19 in the *Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication* reads: “For the fulfillment of his supreme pastoral responsibility regarding instruments of social communication, the Sovereign Pontiff has at his disposal a special office of the Holy See.”¹² Pope Paul himself personally made 19 changes in the *Decree on Ecumenism* on the day before the final vote was to be taken, when it was too late for discussion. Though this irritated many, the council fathers went along with the changes. This decree, among other similar statements, says: “It is through the faithful preaching of the gospel by the apostles and their successors—the bishops with Peter’s successor at their head—through their administration of the sacraments, and through their loving exercise of authority, that Jesus Christ wishes His people to increase under the influence of the Holy Spirit.”¹³ The *Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches* quite bluntly asserts: “Such individual Churches, whether of the East or of the West, although they differ somewhat among themselves in what are called rites (that is, in liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, and spiritual heritage) are, nevertheless, equally entrusted to the pastoral guidance of the Roman Pontiff, the divinely appointed successor of St. Peter in supreme government over the universal Church.”¹⁴ Perhaps the most explicit statement on the authority of the pope is given in the very decree which was to share his power with the bishops, the *Decree on the Bishop’s Pastoral Office in the Church*: “In this Church of Christ the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Peter, to whom Christ entrusted the feeding of His sheep and lambs. Hence by divine institution he enjoys supreme, full, immediate, and universal authority over the care of souls. Since he is pastor of all the faithful, his mission is to provide for the common good of the universal Church and for the good of the individual churches. He holds therefore, a primacy of ordinary power over all the churches.”¹⁵ The order of bishops, which is designated “the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching

⁶ *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1950, vol. XII, p. 154.

⁷ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 105.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 117-118.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 150.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 245.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 329.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 344.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 374.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 397.

authority and pastoral rule,” is informed it cannot exercise this power except “Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head...”¹⁶

Just the other day Pope Paul spelled out the power of the Roman Catholic bishops in a decree which Vatican spokesmen called the most important papal guideline so far putting the council decisions into force. Local bishops were given the right to decide whether to lift the celibacy requirements for a sub-deacon abandoning his priestly studies, permission to allow changes in the garments and style of living for nuns and religious orders in their areas, the right in some cases to approve marriage between second cousins, and the privilege to make one year exceptions in the present church minimum age limits of 16 years for men and 14 years for women wishing to marry. This is called a broad new field of powers, which the bishops never had before.¹⁷ But let us return to the Vatican documents.

In the *Decree on Priestly Formation* rules governing seminaries must be “endorsed by the Apostolic See,”¹⁸ and the seminarians are already spoken of as “bound even now to Christ’s Vicar with humble and filial love, ...”¹⁹ The *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life*, addressed to all those “who are called by God to practice the evangelical counsels,”²⁰ submits all adaptations of every kind to “the approval of the Holy See and of local Ordinaries.”²¹ In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* the laity is reminded that it shares in the role of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King; is encouraged to take an active part in church matters; but is also specifically told: “Indeed, union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule God’s Church is an essential element of the Christian (lay) apostolate.”²² In the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* we read: “Since the priestly ministry is the ministry of the Church herself, it can be discharged only by hierarchical communion with the whole body. Therefore pastoral love demands that acting in this communion, priests dedicate their own wills through obedience to the service of God and their brothers. This love requires that they accept and carry out in a spirit of faith whatever is commanded or recommended by the Sovereign Pontiff, their own bishop, or other superiors.”²³ Another quotation, this one in the *Decree on the Missionary Activity in the Church*: “Since then the duty has weighed upon the Church to spread the faith and the saving work of Christ. This duty exists not only in virtue of the express command which was inherited from the apostles by the order of bishops, assisted by priests and united with the successor of Peter and supreme shepherd of the Church. It exists also in virtue of that life which flows from Christ into his members.” The *Declaration on Christian Education*²⁴ did not become valid until promulgated by Paul VI with the words: “We, too, by the apostolic authority conferred on us by Christ, join with the Venerable Fathers in approving, decreeing, and establishing these things in the Holy Spirit, and we direct that what has thus been enacted in synod be published to God’s glory.”²⁵ The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* opens with the customary greeting: “Paul, Bishop—Servant of the Servants of God—Together with the Fathers of the Sacred Council—For Everlasting Memory.”²⁶ In the final document, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, the Council simply “intends to develop the doctrine of recent Popes.”²⁷ Thus there is not a single area that does not involve the papacy in every way as totally supreme. Or, to put it in the words of another quotation from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “... in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 399.

¹⁷ See *The Milwaukee Journal* of June 17, 1966.—The more recent decision of September 1966 on the part of the American bishops to terminate the traditional law of abstinence from meat on Fridays, formerly binding under pain of sin, cannot be looked upon as a return to the Gospel, since these bishops still presume to have the right to decree something to be a sin or not a sin, though it is not so designated in the Word of God. Nor was this an independent action on their part; it had the approval of the Holy See.

¹⁸ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 444.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 446.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 467.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 470.

²² *Ibid.* p. 512.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 564.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 589.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 651.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 660.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 677.

whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely.”²⁸ We can hardly agree with Professor Braaten in *Una Sancta* (June, 1966) that were Luther living within the conditions of present-day Roman Catholicism, he would probably not “sound his call to reform in the same uncompromising fashion, . . . ” We are convinced that the Lutheran Confessions, if they were justified in 1529–1580, are equally justifiable today in view of the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council, which lasted from October 11, 1962, to December 8, 1965, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We have had a rather lengthy sample of Vatican II. What has been said helps us appreciate the Lutheran Confessions. But this is by no means all that needs to be said if we are to ascertain whether the Lutheran Confessions are adequate for our own day. What kind of day is it that we are living in? Let’s take a look at

The Theological Character of Our Time

This is not 1530! Thus, it is like a whiff of ancient history when we read at the beginning of the *Augsburg Confession*: “Most Invincible Emperor, Caesar Augustus, Most Clement Lord: Inasmuch as Your Imperial Majesty has summoned a Diet of the Empire here at Augsburg to deliberate concerning measures against the Turk, that most atrocious, hereditary, and ancient enemy of the Christian name and religion, in what way, namely, effectually to withstand his furor and assaults by strong and lasting military provision; and then also concerning dissensions in the matter of our holy religion and Christian faith, . . . ”²⁹ It is clear, those days were evil days in the state and in the church. This has not changed.

The number of different theological currents today is almost unbelievable. Protestantism presents a confessional wilderness; Rome seems to offer green pastures and still waters, but the price is steep; the post-Christian theologians are seeking to lead us into a secular jungle; they who bear the name of Luther have achieved no more than a Lutheran chaos; and we—we stand almost alone. Not a nice picture, but we must take a brief look at it, to realize what God has given us in the Lutheran Confessions.

The Protestant world is a confessional wilderness. There are conservative elements and groups within Protestantism, but there are also such (possibly in the majority) who have rejected almost every doctrine taught in Holy Scripture. The ecumenical movement has captured the thinking of most, as the activity of the World Council of Churches demonstrates. Its aim, of course, is a one-church world. The least common denominator determines its doctrine. In fact, almost all doctrines have become open questions. We need not go into detail.

Perhaps the most recent of proposed new confessions, the *Presbyterian Confession of 1967*, ought to receive at least a little attention, for it is symptomatic of the state of Protestantism today. Typical of this Confession is Part I, Section IIIb, on *The Bible*. There we read: “The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears witness in many ways. The Church has received the Old and New Testaments as the normative witness to this revelation and has recognized them as Holy Scriptures. The New Testament is the recorded testimony of apostles to the coming of Jesus Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit to the church. The Old Testament is received in the church as Holy Scripture, which bears witness to God’s faithfulness to Israel and points the way for fulfillment of His purpose in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. The Old Testament is indispensable to understanding the New, and is not itself fully understood without the New. God’s word is spoken to His church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction. The Bible is to be interpreted in the light of its witness to God’s work of reconciliation in Christ. The words of the Scriptures are the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos that were then current, and the understanding of them requires literary and historical scholarship. The variety of such views found in the Bible shows that God has communicated with men in diverse cultural conditions. This gives

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 43.

²⁹ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 39.

the church confidence that He will continue to speak to men in a changing world and in every form of human culture.”

Such views subject the Scripture to human reason and, finally, to the whim of the church or its leaders and theologians. As a result, nothing solid, nothing sure remains. That this is not a misinterpretation is clear from these words of the “Introductory Comment and Analysis”: “This section is an intended revision of the Westminster doctrine, which rested primarily on a view of inspiration and equated the Biblical canon directly with the Word of God. By contrast, the pre-eminent and primary meaning of the Word of God in the Confession of 1967 is the Word of God incarnate. The function of the Bible is to be the instrument of the revelation of the Word in the living church. It is not a witness among others but the witness without parallel, the norm of all other witness. At the same time questions of antiquated cosmology, diverse cultural influences, and the like, may be dealt with by careful scholarship uninhibited by the doctrine of inerrancy which placed the older Reformed theology at odds with advances in historical and scientific studies.” The words speak for themselves. If this Confession of 1967 is adopted (and there is no indication that it will not be adopted), the Presbyterian Church and the Scripture have parted company in a very real way.

Now, if it is objected that the Lutheran Confessions have no section concerning the Bible at all, this, of course, must be conceded, but only in a technical sense. Anyone who reads the Lutheran Confessions cannot but be struck by the fact that in each and every case appeal is made to the Bible—as it reads. The Bible is accepted as the infallible, inerrant, inspired Word of God. The Preface to the Christian Book of Concord demonstrates how our 16th-century fathers looked upon the Scriptures. Speaking of the members of the Calvinistic churches, which rejected the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper as taught by Luther and the Holy Scripture, the preface states: “We are also in great hope that, if they would be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God’s Word.”³⁰

Compared with the confessional wilderness of the Protestant world, the Church of *Rome seems to offer green pastures and still waters*. This is very deceptive. The price to be paid is submission to the Antichrist, as we noted previously. We shall hear more of this as we speak of the *Smalcald Articles*. Rome, in its Council documents, however, does offer a well-knit exposition of the doctrine of the Church in the Roman sense—one that appeals because of its solidarity. All Council documents are intimately related to this doctrine. The one on Sacred Liturgy pictures the Roman Church at worship. The one on Divine Revelation speaks of the norm of authority in the Church. On Ecumenism details her relation to other Christians, the *Decree on Non-Christian Religions* to the devotees of other religions, the *Church in the Modern World* to the entire community. This is something very substantial in a strife-torn theological and political world.

However, Rome’s basic concept of the Church is non-scriptural. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians speaks of keeping the unity of the Spirit, not of organizational oneness. Not so Rome! It teaches the necessity of a visible, organizational oneness. Listen to several excerpts from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible structure.”³¹ “This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity.”³² “They are fully incorporated into the society of the Church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system and all the means of salvation given to her, and through union with her visible structure are joined to Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops.”³³ The thought which has been widely expressed that the Church of Rome has changed her attitude toward the other churches is only true in part, and somewhat a matter of semantics, as is evident from this statement: “The Church

³⁰ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 19.

³¹ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 22.

³² *Ibid.* p. 23.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 33.

recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who, being baptized, are honored with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve unity of communion with the successor of Peter.”³⁴

Shall we go back? Is there a way in which we can accept the papacy with a clear conscience? John XXIII was certain that the Council would make it possible. Here are his words previous to the Council: “With God’s grace, therefore, we shall celebrate this council. We shall prepare for it by endeavoring to see to it that what is most necessary on the part of Catholics be healed and strengthened as our Lord has taught us. When we have carried out this laborious task and thus eradicated what could hinder speedy progress in the human area, we shall show forth the church in all its splendor, *sine macula et ruga* (without spot or wrinkle) and say to all others who are separated from us, the Orthodox and the Protestants, etc.: ‘Behold, brethren, this is the church of Christ. We have endeavored to remain faithful to her, to pray to the Lord for grace that she may always remain as he desired her to be. Come, come, this is the way to meeting, the way that leads to homecoming. Come, and occupy or reoccupy your place, which for many of you was the place of your forefathers.’”³⁵ The words are winsome and appealing—we cannot deny that. Compared with them, Luther at times was rude to the extreme. Have the 400 years that separate the men made the difference? Will the Council of 1962–1965 compel us Lutherans to revise our denunciations, ditch our Confessions, and seek a place in the Roman Church as a Lutheran rite?

Perhaps the answer to just one question will decide the issue for us. Does Jesus Christ remain what He claims to be in the Scripture after the Council has spoken? Is His Word still true: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6)? Or was Thomas correct? Let us investigate.

The Council quotes the same passage in the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, but not quite in the same sense in which the Lord gave it. The omission, and thus the changed emphasis, is striking—and undoubtedly intentional. Having spoken of Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions, it states: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims and must ever proclaim Christ, ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (John 14:6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself (cf. II Cor. 5:18, 19).”³⁶ As a result the Council included almost all men among the People of God, with or without Christ. We read once more from the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “Finally, those who have not yet received the gospel are related in various ways to the People of God. In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4, 5). On account of their fathers, this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor the calls He issues (cf. Rom. 11:28, 29). But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Moslems, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God Himself far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and every other gift (cf. Acts 17:25–28), and who as Savior wills that all men be saved (cf. I Timothy 2:4). Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace. The Church looks upon whatever goodness or truth that is found among them as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities as given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.”³⁷

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 33f.

³⁵ *The Papal Council and the Gospel*, K. Skydsgaard, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1961, p. 122.

³⁶ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 662.

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 34-5.

I suppose someone is going to ask how this differs from the opinions voiced in the January-February 1966 issue of *Arena* (p. 14): “This latter (the conversion of Jews to Christ) implies a theological viewpoint with which many Christians would disagree, but which is emerging out of biblical studies. It is that it may be God’s purpose to deal with the Jews as his chosen people in his own merciful way without requiring their conversion to Christianity while dealing with Gentiles in the Church. There is an unbiblical presumption in believing that Jews are ‘lost’ because they are not Christian.” Frankly, there is but little difference. Such teaching simply does not grant to Jesus Christ His unique position as the only Savior of men. Rather, men are their own saviors, despite much talk about grace.

I am sure that by this time the invitation issued by John XXIII has lost its appeal. We feel somewhat as the Magdalene did: “They have taken my Lord away.” The teachings of Rome have not changed. The green pastures have turned to dry stubble, the still waters to murky depths. Rome does not offer us the Rock of Ages as Scripture holds Him up before sinful man. We shall learn to appreciate the Lutheran Confessions even more, if we keep this in mind.

But perhaps the vanguard theologians of today, the Bishop Robinsons, the Coxes, the Altizers—so prominent—have something to offer that is better. If our members have not read their writings, they have read about them and have perhaps begun to wonder whether our Confessions are “honest to God,” whether they are true when they proclaim Him the living Lord. In this particular Vatican II speaks correctly, even though it is guilty of blasphemy, for example, in identifying the God of Islam with the God of Scripture. Nevertheless, Rome is not ready to sign God’s death certificate; and neither are we.

Contemporary theology undermines all morality when it proposes situation ethics, which is actually no ethics at all. Love is proclaimed as the basic motive, but a love that permits all things and is limited solely by possible damage done to the other person. The real love to God is ignored, the love John wrote of, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (I John 5:2, 3). The March 1966 flyer put out by our Wisconsin Synod Board for Information and Stewardship offers a most pertinent criticism of today’s “advanced” theology and its resulting ethics in the form of a short excerpt from a letter written by a university student to his father, “We’re told to play the game of life. How can we do it if we don’t know where the goalposts are?” *Secular theology is a morass and a jungle*. Our Confessions, and we, want no part of it.

The *Formula of Concord* describes the reborn child of God thus: “But when man is born anew by the Spirit of God, and liberated from the Law, that is, freed from this driver, and is led by the Spirit of Christ, he lives according to the immutable will of God comprised in the Law, and so far as he is born anew, does everything from a free, cheerful spirit; and these are called not properly works of the Law, but works and fruits of the Spirit, or as St. Paul names it, *the law of the mind and the Law of Christ*.”³⁸ This is not situation ethics, except that our situation is that of being a child of God. Our Confessions are ethically valuable in a day of loose theology and looser morals.

But we must say something concerning *the Lutheran situation*. It is at this point especially that we of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod begin to feel a deep and tragic loneliness. Though all Lutheran bodies subscribe to the *Augsburg Confession*, we nevertheless stand alone. The events of the last few years have even faced us with the problem of judging whether we are truly a church or just a splinter. The break-up of the Synodical Conference was perhaps the most soul-searching event in recent synodical history. To be separated from so many who formerly were our brethren is agonizing. It naturally causes us to ask whether this actually was God’s will, or whether our subscription to the Confessions has been a legalistic and rigorous one. It does but little good to blandly remind that at one time God had only 7,000 in Israel, when not so subtle ridicule is directed our way through the public press. A release printed in *The Cleveland Press* on January 31, 1966, concerning the efforts of Lutherans to clean up their intramural differences in constituting the Lutheran Council in the United States of America (LCUSA), puts it this way: “The new council will be headed by a member of

³⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 967.

the conservative, nationwide Missouri Synod, which became cooperative after it found itself to the doctrinal left of the Wisconsin Synod group. The latter, most Lutherans agree, will speak only to God from now on.”

We won't pause to defend ourselves and to point to the truly ecumenical spirit in our midst. Rather, we would ask: How do other Lutherans view the Confessions? A few quotations will reveal this. A recent publication, *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation, asks us to straddle the fence. We read: “When subscribing to them [the Lutheran Confessions] today Lutherans assert that, in view of the issues which were then at stake and the alternatives which were then offered, the creedal and confessional decisions were right. Inasmuch as there has been growth in knowledge and understanding since the 16th century, subscription must take into account the historically conditioned limitations that inhere in all statements of the past. Tension between the witness of the Scriptures and the witness of the symbols must also be allowed, indeed asserted, and so honest subscription involves a *quatenus* as well as a *quia*.”³⁹

Dr. C. E. Braaten of the Lutheran Church in America, former editor of *Dialog*, says: “While we may all accept the same confessions, we do not all accept them in the same way and with the same attitudes. We do not all accept the same meaning of acceptance, . . .”⁴⁰ Truer words have never been spoken. Christopher Adams, writing in *The Lutheran*, the official magazine of the Lutheran Church in America, states: “Next I take down from the shelf the Confessions of the church, and leaf through them. Are the pages old and brittle like the dead wine skins? Once they were written out of the living stuff of the encounter of sensitive Christians with the living stream that was bursting out of the dried-up vessel that was the Roman Church of that day. The pages of the Confessions channeled the living Spirit to many men, but do the Confessions now form a hardened channel that keeps the church from branching out to meet converging streams of other vessels fashioned in other times and in other places? Unless the Confessions of the church drive it on to meet men on every frontier, it would be best for them to be laid aside reverently and gratefully. Again, we need theologians filled with the Spirit and at home on the growing edges of society where east meets west, black meets white, and urban life meets slum. It is up to them to assess the old and if necessary shape the new.”⁴¹ The same article puts a tentative question mark behind the Trinity, the Scriptures, the Scripture pattern of Christian morality, in fact, behind almost any value that we have been accustomed to relate to our faith in God and in our Savior Jesus Christ. This undoubtedly is not the position of every member of the Lutheran Church in America, but it is tolerated in its official publication.

The position of The American Lutheran Church is essentially no different. Its president has recently stated that his church is going through a time of transition, namely, forsaking Reformed fundamentalism and returning to the Lutheran Confessions. The many doctrinal departures in that church body show this to be untrue. There are indications, too, within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that its subscription to the Confessions is not quite as solidly *quia* as in former years. In the *Lutheran Witness* of June 1966 a discussion of the papacy as the Antichrist in view of the recent Roman Council closed with these words: “Whether the winds of renewal now sweeping the Roman Church portend changes which will ultimately require Lutherans to revise the judgment of their 16th-century confessions lies in the province of the Holy Spirit.” That seems to mean that the statement of the *Smalcald Articles* that the Pope is the very Antichrist is no longer looked upon as a Scripture teaching, but rather as a historical judgment. At least the possibility of such being the case is granted. It is thus not surprising that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod found itself in substantial agreement on the Confessions with the Lutheran Church in America and The American Lutheran Church in talks leading to the formation of the Lutheran Council in the United States of America.

To show our own position we would quote the words of the Constitution of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod concerning the Lutheran Confessions. There we read: “The Synod also accepts the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church embodied in the Book of Concord of 1580, not in so far as, but because they are a correct presentation and exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God.” With that we do not

³⁹ *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, J.H. Bodensieck, editor, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1961, vol. 1, p. 567.

⁴⁰ *Dialog*, vol. I, Number I, p. 42.

⁴¹ *The Lutheran*, May 23, 1966, p. 7.

bind ourselves to approve every exegesis, every historical statement, the form of every quotation, or necessarily every line of reasoning or deduction. But we do assert that, because the Confessions agree with the norm, the Holy Scripture, we accept every doctrine these Confessions present.

It is not stretching it to say that Lutherans today find themselves in the midst of a *Lutheran chaos*, and that we practically stand alone.

The Lutheran Confessions

Since Christian men have charged that our understanding and acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions is unwarranted, we shall now call on the Confessions to speak for themselves. It is high time that the Lutheran Church made a special pilgrimage—not to Rome, but to its confessional writings, carefully garner their message for our day and absorb their spirit, especially, their attitude to the written Word of God.

Which are the Confessions contained in the *Book of Concord*? And what is their theme? We might well call their theme “The Gospel of Jesus Christ.” To begin with, we accept the three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian. They are the confessional response of the early Church to the attacks on the Gospel made in its day. During the long years following their adoption by the early Church, the Gospel was all but buried by the semi-Pelagian theology of the Roman Church and its popes. Luther’s recovery of the Gospel and his defense of the same brought about the 16th-century division in Christendom, and the need for particular symbols on the part of the Lutheran Church. Through Luther God once more spoke the biblical Gospel to the men of his day and to us. The Confessions state what they and we believe on the basis of Holy Scripture. They are our interpretation of the Word of our God, the Holy Gospel. The first, the *Augsburg Confession*, is the primary confession of the Lutheran Church to the Gospel. The *Apology* is a detailed exposition of that same Gospel, Melancthon’s answer to the *Roman Confutation*. The *Smalcald Articles* are a defense of the Gospel, carrying the battle to the enemy. The *Small* and *Large Catechism* are teaching-tools, teaching the Gospel to both young and old, to both laity and clergy. The *Formula of Concord* reaffirms the Gospel after controversy. This collection is our Gospel standard.

Shall we adhere to these Confessions, or have Protestantism and the Roman Council brought forth something better? Are our Confessions an adequate statement of what we believe, and ought to believe, as the people of God today? This can best be ascertained by examining the Confessions on three scores: Are they apostolic? Are they evangelical? Are they catholic and ecumenical? Rome claims that it and it alone is truly apostolic; it claims that it and it alone teaches the Gospel in its fullness; it claims that it and it alone is catholic and truly ecumenical. Where does the truth lie? Does it lie on the one side or on the other? Or does it possibly lie somewhere in between? We must know if we are to retain peace of heart, the certainty of salvation, and an eagerness to carry out the commission our Savior laid upon us: To preach the Gospel to every creature. The answer affects our personal soul-life and our church life. It even hits our pocketbook. Therefore we must ask:

Are Our Confessions Apostolic?

This is a question concerning the validity of the Confessions. The word apostolic has, of course, totally different implications for the Lutheran Confessions than for the Roman Catholic Church. Rome has always called herself apostolic. What does she mean? Certainly she includes preaching the apostolic Word in that expression, though she understands that, too, in a totally different sense than the Lutheran Confessions do. But chiefly she refers to what she is pleased to call the apostolic succession. In a Catholic catechism the question: “Why is the Catholic Church apostolic?” is answered thus: “The Catholic Church is apostolic because it was founded by Christ on the apostles and, according to His divine will, has always been governed by their lawful successors. The true Church is apostolic because it is the Church Christ founded upon the apostles, and especially upon Peter whom He called the Rock on which the Church would be built. The supreme power of

Saint Peter in the Church has been passed down through the unbroken line of his successors in the See of Rome.”⁴²

In a previous section of this essay we saw how the papacy is intimately involved in each of the constitutions, decrees, and declarations of Vatican II. Thus it is not surprising that Vatican II finds the apostolic character of the church in the papacy and the hierarchy, and their teaching. In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* we read: “Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and charity, as a visible structure ... furnished with hierarchical agencies... This is the unique Church of Christ, which in the Creed we avow as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. After His resurrection our Savior handed her over to Peter to be shepherded, commissioning him and the other apostles to propagate and govern her... This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, ...”⁴³ “That divine mission, entrusted by Christ to the apostles, will last until the end of the world, since the gospel which was to be handed down by them is for all time the source of all life for the Church. For this reason the apostles took care to appoint successors in this hierarchically structured society ... and authorized the arrangement that, when these men should have died, other approved men would take up their ministry ... through those who were appointed bishops by the apostles, and through their successors down to our own time, the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved throughout the world.”⁴⁴ “But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful.”⁴⁵

It is Melanchthon’s treatise *Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope* that demonstrates that the papacy and also the hierarchy are not apostolic creations, but human inventions based on a faulty exegesis of the apostolic word. From a consideration of the Scripture he points out that the Roman bishop is not by divine right above other bishops and pastors. He quotes Luke 22:25: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so.” Then he states: “Christ expressly prohibits lordship among the apostles.”⁴⁶ Another passage treated is Galatians 2: “St. Paul manifestly affirms that he was neither ordained nor confirmed by Peter, nor does he acknowledge Peter to be the one from whom confirmation should be sought. And he expressly contends concerning this point that his call does not depend upon the authority of Peter. But he ought to have acknowledged Peter as a superior if Peter was superior by divine right (if Peter, indeed, had received such supremacy from Christ). Paul accordingly says that he had at once preached the Gospel without consulting Peter... he teaches that the authority of the ministry depends upon the Word of God, and that Peter was not superior to the other apostles, and that it was not from this one individual Peter that ordination or confirmation was to be sought.”⁴⁷ He follows this with quotations from the early church fathers. All other passages usually cited by the Romanists are also treated in the Confessions. The exegesis demonstrates clearly that the papacy is not that which made the church apostolic, in fact, in the *Smalcald Articles* we are taught, in agreement with II Thessalonians 2, that: “The Pope is the very Antichrist.”⁴⁸ Why? Because “he arrogates to himself the authority to make laws concerning doctrine, and wishes his articles, his decrees, his laws to be considered equal to the divine laws, i.e., he holds that by the papal laws the consciences of men are so bound that those who neglect them, even without public offense, sin mortally. And what he adds is still more horrible, namely, that it is necessary to believe all these things in order to be saved.”⁴⁹ Such doctrine is not apostolic, but the very opposite.

⁴² *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, Revised Edition of the Baltimore Catechism, No. 3, St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, New Jersey, 1949, p. 122.

⁴³ *The Documents of Vatican II*: pp. 22-23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 39f.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 43.

⁴⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 505.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 507.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 475.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 505.

The Roman Church has, in addition, violated the Apostolic Word in its teaching about Mary, about the Mass as a sacrifice, about meritorious deeds, about celibacy, etc. Much of this will be discussed when we speak of the Lutheran Confessions as evangelical. Our verdict on Rome and Vatican II must be that they are too little apostolic.

Rome's attitude toward the Word of God is not the attitude of the apostles or of Christ. It would not be difficult to multiply passages from Scripture in which Christ says, "It is written," and in which the apostles say the same. There is never an appeal to any authority outside Holy Writ. Just think of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness, and Paul's epistles, and the Book of Hebrews. Let us be on guard lest we be taken in by beautiful words such as these: "Among the principal duties of bishops, the preaching of the gospel occupies an eminent place."⁵⁰ Words do not always mean what they seem to say—these among them. The inspired apostolic Scripture is not Rome's sole authority. In the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* Vatican II teaches: "In order to keep the gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over their own teaching role' to them... The apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by a continuous succession of preachers until the end of time... Now what was handed on by the apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase in faith of the People of God; and so that Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes. This tradition, which comes from the apostles, develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit... Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything that has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence. Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church... The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church."⁵¹ Concerning the teaching office of the Church we read in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: "This is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith, he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, without the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable; for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter. Therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment... The Infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of bishops when that body exercises supreme teaching authority with the successor of Peter."⁵²

That there is no *sola Scriptura* in the Roman Church, no matter how much propaganda is being made to the effect that the Roman Church is listening more closely to the Scripture, is evident from the following statements in the *Decree on Ecumenism*. "But when Christians separated from us affirm the divine authority of the sacred Books, they think differently from us—different ones in different ways—about the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church. In the Church, according to Catholic belief, an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God."⁵³ This opens the door to the Roman theory of the development of doctrine, a theory that is basic to Roman theology, but is not apostolic.

Herewith compare our Confessions. In them you search in vain to find even a single point of doctrine based on anything but Holy Scripture, in accordance with Ephesians 2:20, which speaks of the church as being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." This position of our Lutheran Confessions is clearly set forth in the *Comprehensive Summary of The Formula of Concord*: "First, then, 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 only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged. 2. And since of old the true Christian doctrine, in a pure, sound sense,

⁵⁰ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 47.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp. 115-118.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 48-49.

⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 363.

was collected from God's Word in brief articles or chapters against the corruption of heretics, we confess, in the second place, *the three Ecumenical Creeds*, namely, *the Apostles'*, *the Nicene*, and *the Athanasian*, as glorious confessions of the faith - brief, devout, and founded upon God's Word, in which all the heresies which at that time had arisen in the Christian Church are clearly and unanswerably refuted. 3. In the third place, since in these last times God, out of especial 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 against the corruptions of the Papacy and also of other sects, we confess also *the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession* as our symbol for this time, not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been taken from God's Word and is founded firmly and well therein."⁵⁴ Add the words: "... the Word of God alone should be and remain the only standard and rule of doctrine, to which the writings of no man should be regarded as equal, but to which everything should be subjected."⁵⁵ Because our Lutheran Confessions are truly Scriptural, they are truly apostolic. Rome falsifies Christian doctrine by adding to Scripture tradition, and to tradition the living teaching authority of the church. Despite assertions to that effect, Rome has not become more biblical.

We turn our attention to the second standard on the basis of which we would test our Confessions, the second reason why we cannot depart from them if we love our Lord and desire the salvation He has promised us. It can be summarized thus:

The Lutheran Confessions, Unlike Roman Doctrine, Are Truly Evangelical

The Evangel is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all men. This Savior says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Do the Lutheran Confessions bring this message into the lives of men, or does Vatican II do that more effectively?

Christ the Savior is spoken of repeatedly in the documents of Vatican II, and that in the very words of Holy Writ. The Gospel is proclaimed. Listen to the opening words of Chapter I in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: "God, who 'wishes all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' (I Tim. 2:4), 'in many and various ways ... spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets' (Heb. 1:1). When the fullness of time had come He sent His Son, the Word made flesh, anointed by the Holy Spirit, to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart (cf. Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:18), to be a 'bodily and spiritual medicine,' the Mediator between God and man (cf. I Tim. 2:5). For His humanity, united with the person of the Word, was the instrument of our salvation. Thus in Christ 'there came forth the perfect satisfaction needed for our reconciliation, and we received the means for giving worthy worship to God.' The wonders wrought by God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and glorious ascension, whereby 'dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life.'"⁵⁶ With a few minor changes this statement could appear in the *Northwestern Lutheran* as a fine presentation of the Gospel message. This is not the only such passage in the documents of Vatican II. We are grateful to the Lord for each such passage, for Roman Catholics reading and studying these documents thereby do come face to face with the claims of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the message preached by Peter and Paul and all the other apostles of Jesus Christ. We can rightly call such statements evangelical.

Does Vatican II then agree with the Lutheran Confessions on this all-important point? Is it possible that the time has come for us to walk hand in hand with those from whom we have been separated these 400 years, a separation of which the *Decree on Ecumenism* says that it "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a

⁵⁴ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 851.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 855.

⁵⁶ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 139-140.

stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature”⁵⁷

We agree. Luther had no intention of breaking away from the established church when he nailed the Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. In the Preface to the *Augsburg Confession* the hope is expressed that “these matters may be settled and brought back to one simple truth and Christian concord, that for the future one pure and true religion may be embraced and maintained by us, that as we all are under one Christ and do battle under Him, so we may be able also to live in unity and concord in the one Christian Church.”⁵⁸ Has that time come? Has the Gospel been restored in the Roman Church? Has the Reformation of Luther finally achieved its aim? Have we perhaps been hasty in criticizing joint Catholic-Lutheran Reformation services and other joint efforts?

There is no doubt that the Gospel message is the chief concern of the Lutheran Confessions. This is evident from words such as these in the *Apology*: “And in the Church [if there is to be a church, if there is to be a Christian Creed], it is necessary that there should be the [preaching and] doctrine [by which consciences are not made to rely on a dream or to build on a foundation of sand, but] from which the pious may receive the sure hope of salvation... It is necessary that in the Church of Christ the Gospel be retained, i.e., the promise that for Christ’s sake sins are freely remitted.”⁵⁹ Right to the point are the words of Article I of the Second Part of the *Smalcald Articles*, written when Paul III had convoked a council, repeatedly delayed until it finally convened in Trent in 1545, shortly before Luther’s death. We quote: “The Second Part Treats of the Articles which Refer to the Office and Work of Jesus Christ, or Our Redemption. The first and chief article is this, *That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4, 25. And He alone is the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world, John 1, 29; and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all, Is. 53, 6. Likewise: All have sinned and are justified without merit [freely, and without their own work or merits] by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood, Rom. 3, 23f. Now, since it is necessary to believe this, and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says, Rom. 3, 28: For we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law. Likewise v. 26: That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Christ. Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin. For there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, says Peter, Acts 4, 12. And with His stripes we are healed, Is. 53, 5. And upon this article all things depend which we teach and practice in opposition to the Pope, the devil, and the [whole] world. Therefore, we must be sure concerning this doctrine, and not doubt; for otherwise all is lost, and the Pope and devil and all things gain the victory and suit over us.”⁶⁰ Thank God for this determination to hold fast to the Gospel! But can it be possible that the Pope has changed? Has he retraced his steps?*

The answer will be forthcoming when we ask him two questions: How is a man justified before God? Is Christ the only Savior? A comparison of the Lutheran Confessions with Vatican II on this score is truly enlightening and will cause us to pause lest our rejoicing get out of hand and our practice and faith be compromised.

How is a man justified before God? Scripture gives a simple, direct answer: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28). Fully one-third of the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* is devoted to a statement, exposition, and confession of the central Gospel truth. The *Apology* points out what the doctrine of the Roman Church of that day was and what it led to: “For since the adversaries understand neither what the remission of sins, nor what faith, nor what grace, nor what righteousness is, they sadly corrupt this topic, and obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and rob devout

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 341.

⁵⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 155.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 461f.

consciences of the consolation offered in Christ.”⁶¹ Speaking of justifying faith, the *Apology* calls attention to a vital difference: “And the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the Law can be easily discerned. Faith is the *latreia* [divine service], which receives the benefits offered by God: the righteousness of the Law is the *latreia* [divine service], which offers to God our merits. By faith God wishes to be worshipped in this way, that we receive from Him those things which He promised and offers.”⁶² Or again: “It is ... the opinion of merit that we exclude.”⁶³ Again: “Love also and works must follow faith. Wherefore, they are not excluded so as not to follow, but confidence in the merit of love or of works is excluded in justification.”⁶⁴ Again: “Remission of sins is something promised for Christ’s sake. Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone. Rom. 4, 16: *Therefore it is of faith that it might be of grace, to the end that the promise might be sure.*”⁶⁵ We could multiply the quotations, but these are sufficient. They show that the Lutheran Confessions consistently exclude human merit from justification.

How does the doctrine of Vatican II compare with this scriptural stand of the Lutheran Confessions? Though the Council opened with a message to humanity, in which the fathers of the Council expressed the wish, “In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves, so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the Gospel of Christ,”⁶⁶ it will become clear that this renewal did not free the Gospel, for even after the Council had finished its work, Roman doctrine still included human righteousness in the ground of justification, and thus the distinctions made in the Lutheran Confessions still stand. In fact, this was not felt to be the big question facing the Council. The same *Message to Humanity* spelled out the direction the Council was to take thus: “As we undertake our work therefore, we would emphasize whatever concerns the dignity of man, whatever contributes to a genuine community of peoples.”⁶⁷

In spite of its sixteen documents and 103,014 words, Vatican II has precious little to say about the forgiveness of sins. In its official decrees justification by faith seems to have been mentioned only in passing. In the *Decree on Ecumenism*, for example, we read: “Nevertheless, all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church.”⁶⁸ That the Council evidently does not understand these words in the sense we would understand them becomes evident when we see how it usually speaks of the forgiveness of sins. Here are some quotations from the *Decree on the Ministry*: “These ministers in the society of the faithful would be able by the sacred power of their order to offer sacrifice and to remit sins.”⁶⁹ Again: “Priests are taken from among men and appointed for men in the things which pertain to God, in order to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”⁷⁰ “By the sacrament of penance sinners are reconciled to God and the Church.”⁷¹ “In the spirit of Christ the Shepherd, priests should train them [that is, the faithful] to submit their sins with a contrite heart to the Church in the sacrament of penance.”⁷² The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, it is true, includes a beautiful statement on Christ’s part in the redemption of men. It reads: “Besides, as the Church has always held and continues to hold, Christ in His boundless love freely underwent His passion and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is, therefore, the duty of the Church’s preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.”⁷³ Despite these words, the forgiveness

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 135.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 149.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 143.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 145.

⁶⁶ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 3-4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 345.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 534.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 536.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 541.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 542.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 667.

of sins in the Roman Church is consistently made dependent on the priest and the sacrament of penance. This vitiates the Gospel, for the sacrament of penance includes the enumeration of all sins and the works of penance following.

This the Lutheran Confessions reject as contrary to the Gospel, which proclaims, “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7). In the *Apology* the Lutheran fathers state: “(Scripture) most frequently teaches that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ’s sake, that Christ is the Victor of sin and death. Therefore the merit of satisfaction is not to be patched upon this. And although afflictions still remain, yet Scripture interprets these as the mortifications of present sin [to kill and humble the old Adam], and not as compensations of eternal death or as prices for eternal death.”⁷⁴ Good works are not excluded, but merit is excluded. Again we quote the *Apology*: “For it is true that in the doctrine of repentance works are required, because certainly a new life is required. But here the adversaries wrongly add that by such works we merit the remission of sins, or justification.”⁷⁵ There is no doubt that the Scripture frequently speaks of good works. Is it then possible that we have wrested the Scriptures? The *Apology* defends the position of the Lutheran Confessions thus: “But our adversaries, charming men, pick out mutilated sentences (from Scripture), in order to deceive those who are unskilled. Afterwards they attach something from their own opinions. Therefore, entire passages are to be required, because, according to the common precept, it is unbecoming, before the entire Law is thoroughly examined, to judge or reply when any single clause of it is presented. And passages, when produced in their entirety, very frequently bring the interpretation with them.”⁷⁶

The false teaching of Rome in regard to merit is based upon a misconception of the powers of man and a misconception of the nature of sin. In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* the Council states: “For sacred Scripture teaches that man was created ‘to the image of God,’ is capable of knowing and loving his Creator, and was appointed by Him as master of all earthly creatures, that he might subdue them and use them to God’s glory.”⁷⁷ In the next paragraph it says of the fall into sin: “Although he was made by God in a state of holiness, from the very dawn of history man abused his liberty, at the urging of personified Evil... Examining his heart, man finds that he has inclinations toward evil too.”⁷⁸ On the following pages the Council speaks of man and sin as though man were only “wounded by sin,”⁷⁹ and of his intelligence thus: “It can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partly obscured and weakened.”⁸⁰ According to the Council, man still possesses free will. “For God has willed that man be left ‘in the hand of his own counsel’ so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him. Hence man’s dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice. Such a choice is personally motivated and prompted from within. It does not result from blind internal impulse, or from mere external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and produces for himself, through effective and skillful action, apt means to that end. Since man’s freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the help of God’s grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower.”⁸¹ Original sin is simply spoken of as a “bent toward evil.”⁸²

The Lutheran Confessions by contrast recognize man for what he is according to the Scriptures—“a lost and condemned sinner,” as we are told in the Second Article. Original sin is not just a stain or a wound, and not at all slight. The *Formula of Concord* says of it, and this is in accordance with Scripture: “God’s Word teaches that the corrupt nature, of and by itself, has no power for anything good in spiritual, divine things, not even for the least, as good thoughts; and not only this, but that of and by itself it can do nothing in the sight of God but

⁷⁴ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 301.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 199.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 201.

⁷⁷ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 210.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 211.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 212.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 213.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 214.

⁸² *Ibid.* p. 224.

sin, Gen. 6, 5; 8, 21.”⁸³ This disposes of free will, as the *Apology* points out: “Therefore, although we concede to free will the liberty and power to perform the outward works of the Law, yet we do not ascribe to free will these spiritual matters, namely, truly to fear God, truly to believe God, truly to be confident and hold that God regards us, hears us, forgives us, etc. These are the true works of the First Table, which the heart cannot render without the Holy Ghost, as Paul says, I Cor. 2, 14: “*The natural man, i.e., man using only natural strength, receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*”⁸⁴ As long as man has spiritual powers to a certain extent, it is quite reasonable to minimize sin and the forgiveness of sin, and to emphasize ways and means by which man can achieve pardon and holiness. This Rome does—but that is not evangelical, not according to the Gospel, and is completely rejected by our Confessions.

In view of this it is not surprising that, despite its vaunted renewal, Rome has retained what it calls “evangelical counsels” as a way by which man may achieve holiness. It says of them in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God [that is, celibacy], poverty, and obedience are based upon the words and example of the Lord... The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church has received from her Lord and which she ever preserves with the help of His grace. Church authority has the duty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of interpreting these evangelical counsels, of regulating their practice, and finally of establishing stable forms of living according to them.”⁸⁵ This resulted long ago in the formation of religious families, monastic orders, etc., of which “institutes of perfection”⁸⁶ we are told that they “give their members the support of greater stability in their way of life, a proven method of acquiring perfection, etc.”⁸⁷ Again: “Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the practice of these counsels is undertaken by many Christians; either privately or in some Church-approved situation or state, and produces in the world, as produce it should, a shining witness and model of holiness.”⁸⁸ The implication is clear that ordinary Christians are not as holy as such who follow these evangelical counsels. Such holiness becomes a matter of merit. Very little is left in Rome of the holiness that is ours in Christ, which the Lutheran Confessions so highly extol.

A further sin against the Gospel spirit is the teaching of Rome on the Lord’s Supper and on Mary and the saints. These, too, are rejected by our Confessions. But it will be well for us to hear from the Council documents themselves, so that we may be convinced that evangelical is not the word that ought to be applied to that which this Council has produced. We quote from the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*: “Through the ministry of priests, the spiritual sacrifice of the faithful is made perfect in union with the sacrifice of Christ, the sole Mediator. Through the hands of priests and in the name of the whole Church, the Lord’s sacrifice is offered in the Eucharist in an unbloody and sacramental manner until He Himself returns.”⁸⁹ “Thus the Eucharistic Action is the very heartbeat of the congregation of the faithful over which the priest presides. So priests must instruct them to offer to God the Father the divine Victim in the sacrifice of the Mass, and to join to it the offering of their own lives.”⁹⁰ “...Especially by the celebration of the Mass, men offer sacramentally the sacrifice of Christ.”⁹¹ “Priests fulfill their chief duty in the mystery of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. In it the work of our redemption continues to be carried out. For this reason, priests are strongly urged to celebrate Mass every day, for even if the faithful are unable to be present, it is an act of Christ and the Church.”⁹² And in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.”⁹³ This

⁸³ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 867.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 337.

⁸⁵ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p. 76.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 73-74.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 66.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 535.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 542.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 541.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 560f.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 28.

teaching not only totally changes that which Christ taught concerning His supper, but is evangelical in no sense of the word, for it offers God the work of man instead of receiving from God.

Considering what we have just read, it is remarkable how often the Vatican documents speak of Christ as the only Mediator. The words are evangelical; but what Rome has made of Mary and the saints undermines the content of this scriptural expression. Rome tries to meet the objections of the Protestant faith and specifically of the Lutheran Confessions when it says in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*: “We have but one Mediator, as we know from the words of the Apostle: ‘For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all’ (I Tim. 2:5, 6). The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power... In no way do they [that is, the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin on men] impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ. Rather, they foster this union.”⁹⁴ Add to that: “By her maternal charity, Mary cares for the brethren of her Son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to their happy fatherland. Therefore the Church invokes the Blessed Virgin under the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix. These, however, are to be so understood that they neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.”⁹⁵ Mary has, they assert, a subordinate role, and yet in common usage she has virtually replaced Christ. The *Apology* correctly responds: “What does Christ do if the blessed Mary does these things?”⁹⁶

The council document on the Church calls Mary’s relationship to Christ an “office”: “... she is endowed with the supreme office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God.”⁹⁷ It points to Scripture as warrant for what it says, stating: “The sacred Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament, as well as ancient tradition, show the role of the Mother of the Savior in the economy of salvation in an ever clearer light and propose it as something to be probed into.”⁹⁸ But what Rome has made of her, despite its protestations to the contrary, has actually set aside the role of Christ as the one and only Savior of men. For example, “By thus consenting to the divine utterance, Mary, a daughter of Adam, became the mother of Jesus. Embracing God’s saving will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son... Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus said, she, ‘being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.’”⁹⁹ On the following page: “Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan (cf. John 19:25), suffering grievously with her only-begotten Son. There she united herself with a maternal heart to His sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth.”¹⁰⁰ We continue her career: “Finally, preserved free from all guilt of original sin, the Immaculate Virgin was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory upon the completion of her earthly sojourn. She was exalted by the Lord as Queen of all, in order that she might be the more thoroughly conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords (cf. Apoc. 19:16) and the conqueror of sin and death.”¹⁰¹ We proceed: “... taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving role, but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation.”¹⁰² Though the Council insists that the adoration given to Mary is essentially different from the adoration offered to the Incarnate Word,¹⁰³ though it exhorts its theologians and preachers to avoid exaggeration on the one hand and the excess

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 90-91.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 91-91.

⁹⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 349.

⁹⁷ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 86.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 87.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 88.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 89.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* p. 90.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* p. 91.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p. 94.

of narrow-mindedness on the other,¹⁰⁴ it insists that the veneration of Mary is true doctrine, and “charges that practices and exercises of devotion toward her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries, and that those decrees issued in earlier times regarding the veneration of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints, be religiously observed,”¹⁰⁵ and adds, “Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and the Mother of men.”¹⁰⁶

We would add to this just one statement concerning the saints, taken from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*: “By celebrating the passage of these saints from earth to heaven the Church proclaims the paschal mystery as achieved in the saints who have suffered and been glorified with Christ; she proposes them to the faithful as examples who draw all to the Father through Christ, and through their merits she pleads for God’s favors.”¹⁰⁷

Such doctrine (with or without safeguards) dishonors Christ and the Gospel, as the Confessions show. The *Augsburg Confession* treads very lightly when it speaks of the worship of saints, and yet clearly shows how that practice actually deposes Jesus Christ. “But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints, or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon, I John 2:1: *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, etc.*”¹⁰⁸ Paragraphs in the later Confessions speak in much greater detail and much more vehemently, for by that time it was clear that Rome would not accept the truth.

Our Confessions are also evangelical in the sense that they do not set up rules where Scripture does not, and completely leave traditional methods a matter of adiaphora. The *Catechism*, which for our laity is the handbook of faith, since they know the *Catechism* best of the confessional writings, is, for example, truly evangelical in the explanation of the Commandments, where legalism and merit could so easily creep in. Luther in his statement of the Third Commandment shows the centrality of the Gospel, and sets up no rules for Sabbath observance, whether in the method of the Seventh Day Adventists or of Rome in this Council. As proper motivation, recognizing the Gospel thrust of the Scripture, Luther proposes: “We should fear and love God.” This is based on the Gospel faith, which is a gift of God. According to the explanation of the Third Article, our conversion is entirely an act of God’s grace through the Holy Spirit, and not at all a decision of a so-called free will. In the section on Confession, the emphasis is not on an enumeration of sins, something that Rome requires in order to assess the works of penance, the satisfactions. Rather, Luther proclaims the Gospel of Absolution. That leaves no room for anything contrary to the Gospel.

Since Vatican II addresses the separated brethren, it is very careful not to distress Protestants unduly. In its treatment of the Sacraments, it often gives greater prominence to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper than to the other five. It mentions purgatory, I believe, only twice, and then incidentally. In connection with the coming of Christ, it states: “Meanwhile some of His disciples are exiles on earth. Some have finished with this life and are being purified. Others are in glory, beholding ‘clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is.’”¹⁰⁹ And: “This most sacred Synod accepts with great devotion the venerable faith of our ancestors regarding this vital fellowship with our brethren who are in heavenly glory or who are still being purified after death.”¹¹⁰

Indulgences seem not to be mentioned in the Council documents at all. That does not mean that they have been dropped. On September 23, 1959, John XXIII addressed a prayer to the Holy Spirit for the success of the Ecumenical Council. Appended to the prayer is this statement: “By virtue of the powers given to it by His Holiness John XXIII, the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary makes the following grants: 1) a partial indulgence of ten years to be gained by the faithful who recite the above prayer devoutly and with contrite heart; 2) once a

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p. 95.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 95.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 96.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p. 168.

¹⁰⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 57f.

¹⁰⁹ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 80.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 83-84.

month a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions if they have piously recited the prayer for an entire month. All things to the contrary notwithstanding.”¹¹¹ That is Romanism in action on the parish and home level. That is not evangelical. It is plain bartering.

The Lutheran Confessions Are Catholic and Ecumenical

Perhaps the strangest thing to say of our Confessions is that they are truly catholic and ecumenical, and that the Roman Council was not of that spirit. It might even seem presumptuous, when we note that the first official action of the Council, taken nine days after it convened, was a *Message to Humanity*, which in its opening words read: “The Fathers of the Council to All Men. We take great pleasure in sending to all men and nations a message concerning that well-being, love, and peace which were brought into the world by Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God, and entrusted to the Church. For this is the reason why, at the direction of the most blessed Pope John XXIII, we successors of the apostles have gathered here, joined in single-hearted prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus, and forming one apostolic body headed by the successor of Peter.”¹¹² Though the Message ends by saying: “Our prayer is that in the midst of this world there may radiate the light of our great hope in Jesus Christ, our only Savior,”¹¹³ yet every Lutheran, Protestant, and Orthodox church member is quite aware of the fact that Rome claims to be the one and only legitimate expression of the Church. This remains its claim, even though the Council in the *Decree on Ecumenism* acknowledges the presence of significant elements of the true Catholic faith outside the boundaries of the Catholic Church,¹¹⁴ and in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* even states: “Likewise, we can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them also He gives His gifts and graces, and is thereby operative among them with His sanctifying power.”¹¹⁵ We admit: the tone has changed, especially when we note the *Pater peccavi* of the Council: “St. John has testified: ‘If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us’ (I John. 1:10). This holds good for sins against unity. Thus, in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us.”¹¹⁶ But let us not be deceived. There is no detailing of what these “sins” are, nor is there a single retraction of those manifest errors and abuses exposed and refuted in the Lutheran Confessions, errors whereby the Church was divided and remains divided. Rome claims to be *the* catholic, universal, ecumenical Church, to which all men are morally bound to belong. Even in the Declaration discussing religious freedom the Council defines it chiefly as immunity from coercion in civil society, and then adds: “Therefore, it leaves untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the true religion and toward the one Church of Christ.”¹¹⁷

With the weight of tradition backing the claims of Rome, can we Lutherans in any way say that our Confessions are catholic, universal, and truly ecumenical? To be able to do so is important, for otherwise our faith is not relevant, and we are not in a position to carry out Christ’s commission, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

An unbiased study of the Lutheran Confessions will support the assertion that in every way the Lutheran Confessions agree with the Scripture. This is particularly the thrust of the *Apology*, which defended the position of the *Augsburg Confession* against the *Confutation* of the Roman party, showing that where the Roman Church differed from the Lutheran Confessions, it had departed from the Scripture. This total agreement of the Lutheran Confessions with the Scripture places us into the most catholic company of all, for thereby we have fellowship with the Father, who in time past spoke through the prophets, with the Son, who instructed and sent out the apostles, and with the Holy Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Holy Word. When I now

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 794.

¹¹² *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* p. 7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 345.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 34.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 351.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 677.

as a child of God join my pastor in the Communion Liturgy and pray, “It is truly meet, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord,” followed by one of the Proper Prefaces which mention John the Baptist, Christ our Lord, His chosen disciples, or the blessed Apostles and Evangelists, continuing then, “Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Thy glorious name, evermore praising Thee and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth,” I have fellowship with all members of the Church Triumphant and its great and glorious Lord. Agreement with the Scripture and faith in Him who is the Cornerstone place us into the most catholic company of all: the Lord God and the departed saints. This is one aspect of being truly ecumenical.

The Confessions likewise present evidence that the position of our Lutheran fathers is in full agreement with the ancient church, and thus is ecumenical and catholic in a very correct sense. The Lutheran way is neither a revolt nor a rebellion. Our doctrines are Christian doctrines, not heretical doctrines. Practically all articles of the *Augsburg Confession* conclude with a paragraph stating: “We condemn all heresies which have sprung up against this article,” and then detail both ancient and modern perversions of the sacred truth. Both the *Apology* and the *Formula of Concord* appeal to the position of the ancient church and cite it. We would also call your attention to the *Catalogue of Testimonies* appended to the *Book of Concord*. Here are the two opening paragraphs of its introduction addressed “To the Christian Readers.” “Since, especially in the article of the Person of Christ, some have without reason asserted that in the Book of Concord there is a deviation from *phrasibus* and *motifs loquendi*, that is, phrases and modes of speech of [received and approved by] the ancient pure Church and fathers, and that, on the contrary, new, strange, self-devised, unusual and unheard-of expressions are introduced; and since the testimonies of the ancient Church and fathers to which this book appeals proved somewhat too extended to be incorporated in it, and, having been carefully excerpted, were afterwards delivered to several electors and princes,—[Therefore] they are printed in goodly number as an appendix at the end of this book, in regard to particular points, for the purpose of furnishing a correct and thorough account to the Christian reader, whereby he may perceive and readily discover that in the aforesaid book nothing new has been introduced either in *rebus* (matter) or in *phrasibus* (expressions), that is, neither as regards the doctrine nor the manner of teaching it, but that we have taught and spoken concerning this mystery just as, first of all, the Holy Scriptures and afterwards the ancient pure church have done.”¹¹⁸ Surely, these testimonies help to vindicate the catholic nature of the Lutheran Confessions.

In two instances it may seem difficult to sustain this judgment: in the doctrine of justification by faith and in the doctrine of the Antichrist... but only until they are examined more closely in the light of Scripture and the early fathers. The Romanists of Luther’s day were willing to agree that the Lutheran faith concerning God and Christ was that of the universal church. But they accused Luther and his followers of introducing a novelty into the Christian religion with the doctrine of justification by faith. They could point to the fact that the church had for a thousand years taught the doctrine of meritorious works, and cite the writings of many fathers in support of this. This might disturb godly minds among us despite our knowledge of Holy Scripture. It should not. Let us remember that the early church had other doctrinal struggles to contend with, those concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Its energy was spent in debating these issues. And yet, even some of the ancient church fathers clearly taught justification by faith in Christ without the deeds of the Law. Melancthon in the *Apology* quotes Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, and Cyprian. If it is contended that the majority of the fathers, however, took a contrary position, then let us remember, as the *Apology* reminds us, that already in the days of Paul there were those in the church who contended that men were reconciled to God and justified not solely by faith in Christ but also by their own works and acts of worship. This was the subject of the apostolic meeting in Acts 15. Considering all this, we can rightfully say that the true doctrine confessed in the Lutheran Confessions was not a novelty, but a doctrine taught by the apostles in the early church, though attacked by others. The Lutheran Confessions present it in harmony with Scripture and the fathers who followed Scripture. Melancthon freely admitted that the evidence is greater in

¹¹⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 1107.

the one than in the other. He wrote, “Scripture is full of such testimonies,” and then adds, “Here and there among the Fathers similar testimonies are extant.”¹¹⁹ Yet he does not stretch the truth when he states in summary: “For we know that those things which we have said are in harmony with the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures, with the holy Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine, and very many others, and with the whole Church of Christ, which certainly confesses that Christ is Propitiator and Justifier.”¹²⁰

Perhaps we might ask why this doctrine of the Gospel, which the *Apology* calls “the chief topic of Christian doctrine,” or the one which, “alone opens the door of the entire Bible,”¹²¹ should have been obscured in the centuries immediately following the Apostolic age and then opposed and denied for more than a thousand years thereafter. The answer will help us to understand how the other doctrine, the one concerning the Antichrist, can be truly catholic and ecumenical, although it seems to be the very opposite.

The Holy Spirit teaches in II Thessalonians 2 of the coming of a man of sin, the son of perdition. This chapter also speaks of something that “withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.” Then it states: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work.” No exegesis up to now has been totally satisfactory as to who or what it is that delayed the open revelation of this man of sin during and after the time of the apostles, nor need we go into that here. Sufficient for our purpose is that this “man of sin” was to be revealed, and that this would follow upon “a falling away.” It is therefore in the nature of a Scriptural doctrine fulfilled in history that from the very beginning the heart of the Gospel, free forgiveness through faith in Christ, was gradually undermined, that the kingdom of the Antichrist was established, and that in due time the Antichrist was revealed. Luther, by the way, was not the first to recognize the Pope as the Antichrist. Many years before, the Spiritual Franciscans, Wycliffe, and Huss had made this charge against the Pope. However, even Luther and the Christian Church had to grow into this recognition and identification. In the *Apology* the Antichrist is mentioned a number of times in connection with the papacy, but the Pope is not expressly charged with being the Antichrist. Always the door is left open for the Pope and his followers to reform and to accept the true doctrine of the Gospel. A loving “if” is prevalent. Thus: “If the adversaries defend these human services as meriting justification, grace, and the remission of sins, they simply establish the kingdom of Antichrist. For the kingdom of Antichrist is a new service of God, devised by human authority rejecting Christ, just as the kingdom of Mahomet has services and works through which it wishes to be justified before God; nor does it hold that men are gratuitously justified before God by faith, for Christ’s sake. Thus the Papacy also will be a part of the kingdom of Antichrist IF it thus defends human services as justifying” (emphasis added).¹²² Six years later, by the time the *Smalcald Articles* were being composed, conviction had been born of the Word of God, and Luther wrote: “... the Pope is the very Antichrist.”¹²³

This then is a doctrine that is truly ecumenical and catholic, though it does not seem so at first glance. Scripture proposes it for the faith of all who follow Christ and seek to be saved by His merits. This doctrine does not make our Confessions sectarian or peculiarly Lutheran, even though the great number of Christians does not recognize its validity and many Lutherans are willing to place a question mark behind it. Not once, for example, does Jaroslav Pelikan mention the Antichrist in his book *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*.¹²⁴ Thus he fails to understand that riddle completely. The doctrine of the Antichrist is catholic and ecumenical in the true sense. The Scripture proposes it for the faith of all of God’s children so that they may be on guard against the foe of their salvation. Nor will this change, for the Antichrist will not be destroyed until the brightness of the Lord’s coming. Presently he is God’s judgment on the outward church. Here then is a doctrine with which the Church of God must come to grips until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Another sense in which the Lutheran Confessions are catholic and ecumenical is that they actually meet the needs of all men. Previously we have referred to the doctrine of justification or the forgiveness of sins

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 151.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 225.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 121.

¹²² *Ibid.* p. 319.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p. 475.

¹²⁴ *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*, Jaroslav Pelikan, Abingdon Press, N.Y., 1959.

through Jesus Christ received by faith. As long as men rely upon their own works, troubled consciences can find no rest.

Vatican II has not changed Rome's teaching that men must merit the pardon of God. It provides many ways of meriting grace—all of them, of course, false. There is penance with its works of satisfaction. How can you ever know whether you have done enough? Are works of love meritorious? How do you know it was pure love and that no other motive was intermingled? Then there is the Mass as a sacrifice offered to God! There are the evangelical counsels by which men are supposed to be able to achieve perfection, in fact, an excellence surpassing what is commanded!¹²⁵ Religious orders offer you a proven method of acquiring perfection.¹²⁶ All of this and more can be documented from Vatican II, plus what a Roman priest once called the clearest doctrine of all Scripture: purgatory. But none of these meets man's need; he is left in his sins. No one, not even Mary, could benefit by such regulations, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

The only way men can be justified is "freely by His grace which is in Christ Jesus." This is the very heart of the Lutheran Confessions. That, too, makes them ecumenical in the sense that all men can find in them that which their souls need. Why else be so concerned about mission work, whether on the Apache reservation, elsewhere in Arizona and California, or on foreign soil?

Vatican II has an entire decree devoted to *Missionary Activity of the Church*. Much in it would make good home reading for our Mission Boards. How beautiful is such a statement as this: "The world which is entrusted today to the loving ministry of the pastors of the Church is that world which God so loved that He gave His only Son for it."¹²⁷ Yet since the motivation is not justification through Christ alone and by faith alone, the real zeal for missions is undermined, perhaps even restricted somewhat to the most serious cases. Rome after all admits the possibility of salvation without Christ for pious heathen. We read a pertinent paragraph in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, under the heading *The People of God*: "But rather often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become caught up in futile reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:2, 25). Or there are some who, living and dying in a world without God, are subject to utter hopelessness. Consequently, to promote the glory of God and procure the salvation of all such (*sic!*) men, and mindful of the command of the Lord, 'Preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk. 16:16), the Church painstakingly fosters her missionary work."¹²⁸ This statement follows upon words in which Jews, Moslems, and others are practically welcomed into the circle of the People of God without change of any kind.

The objection is raised that the Lutheran Confessions scarcely speak of missions at all. The difference is that in the Lutheran Confessions the Lutheran Church does not state what it proposes to do, but simply confesses what it believes, and what all others must believe for their eternal salvation. The Lutheran Confessions are a confession, not a program.

That which perhaps above all marks our Confessions as catholic and ecumenical is their doctrine of the Church. Catholicism, in renewing itself, had needed to improve its image in this respect. Ever since its break with Eastern Orthodoxy and especially during the last four and one-half centuries, it has denied membership in the Church to all men, women, and children outside the Roman fold—almost as many as were within it. This had long been a source of irritation to other Christians. The best the Council could come up with without totally reversing the former stand of the Roman Church was to state in its *Decree on Ecumenism*—and similar statements occur frequently in other Vatican II documents, "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church."¹²⁹ It is not ready to grant that any who are not affiliated with Rome can be members of the Church in the true sense of the word. It recognizes only those in fellowship with the Pope and under his teaching authority as fully members of the Church.

¹²⁵ *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 72.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 74.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 575.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 35.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 345.

Conceivably this could be true if the Church were in its essence a visible body, as Rome insists. That, however, would mean that many who are hypocrites, or worse, would truly be members of the Church. Both Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions start from the simply truth that the wicked cannot be members of the Church, for the wicked are part of the devil's kingdom, though they may be in outward fellowship with such who are truly members of the Church. The *Apology* teaches: "Although, therefore, hypocrites and wicked men are members of this true Church according to outward rites [titles and offices], yet when the Church is defined, it is necessary to define that which is the living body of Christ, and which is in name and fact the Church [which is called the body of Christ, and has fellowship not alone in outward signs, but has gifts in the heart, namely the Holy Ghost and faith]." ¹³⁰ It continues: "Therefore, the Church, which is truly the kingdom of Christ, is properly the congregation of saints," ¹³¹ that is, believers. The Church is therefore to be found wherever the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered, for the Gospel produces believing hearts. In its essence the Church must therefore be invisible, restricted to no one denomination, nation, people, language, rite, or human authority. This is comforting and consoling to the child of God, for having come to faith in Christ through the Gospel, he is persuaded that he is not excluded from the holy Christian Catholic Church, which is gathered from among all people. The Lutheran Confessions acknowledge every believer in Christ as a member of the holy Christian Church and heir of eternal life. This is truly ecumenical and catholic.

Are the Lutheran Confessions Adequate?

We still need to ask: Are the Confessions adequate for our day? Despite Vatican II our Confessions meet the needs. In fact, many of today's problems have been answered in the Confessions incidentally, if not directly. There is no need for a wholesale revision or a drastic overhaul. It may, of course, be necessary to enlarge upon areas where the Confessions have not spoken directly in the form of proposed articles of faith. The former Synodical Conference did that very thing in its *Statement on Scripture*. Disagreement may make this necessary. It would be spiritual folly simply to declare that all doctrines, which have not been expounded in the Confessions explicitly, remain open questions. Some have suggested that. Carried to its logical conclusion, this can only provide cover for heretical opinions. Further statements have often been necessary, and will continue to be. But let no one say that the Confessions are relics, fit only to be placed into an historical museum. Some statements may be dated, but most are timeless, for the Confessions confess the eternal, immutable truths of Holy Scripture, the Gospel of our salvation. In this they are adequate.

Perhaps, on the other hand, we ought to ask ourselves, whether *we* have made museum pieces out of them? Do we read them? Do we study them? As pastors and teachers who have sworn to uphold them in our preaching and teaching, we would be less than the pastors and teachers God would have us be if we were to ignore them. Our laymen, who have bound themselves to the Confessions in the constitutions of our Synod and our congregations, ought also to be deeply concerned about them. The Scripture ought to be in one hand, the *Book of Concord* in the other. That makes for no tension, for the Confessions teach the pure Gospel of salvation. There is no greater worship of Jesus Christ than to seek in Him alone the forgiveness of sins, to turn to Him alone as our Mediator and Redeemer. Therein alone is found strength for living and consolation for dying.

Dr. F. Bente, one of the forgotten fathers of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, stated in his Preface to the *Concordia Triglotta*: "Wherever the Lutheran Church ignored her symbols or rejected all or some of them, there she always fell an easy prey to her enemies. But wherever she held fast to her God-given crown, esteemed and studied her confessions, and actually made them a norm and standard of her entire life and practice, there the Lutheran Church flourished and confounded all her enemies." ¹³² The Confessions—apostolic, evangelic, catholic—are not just a static witness from Reformation days, but our living voice whereby we confess Christ before the men and women of today and invite them to the Savior, who will come again to receive His own to Himself. This suggests no renovation of doctrine, but surely a renewal of our hearts and our

¹³⁰ *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 231.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹³² *Ibid.*, *Preface*, p. iv.

lives, so that our lips may be willing instruments able to serve our God and our fellow men through the Lutheran Confessions.