

# The Future Of Confessional Lutheranism In The USA

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What is the future of Lutheranism? Or to state the question more precisely for our conference this afternoon: What is the future of confessional Lutheranism in the United States of America? The question seems to imply that there might not be a future.

How often in the course of some 455 years, has this question been asked! One's thoughts go back quickly to the days of the Reformation, to the Edict of Worms of 1521, directed along with the sentences of death on Luther, the extirpation of Lutheran teachings,<sup>1</sup> the ban against anyone who shall dare to buy, sell, ready preserve, copy, print, or cause to be copied or printed any of Luther's books.<sup>2</sup>

We may think of the days of the Interims.<sup>3</sup> In 1548 the German people were forced to return to the Roman Church, Evangelical clergymen were driven out, and Roman worship was reintroduced.

We may think of more recent years. Since about 1846 the real Lutheran Church has ceased to exist in large sections of Germany.<sup>4</sup> The houses of God in Wittenberg, Torgau, Eisleben, Erfurt, Magdeburg are no longer Lutheran Churches. Even the "City Church of Wittenberg" (where the Sacrament was first again celebrated according to Christ's institution and the teachings of our Confessions; where one can see the younger Cranach's superlative Reformation Altarpiece, showing Luther and the other Wittenberg Reformers seated around their Lord at the Last Supper) is not a Lutheran Church.

In our day the question of the future of Lutheranism is again asked. We are living in the day and the age of the modernism of a Paul Tillich, who reduces the Christian faith to "ultimate concern".<sup>5</sup> We live in an age of a Rudolf Bultmann who demythologizes the New Testament to a mere kerygma.<sup>6</sup> We live in a day and age when the followers of Schweitzer are ending their quest for the historic Jesus<sup>7</sup> with the conclusion that he is not. We live in the day of a Thomas Altizer who bluntly proclaims that God is dead.<sup>8</sup> These doctrines of devils (1 Ti 4:1) are no strangers to Lutherans. They are echoed in most Lutheran schools of the prophets; they are reechoed from many Lutheran pulpits across the nation.

In the year 1961 the periodical *News and Views*<sup>9</sup> published a series of four articles entitled "What's Troubling the Lutherans?"<sup>10</sup> In these issues the author divided into three categories of left, center, and right—representing the United Lutheran Church in the America, the American Lutheran Church and the Synodical Conference, respectively.<sup>11</sup> It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss how the various and sundry groups of Lutherans merged into these three categories. However some charts and explanations on the historical nature of American Lutherans can be found in Appendix I.

This three-fold grouping of Lutherans in America made by *News and Views* in 1961 is no longer adequate or relevant for 1971. To discuss American Lutheranism from this perspective would be similar to discussing American political parties by placing them in the categories of Federalist, Whigs, and Democratic-Republicans.

Much has happened in ten short years. The "left" and "Center" and two members of the Synodical Conference (Missouri and Slovak) have formed the Lutheran Council USA. This "new" council replaced the old National Lutheran Council. The "left" with a series of mergers

has become known as the Lutheran Church in America. The “center” and Missouri Synod have declared pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. Numerous church bodies have split off from the “right”. The Synodical Conference is no more.

Therefore, new categories are needed. We propose the following for the discussion of this subject of the future of Lutheranism. They are again three in number:<sup>12</sup> 1) The Lutheran Council USA (consisting of the Lutheran Church in America, LCA, the American Lutheran Church, ALC, The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, LC-MS, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, Slovak,); 2) The Evangelical Lutheran Confessional Forum, (consisting of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Church, WELS, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Norwegian, and hopefully the Federation for Authentic Lutheranism, FAL); and 3) various other groups, synods, federations, and individuals.<sup>13</sup>

### WHAT IS LUTHERANISM?

All the members of the three groups mentioned above stake claim to the name of “Lutheran”. It thus becomes important to define what is Lutheranism. As stated in the title of this paper, we are concerned with confessional Lutheranism. Thus, when the term Lutheran or Lutheranism is used we mean confessional Lutheranism.

Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the father of Confessional Lutheranism in America, in his great, classic *The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The True Visible Church of God on Earth*<sup>14</sup> gives this definition of the Lutheran Church.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the sum total of all who without reservation profess the doctrine which was restored by the Reformation of Luther and was summarily submitted in writing at Augsburg in 1530 to the emperor and the realm, and was treated and expounded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols, as the pure doctrine of the divine Word.<sup>15</sup>

Dr. Walther then goes on in the following theses to enlarge upon this basic definition. We shall quote at length from these Theses since we believe they are very important for the discussion of the future of Confessional Lutheranism. In fact, we believe that these Theses are the very heart and soul of the matter.

Walther says:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes the written Word of the apostles and prophets as the sole and perfect source, rule, and norm, and the judge of all doctrines: (a) not reason; (b) not tradition; (c) not new revelations.<sup>16</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church professes the perspicuity of Holy Scripture.<sup>17</sup> (There are no ‘views’ and open questions.)<sup>18</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes no human interpreter of Holy Scripture whose *ex officio* interpretation must be regarded as infallible and binding; a. not any individual person; b. not any special estate; c. not any special or universal church council; d. not the whole church.<sup>19</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church accepts God’s Word as it interprets itself.

- A. The Evangelical Lutheran Church leaves the decision solely to the original text.
- B. The Evangelical Lutheran church, in its interpretation of words and sentences, adheres to the linguistic usage.
- C. The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes only the literal sense as the true meaning.
- D. The Evangelical Lutheran Church maintains that there is but one literal sense.
- E. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is guided in its interpretation by the context and purpose.
- F. The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes that the literal sense may be either the improper or the proper one; however, it does not deviate from the proper meaning of a word or sentence unless Scripture itself forces it to do so, namely, by either the textual circumstances a parallel passage, or the analogy of faith.
- G. The Evangelical Lutheran Church interprets the obscure passages in the light of the clear.
- H. The Evangelical Lutheran Church takes articles of faith from those passages in which they are expressly taught, and judges according to these all incidental expressions regarding them,
- I. The Evangelical Lutheran Church rejects from the very outset every interpretation which does not agree with the analogy of faith. (Ro 12:6)<sup>20</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church receives the entire Holy Scripture (as God's Word), regarding nothing set forth in it as superfluous or unimportant, but everything as necessary and weighty; it accepts also all doctrines which necessarily follow from the Scripture words.<sup>21</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church assigns to every doctrine of Scripture the rank and significance which it is given in God's Word itself.

- A. As the foundation, core, and guiding star of all teachings it regards the doctrine of Christ or of Justification.
- B. The Evangelical Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply between Law and Gospel.
- C. The Evangelical Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply between fundamental and nonfundamental articles as set forth in Scripture.
- D. The Evangelical Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply what God's Word commands and what it leaves to Christian liberty (adiaphora, ecclesiastical organization).
- E. The Evangelical Lutheran Church distinguishes sharply and cautiously between the Old and the New Testament.<sup>22</sup>

\*The Evangelical Lutheran Church adopts as an article of faith no teaching not shown with incontestable certainty to be contained in the Word of God.<sup>23</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is sure that the doctrine set forth in its Confessions is the pure divine truth, because it agrees with the written Word of God on all points.<sup>24</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church demands of all its members especially of all its ministers, that they acknowledge its Confessions without reservation and show their willingness to be obligated to them.<sup>25</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church rejects every fraternal or Ecclesiastical fellowship with such as reject its Confession, either in whole or in part.<sup>26</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church administers the holy sacraments according to Christ's institution.<sup>27</sup>

True Evangelical Lutheran particular or local churches or congregations are only those in which the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, set forth in its symbols, is not only lawfully recognized, but is also professed in public preaching.<sup>28</sup>

The Evangelical Lutheran Church practices fellowship of confession and (Christian) love with all who with it are one in faith.<sup>29</sup>

In Walther's Theses two things stand out as supremely characteristic of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, namely God's Word and Confessional theology. The future of true Lutheranism in America will be determined by the acceptance or rejection of these two fundamental characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

### **THE FORMAL PRINCIPLE**

Dr. Robert Preus, in an article entitled "Confessions Leave No Doubt About God's 'Pure, Infallible Word'", summarizes the Confessional principle concerning Holy Scripture:

The Lutheran Confessions take for granted the divine origin—and as a result also the inerrancy—of Scripture. In our Confessions they are called the 'holy Scripture of God' (FC SD, V 3) 'the clear Scripture of the Holy Spirit' (Apol, pref. 9). Again and again 'God's Word' and 'Holy Scripture' are identified in our Confessions. This assurance concerning the divine origin and nature of Scripture is fundamental to a proper reading and approach toward Scripture. The Lutheran Confessions consistently read Scripture as God's Word, carrying with it God's authority, God's power, God's truthfulness.

And so our Lutheran Confessions speak of Scripture as 'the eternal truth' (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 13). They urge us to believe the Scriptures; for 'they will not lie to you' (FC V, 76 df. IV, 57) the Scriptures cannot be 'false or deceitful' (FC SD, VII, 96). And why? Because God who is eternal truth cannot contradict himself in Scripture (FC SD, XI, 35). It is his 'pure, infallible and unalterable' Word. (Preface to the *Book of Concord*, p. 8)<sup>30</sup>

But what is the attitude towards God's Word among American Lutherans in the decade of the seventies? Lawrence L. Kersten in his survey of religious beliefs among Lutherans living in the Detroit area records these results:<sup>31</sup>

The Bible is God's word and all it says is true. (agree)

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	29%	35%	62%	77%
Clergy	10%	19%	74%	100%

The Bible was written by men inspired by God, and its basic moral and religious teachings are true, but because the writers were men, it contains some human errors. (agree)

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	47%	47%	27%	16%
Clergy	76%	74%	18%	0%

Even though the Bible contains many errors and myths, it still represents God's teachings. (agree)

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	24 %	17%	10%	7%
Clergy	12 %	7%	4%	0%

Don't know.

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	0%	1%	1%	0%
Clergy	2%	0%	4%	0%

In a nation wide poll taken by Jeffrey Hadden,<sup>32</sup> the results were as follows:  
I believe in a literal or nearly literal interpretation of the Bible.<sup>33</sup>

	Agreeing by %
American Lutheran Church (AL)	43
Missouri Synod Lutherans (MSL)	76

Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God not only in matters of faith but also in historical, geographical, and other secular matters.<sup>34</sup>

	Agreeing by %
American Lutheran Church (AL)	23
Missouri Synod Lutherans (MSL)	76

Hadden interviewed 908 American Lutheran pastors and 895 Missouri Synod pastors.<sup>35</sup>  
A group of liberal clergymen in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod hold this view regarding Holy Scripture.

We specifically hold that differences concerning . . . the question of factual error in the Bible . . . are not to be the basis for inclusion or exclusion of people among the true disciples of Jesus Christ or for membership in the LC-MS.<sup>36</sup>

While none of the above surveys included representation from any of the church bodies or federations from our third group of Lutherans in America, we believe it would be correct to conclude that all members of this group closely approach the position held by the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans.

Therefore, the position taken in regard to Holy Scripture by both the second and third group of Lutherans in America can be summarized in the words of the statement of belief published by the WELS.

We believe that in a miraculous way that goes beyond all human investigation God the Holy Ghost inspired these men (prophets, apostles) to write his Word. These “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Pe 1:21) . . . Every thought they expressed, every word they used, was given them by the Holy Spirit by inspiration . . . We believe that Scripture is a unified whole, true and without error in everything it says; for our Savior said: “The scripture cannot be broken” (Jn 10:35).<sup>37</sup>

The Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, a representative of our third group of Lutherans, has the very words used by Jeffrey Hadden (Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant Word of God not only in matters of faith but also in historical, geographical and other secular matters) as one of its confessional articles.<sup>38</sup>

### **CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLES**

As one reads the doctrinal articles of the various constitutions of Lutheran Church bodies in America, one finds almost complete agreement on what the Synod and every member of that Synod accepts without reservation. For example the Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America reads:

This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther’s *Small Catechism* as true witnesses to the Gospel . . . This church accepts the other symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther’s *Large Catechism*, and the Formula of Concord . . .<sup>39</sup>

Similar statements may be found in the Constitutions of all Lutheran Synods in America. However, one does not have to read very far in current Lutheran publications to find various and sundry interpretations of these constitutional Articles on doctrine and confession. The Lutheran Confessions are often used as a wax nose (like also Scripture) and twisted to suit the fancy of the individual.

All three groups of Lutherans appeal to the Symbols. However the mere statement that one believes what is contained in the Augsburg Confession or the *Book of Concord* is not a confession that clearly distinguishes the true confessor from the false confessor. For the sake of

clarity it is necessary to declare how one understands and interprets the Symbols and the articles of faith contained therein.

We find the following views regarding the Lutheran Confessions current in American Lutheranism.

**UNCONDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTION** - This is the position of orthodox Lutheranism of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>40</sup> It is the position held by the members of the Lutheran Forum, our second group of Lutherans. It is also the position held by most of the synods in our third group of Lutherans.

The unconditional subscription is best summarized by Dr. C.F.W. Walther. He states:

An unconditional subscription is the solemn declaration which the individual who wants to serve the Church makes under oath 1) that he accepts the *doctrinal* content of our Symbolical Books, because he recognizes the fact that it is in full agreement with Scripture and does not militate against Scripture in any point, whether that point be of major or minor importance.

2) that he therefore heartily believes in this divine truth and is determined to preach this doctrine without adulteration. Whatever position any doctrine occupy in the doctrinal system of the Symbols, whatever the form may be in which it occurs whether the subject be dealt with *ex professo* or only incidentally, an unconditional subscription refers to the whole content of the Symbols and does not allow the subscriber to make any mental reservation in any point. Nor will he exclude such doctrines as are discussed incidentally in support of other doctrines, because the fact that they are used stamps them as irrevocable articles of faith and demands their joyful acceptance by everyone who subscribes to the Symbols . . . However since the Symbols are confessions of faith or doctrine, the Church necessarily cannot require a subscription to those matters which do not belong to doctrine. . . . An unconditional subscription does not at all imply that it were impossible to improve on the line of argument employed. The same is true of the interpretation of certain Bible passages.<sup>41</sup>

**CONDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTION** - This kind of subscription is usually connected with old pietists and rationalists. It is the “in-so-far-as” subscription.

By using this formula the Pietists did not want to yield the fundamental articles of our faith. The Rationalist, on the other hand, did not want to be bound to these articles, even as they accepted Scripture as a rule and norm for their teaching only in so far as the context of Scripture was not contrary to their reason.<sup>42</sup>

John Conrad Dannhauer’s comment concerning this conditional subscription is still the best refutation: “a man could subscribe to the Koran in so far as it agrees with the Scriptures.”<sup>43</sup>

**HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION** - By this kind of interpretation one asserts that the doctrinal articles contained in the Confessions are not eternal truths. They were applicable only for certain times and conditions.

Dr. Robert Preus Labels this confessional interpretation “relativizing them historically.”

This attitude toward the Confessions argues that the Lutheran symbols, like every writing (including the Bible) are historically conditioned. They were indeed good and adequate confessions for their day. But we are living in a different age.<sup>44</sup>

Carl E. Braaten calls this historical interpretation a “Hypothetical Confessional Lutheran.” He writes:

If the identical doctrinal circumstances should prevail today, I would take precisely the same stand as our Lutheran forefathers . . . Historical factors however have intervened . . . This is merely a new declension of the old *quatenus* formula. Only now we accept the confessions not only in-so-far as they conform to the Sacred Scriptures, but also in-so-far as they are relevant to our times.<sup>45</sup>

Theodore Tappert, a member of the LCA, advocates this kind of historical interpretation. He writes:

When subscribing the confessions today, Lutherans assert that, in view of the issues which were then at stake and the alternatives which were then offered, the confessors were right.<sup>46</sup>

OPEN QUESTION INTERPRETATION - This approach wishes to declare as open questions all articles of doctrine not implicitly taught in the Confessions. This interpretation really elevates the Confessions above the Scriptures.

In a critique of this type of interpretation, Rev. Huth writes:

However, Synod holds that the Symbols were written for the purpose of providing Lutherans with an exhaustive list of the articles of faith and that specifically the Augsburg Confession prescribes some kind of quantitative total which Lutherans must accept so that Lutherans are not bound by anything that Scripture teaches unless it is also at least implicitly taught in the Augsburg Confession.<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Walther vigorously opposed this type of an approach in his 1868 essay on “False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions”<sup>48</sup> and in his 1858 essay on “Unconditional Subscription.”<sup>49</sup>

EVANGELICAL WITNESS - Dr. Robert Preus labels this approach as “relativizing the Confessions reductionistically.”<sup>50</sup> He writes:

This is the simplistic and arbitrary position of Carl Braaten. Gratuitously assuming that the Confessions provide no formula of subscription for succeeding Lutherans, Braaten claims that we are free today to work out our own approach toward the confessions. An unconditional subscription he calls ‘symbolatry’, ‘doctrinal legalism’, ‘confessional totalitarianism’, ‘restitution’, ‘a kind of doctrinal methodism.’<sup>51</sup>

Braaten offers what he calls “Constructive confessional Lutheranism.”<sup>52</sup> By this term Braaten means that we should accept the symbols as only an example of the evangelical witness



which the confessors formulated for the doctrinal controversies of their day. The Confessions, according to the Evangelical witness interpretation, have no authority for the Church today.

**REJECTION INTERPRETATION** - This position asserts that the Bible is enough. It even appeals to the *sola scriptura* principle of the Reformation. Richard Neuhaus, an advocator of this position, writes:

A theologian worthy his stipend can hardly be constrained, either in methodology or conclusions by the statements of the theologians of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup>

54 And a woman theologian, Rachel W. Ahlberg, states: “The confessions are out of date.”

These are the various interpretations being placed on the Lutheran Confessions today. In 1858, Dr. Walther concluded his essay on “Unconditional Subscription to the Confessions” with these telling words:

The only help for resurrection of our Church lies in a renewed acceptance of its old orthodox confessions and in a renewed unconditional subscription to its Symbols.<sup>55</sup>

Today, also, the future of Lutheranism in America lies in the acceptance of the Confessions and in an unconditional subscription to these Symbols.

### **THE RESULTS OF REJECTING AN UNCONDITIONAL SUBSCRIPTION**

The majority of Lutherans in America are not bound by an unconditional subscription. With such wild views regarding the Lutheran Confessions, one is not at all surprised to find such doctrinal confusion within American Lutheranism as presently exists today. The problem thus becomes:

Whether a person can be loyal to any confession or creed at all, whether theologians who have abandoned the authority of holy Scripture can have confessions any longer, whether modern latitudinarianism and indifferentism so rampant in practically all synods and church bodies today is at all compatible with confessionalism.<sup>56</sup>

One of the great confessional articles is the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>57</sup> We would say that this doctrine is explicitly taught in the Symbols; it even has the distinction of being a doctrine confessed in Augustana. Nevertheless, a group within the Missouri Synod, called “Openness and Trust”, questions this doctrine and places it in a list of “doctrines” which they call “open questions.”<sup>58</sup>

The August, 1971 issue of *SCOPE*, (published by the American Lutheran Church) magazine is a perversion of the Scriptures and the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. In commenting upon the word “body” in 1 Co 11:29 Dr. J. Kallas wrote “What he is saying is that Christ is present in the body—and the body is not the bread, or wine! The body is the church. Christ is present in his people!” Question 8 of the Bible study on page 21 also perverts Scripture and the

doctrine of the Lord’s Supper when it asks about the meaning of “body” as used in verse 29, obviously leaving it an open question.<sup>59</sup>

Another confessional article taught explicitly is the doctrine of Justification,<sup>60</sup> the material principle of Lutheran theology the article by which the church stands or falls.

Kersten in his survey among Detroit Lutherans recorded these results.<sup>61</sup>

Only those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior can go to heaven. (agree)

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	56%	58%	75%	84%
Clergy	43%	52%	84%	100%

A child is already sinful at birth (agree)

	LCA	ALC	MS	WELS
Lay	45%	58%	77%	79%
Clergy	67%	74%	96%	100%

Based upon the replies to several questions Kersten concludes:

The majority of Lutheran laymen today, in contrast to their views of being saved by God’s grace through faith and trust, also say that they are saved by keeping the Ten Commandments and living a good moral life . . . The majority of laymen interviewed think that they can achieve salvation by keeping the Ten Commandments.<sup>62</sup>

J. Hadden asked this question in his survey:<sup>63</sup>

Man by himself is incapable of anything but sin.

American Lutheran Church	73% yes
Missouri Synod Lutherans	85% yes

Another example of anti-confessional loyalty is the study document on Jesus Christ prepared by the Lutheran Council USA.<sup>64</sup> This document not only rejects the theology of the Lutheran Confessions concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ<sup>65</sup> but also the doctrine of the great ecumenical creeds of Christendom.

Dr. E. F. Klug, writing in the Springfielder offers these criticisms:

At various points it speaks of the humanity of Jesus Christ in such a way as to suggest a self-sustaining essence of person of man, for example, in a statement like “in the man Jesus, God confronts us”; “who shared our humanity, perhaps even our limitations.” . . . the context is intent on humanizing the person of Christ that it appears to speak in terms of an autohypostatic nature for the man Jesus.

In describing the attribute of omnipresence of Christ in terms of our entering into a believing relationship with him. The threat of Kenoticism seems to be real in view of statements like this, let alone a possible denial of the genus majesticum.

The document also shows a definite predilection for Aulen's Christus Victor emphasis, of Christ who was triumphant over Satan and evil, at the expense or neglect of the vicarious satisfaction. In a document on Christ and his work there is precious little focus on the crucified and risen Savior, who was the perfect propitiation, the Mercy-seat, as Paul calls him, who made full atonement for all men's sins, through whose redemption there is a perfect righteousness or justification.

Where Christ is being described as Reconciler, there is noticeable avoidance of speaking of the righteous wrath of God against sin and sinners.

Certain phrases in the document show an undue commitment to liberal theology's thought-forms. Witness, for example, "God is capable of and willing to fill every human life with that content that was manifested in the person of Jesus of Nazareth." Where is Luther's Christ-for-us? Sounds more like the New Being of Tillich and the old, old Christ-in-us theology of Schleiermacher.<sup>66</sup>

A simple comparison between this study document of the LCUSA and articles of the Lutheran Symbols on Christ, his Person, his Work, will show how completely void of Biblical and Confessional theology this document is.

The same false doctrines presented in this study document, "Who Can This Be?" are found in Dr. Kent Knustson, president of the ALC, book *His Only Son, Our Lord*.<sup>67</sup>

### **THE FUTURE**

As surveys such as those of Kerten and Hadden clearly show, as the current literature being issued from liberal Church presses reveals, the future of Confessional Lutheranism does not lie with the large Lutheran Synods in our first group.

The hope of Confessional Lutheranism must be sought in Confessional Theology, in an unconditional subscription to the Symbols, in a truthful proclamation of these doctrines.

President Oscar J. Naumann, in his President's address to the Forty-First Convention of the WELS, offers a proposal for the realignment of Confessional Lutherans.

1972 might be the year during which our Synod together with the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, the two synods who still uphold the confessional platform of the former Synodical Conference, should initiate consultations with orthodox Lutheran synods around the world aimed at the formation of a world-wide synodical conference founded on the same confessional principles on which the former synodical Conference was founded.<sup>68</sup>

A similar proposal was asked for at the ELS convention on June 25, 1971. The convention said:

Because the Confessional deterioration throughout most of Lutheranism has placed the faithful confessors in the position of having to battle against great odds within their circles, we encourage and support concerned members of other Lutheran Synods in their confessional battles.

We request the officers of our Synod to continue to take the initiative in laboring for a realignment of Lutherans who wish to remain faithful to God's Word.<sup>69</sup>

Those Pastors and laymen within the LCUSA structure who wish to remain Confessional Lutherans should be encouraged by these recommendations and eagerly seek realignment. Herman Otten, places this question before Lutherans:

Why should "moderates", liberals and evangelicals within the three major Lutheran bodies continually fight one another? The liberals within all Lutheran bodies should unite and the loyal Lutherans within these bodies should form an international synodical conference which should be open to all faithful Lutherans. Liberals would then be free to carry on their social gospel emphasis while evangelical Lutherans could then concentrate upon the preaching of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to lost sinners.<sup>70</sup>

We would also hope that Confessional Lutherans from the third group of Lutherans in America would join together with the Lutheran Forum in this international synodical conference. Most of the Pastors in these synods and federations were once members of the old synodical conference. Therefore, we find it difficult to see how they can find any doctrinal objections to forming a new synodical conference founded on the same confessional principles as the former synodical conference.

The editor of *Christian News* offers this observation:

We have been asked a number of times to publish articles on various controversies between confessional Lutherans. There are some minor disagreements among Confessional Lutherans but we don't believe these differences should prevent them from being in fellowship with one another . . . Loyal Lutheran bodies throughout the world should form some sort of synodical conference.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion we would offer these suggestions for the future of Confessional Lutheranism.

1. BIBLE: We who desire to preserve true Lutheranism should prayerfully study Holy Scripture, God's verbally inspired Word and revelation. The chief instrument in the Reformation of the sixteenth century was the open Bible,<sup>72</sup> translated for every plow-boy to read and understand. We believe that the preservation of true Lutheranism will require the use of Bibles that faithfully translate God's word in the language of the people.

Traditional language may be beautiful, and its familiarity may be comfortable to many, but the Word of God should not remain shrouded in archaisms—however beautiful—which shut it off from living communication with those who know only the English of current conversation and literature.<sup>73</sup>

Pastors must also continue to study God's Word in the original languages.

2. CONFESSIONS: True Lutheranism cannot be preserved outside of Confessional loyalty. This means that pastors must study and know their Confessions. We should ask

ourselves, when was the last time we read the Augsburg Confession, The Apology, or Formula through completely and studied what was there written? Our laymen must also be made aware of the great riches found in our Lutheran Confessions.

3. **WORSHIP:** Another important point for the preservation of Lutheranism is the worship life of our people. Our members must have a much clearer and a better understanding of a worship service. The two high points of worship—Word and Sacrament—must be made clear. Pastor Kurt Marquart writes:

The Real Presence has in recent times not played the central practical role in Church life which it had in Apostolic, ancient, and Reformation times.<sup>74</sup>

Dr. Hermann Sasse makes this observation:

One of the reasons why our conservative churches have not been able to revive orthodox theology in our time more powerfully is certainly the failure to realize the liturgical and sacramental character of the Christian doctrine.<sup>75</sup>

The great truths of Christianity, the rich heritage of Lutheran worship the great feast days of our Lutheran calendars, should be made more and more meaningful to our people.

While we have remembered the truth that ceremonies or church usages . . . are in and for themselves no divine worship or even part of it. (F.C. Epitome X, 3) we have not always remembered the corresponding truth of the Augsburg Confession “that nothing contributes so much to the maintenance of dignity in public worship and the cultivation of reverence and devotion among the people as the proper observance of ceremonies in the churches. (A.C.P.49 Tappert)<sup>76</sup>

4. **MISSIONS:** The preservation of true Lutheranism requires its continual proclamation, winning more and more for the church of Jesus Christ. True Lutherans believe that a man is saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Our members should be filled with this desire to win souls for Christ. They should be shown how this can be done by personal witness, the programs of the Church evangelism, prayers, and financial support.

5. **EDUCATION:** Christian education for all our members, not only those desiring to become Pastors and teachers., should be actively supported and promoted, Our members must be offered the best and finest schools possible. The hope for the future requires an intelligent and indoctrinated laity.

6. **AWARENESS OF TRENDS OF THE DAY:** Confessional Lutherans must also be on their guard. Eternal vigilance must be the motto.

There is a great future for Confessional Lutheranism! Too often true Lutherans become discouraged and pessimistic. This becomes the very thing the devil wants.

We must look for our comfort and encouragement to the Scriptures. “Look to the rock whence ye are hewn!” (Isa 51:1) Such passages as “Occupy until I come” (Lk 19:13): “Work while it is day” (Jn 9:4): “Do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” (2 Ti 4:5), must be our source of strength.

The great battle cry of the Apostle Paul must be our battle cry for the future of Lutheranism:

Finally, let the Lord and his mighty power make you strong. Put on God's whole armor, and you will be able to stand against the devil's tricky ways. You're not fighting against flesh and blood but against the rulers, authorities, and lords of this dark world, against the evil spirits that are above. This is why you should take God's whole armor; then you can resist when things are at their worst and having done everything, you can hold your ground. Stand, then, with truth as a belt fastened around your waist, with righteousness covering you as a breastplate, and with shoes on your feet, ready to bring the good news of peace. Besides all these, take faith as the shield with which you can put out all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take salvation as your helmet, and the Spirit's sword, which is God's Word. (Eph 6:10-17)

### SOLI DEO GLORIA!

#### NOTES

1. Hermann Sasse, *Here I Stand*, p. 6.
2. E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, p. 509ff.
3. F. Bente, *Historical Introduction to the Book of Concord*, p. 93ff.
4. Hermann Sasse, op. cit., p. 11,12.
5. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, p. 110; *Dynamics of Faith*, p. 1ff, 32, 51; cf. J. Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* p. 368; *Time* March 16, 1959, p. 46.
6. Rudolf Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, p. 38-40; *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 53; cf. J. Macquarrie, op. cit., p. 363.
7. Albert Schweitzer, *Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 397; cf. J.W. Macquarrie, op. cit., p. 94,153.
8. Thomas J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*; cf. J. W. Montgomery, *The 'Is God Dead?' Controversy*; and "The Death of the 'Death of God.' *The Suicide of Christian Theology*, p.76-173.
9. *News and Views* is published monthly by the National Laymen's Council of the Church League of America, 1407 Hill, Wheaton, Ill.
10. *News and Views*, Jan. 1961, Feb. 1961, June 1961, and May 1962.
11. Ibid. Feb. 1961, p. 1.
12. This new grouping is not to be viewed as similar to the old grouping of 1961 and prior, e.g. Lutheran Forum corresponds to the ALC. If any similarity of grouping is to be found in church history, it is the grouping of Lutherans prior to the adoption of the Formula of Concord, i.e. the Synergists, Crypto-Calvinists, Philippists; Genesio-Lutherans; and the third or center-party who came to the front when work of pacification began (the framers of the Formula). cf. *Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books*, p. 102,103. It is our conviction that the first group known as the LCUSA is the 20<sup>th</sup> century representation of the Crypto-Calvinists, Synergist, however, in a more serious form and with much more devastating results, for they not only destroy Confessional Lutheranism but also historical Christianity. The Lutheran Forum plays the role of the Genesio-Lutherans and the framers of the Formula I for they not only preserve genuine-Lutheran Confessionalism, but also hold the position of "restoring a true and godly peace to our (Lutheran) Church." (*Historical*

- Introduction*, p.103) The third group of our modern listing is characterized by Flacius and Amsdorf, who went too far in their defense of orthodoxy.
13. We may list these members of the third group as follows: CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, (CLC); LUTHERAN CHURCHES OF THE REFORMATION (LCR); CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE (CLC); THE PROTESTANT CONFERENCE: CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN BRETHREN; APOSTOLIC LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA; ASSOCIATION OF FREE LUTHERAN CHURCHES; EIELSEN SYNOD; and others.
  14. Translated by John T. Mueller, *The True Visible Church*.
  15. Ibid. Thesis X, p. 42
  16. Ibid. Thesis XIII, p. 50
  17. Ibid. Thesis XIV, p. 56
  18. *Walther and the Church*, Thesis XIV, p. 123
  19. *True Visible Church*, Thesis, XV, p. 61
  20. Ibid. Thesis XVI p. 66-90
  21. Ibid. Thesis XVII, p. 90
  22. Ibid. Thesis XVIII, p. 94-114
  23. Ibid. Thesis XIX, p. 114
  24. Ibid. Thesis XXI A, p. 121
  25. Ibid. Thesis XXI B, p. 125
  26. Ibid. Thesis XXI C, p. 128
  27. Ibid. Thesis XXII,, p. 131
  28. Ibid. Thesis XXIII, p. 133
  29. Ibid. Thesis XXIV, p. 134
  30. *Lutheran Layman* May, 1970
  31. Lawrence L. Kersten., *The Lutheran Ethic* p. 34
  32. Jeffrey Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches*. The Central thesis of Hadden's volume is that the Protestant churches are involved in a deep and entangling crisis which in the years ahead may seriously disrupt or alter the very nature of the church (p. 5). Hadden writes, "optimists have assumed that the ecumenical spirit is a rejection of emerging doctrinal unity. *An assumption which the evidence of this volume will prove to be unfounded.* (p.3) (emphasis ours) Hadden concludes that it is possible theological differences have not so much disappeared as they have become irrelevant.
  33. Ibid. p. 39
  34. Ibid. p. 41
  35. Ibid.
  36. *A Call to Openness and Trust*
  37. *This We Believe*, p. 4,5
  38. Constitution of the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, Art. III, # 2 "and 'A Brief Statement of 1932'."
  39. Wolf, *Documents of Lutheran Unity in America* p. 227
  40. Robert Preus, *Theology of Post-Reformation Lutherans*, Preus quotes Leonard Hutten; "Holy Spirit was the author of the Lutheran Confessions and that their writings were divinely inspired." He means the doctrine of the Lutheran Confessions is divine because it agrees with Scripture. Abraham Calov declared that the Lutheran Confessions are infallible, but this is only because they are based on the authoritative Word of Scripture. P. 38ff

41. C. F. W. Walther, "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers, and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church." *Concordia Theological Monthly*, April 1947, p. 241ff.
42. Ibid. p. 243.
43. Quoted by Walther p. 242. Cf. Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutherans*.
44. Robert Preus, "Confessional Subscription" *Evangelical Direction for the Lutheran Church* p. 44.
45. Carl Braaten, "The Crisis of Confessionalism" *Dialog*, Winter, 1962, p. 40, 41
46. T. Tappert, "Significance of Confessional Subscription" *Essays on Lutheran Confessions*.
47. H. Huth, "A Critique of Prof. Repp's Binding Nature of Synodical Resolutions", *Affirm* June A, 1971, p. 3.
48. Translated in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol X, 4-11 (1939). See also *Confessional Lutheran*, 1940, p. 20ff. It was on the basis of these theses that fellowship was established between the Wisconsin and Missouri Synod, see *Proceedings of Thirty-Fifth Convention of WELS*, Aug. 1959. The Theses were reprinted in these *Proceedings*. It is also interesting to note that the entire text of the Theses was again reprinted for the 1971 convention of the Missouri Synod. See Pres. J. A. O. Preus address to the delegates.
49. Walther, op. cit., p. 247
50. R. Preus, *Confessional Subscription*, p. 44
51. Ibid.
52. Braaten, op cit. p. 47
53. *Lutheran Forum*, April 1969
54. *Lutheran Forum*, Feb. 1970
55. Walther, op cit. p. 253
56. Peter Brunner, "Commitment to the Lutheran Confessions—What does It Mean Today?" *Springfielder*, Dec. 1969 Quoted by R. Preus, op. cit.
57. This doctrine is taught in the following articles; Art. X. A.C. p. Art. X, Apol., p. 247; S.A. The Third Part, Art. VI, P. 493; Small Catechism, VI p. 555; Large Catechism, Part Fifth ' P. 753; Art. VII, F.C. (Thor. Decl. p. 971; Epit., p. 807); Art. XXII, A.C. p. 59; Art. XXII (X) Apol., p. 257; Art. XXIV, A.C. p. 65; Art. XXIV (XII), Apol., p. 383; S.A., The Second Part, Art. II p. 463. All page numbers are to the *Concordia Triglotta*)
58. *Call to Openness and Trust*
59. *Christian News* Oct. 25, 1971 p. 2
60. This doctrine is taught in the following articles: Art. IV, A.C., p. 45; Art. V.A.C., p. 45; Art. VI, A.C., p. 45; Art. XX2 A.C., p.53; Art. IV (II) Apol., p. 119; Art. (III) Apol., p. 157; Art. XX, Apol., p 337 S.A., The Second Part the first and chief article, p. 461; The Third Part, Art. XIII, p. 499; Art. III. F.C. (Thor. Decl. p. 917; Epit., p. 791); Art. IV, F.C. (Thor. Decl., p. 939) Epit., p. 797) Art. V.F.C. (Thor. Decl. p. 951) Epit., p. 801) S.A. The Third Part, Art. II p. 479; Art. IV. p. 491; Art. VI F.C. (Thor. Decl. p. 963; Epit., p. 805) All page numbers are to the *Concordia Triglotta*
61. Kersten, op. cit., p. 36
62. Ibid. p. 24 and 92
63. Hadden, op. cit., P. 47
64. *Who Can This Be? Studies in Christology*, prepared by Lutheran Council in the USA.
65. This doctrine is taught in the following articles: Art. III, A.C, p. 45; Art. III, Apol., p. 119 The Athanasian Creed, p. 33; S.A., The First Part and the Second Part, p. 461; Art. VIII,



F.C. (Thor. Decl. p. 1015 Epit., p. 817); Art. IX, F.C. (Thor. Decl., p. 1049; Epit., p. 827).  
Art. XXI, A.C., p. 57; Art. XXI (IX) Apol. p. 343; A.S., The Second Part, Part, p. 469; Page  
numbers refer to *Concordia Triglotta*

66. Springfielder, Autumn 1968
67. Kent S. Knutson, *His Only Son Our Lord*
68. Proceedings of WELS, Watertown., 1971, p. 21
69. *Lutheran Sentinel* July 223 1971
70. *Christian News*, July 5, 1971, p. 1
71. *Christian News*, Feb. 15, 19712 p. 10
72. C. P. Krauth, *Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, p. 88f
73. Preface to *The Holy Bible, A Contemporary Translation*
74. Kurt Marquart, "Some Aspects of a Healthy Church Life" *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*,  
Spring, 1968 p. 46
75. *Sola Scriptura*, Vol 1, No. 5 P. 15.
76. Kurt Marquart, op. cit. P. 49