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The New Translation of the Book of Concord: Closing the barn door after

Roland F. Ziegler

Introduction

The last year of the second millennium saw the publication of a new translation of the Book of Concord into the English language.¹ Unlike new translations of the Bible into English, or new revisions of older revised versions, which no longer cause the stir and evoke the interest of the Revised Version of the New Testament in 1881 (printed as a supplement of a national newspaper), a new translation of the Book of Concord demands our attention for two reasons. The first reason is the comparative rareness of such an occasion; second, very likely this new translation will become the standard for coming decades. Because every Lutheran pastor pledges his allegiance to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and because the knowledge of the languages in which these confessions were originally written, that is Latin and German, has continually decreased among American Lutheran clergy, the question of the accuracy of such a translation should be of high interest to any Lutheran pastor.² This paper is not going to give a detailed analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the new edition compared to Tappert or the Triglotta. The main part of this essay deals with the question: What is the actual relevance of the Book of Concord, which we now possess in a new edition, in Lutheranism? Or, to say it differently, does anybody really care? Some would argue that Christianity has passed the confessionalistic age and proceeded into a new age, an age where the old debates are of only historical interest. An example of this perspective might be the ELCA's ecumenical agreements of the last several years.³ This paper, in large part, investigates the understanding of the Book of Concord which is manifested in these endeavors. In a last

¹Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, editors, *The Book of Concord: The confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). Hereafter abbreviated as Kolb and Wengert.

²Due to this lack of familiarity, many rely solely on translations, thereby being in a similar position regarding the confessions as their less educated colleagues of various denominations with their lack of Hebrew and Greek are in respect to Holy Writ.

³Louis A. Smith, "Can the ELCA Represent Lutheranism? Flirting with Rome, Geneva, Canterbury, and Herrnhut," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 65 (2002): 99-120.

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part, we will consider some questions about the relevance of the Book of Concord in churches that understand themselves as confessional and orthodox.

The Text of the Book of Concord

The Lutheran Confessions are in the plural; the Book of Concord is in the singular.⁴ The Lutheran Confessions are a collection of creedal statements, each of which has a textual history of its own. The Book of Concord is a collection of these documents, whose text is quite definite, although there are textual debates.

The first question is, whether the *Marriage Booklet* and the *Baptism Booklet* are part of the Book of Concord or not.⁵ This question is rooted in the differences between the Lutherans of northern and southern Germany. Whereas the Saxons viewed Luther's order for baptism and marriage as integral parts of his catechism (which they historically were) and therefore as a part of the Book of Concord, there were reservations on the side of the southern Lutherans. Andreae saw them as a part of church order, not as part of doctrine. Reservations on the part of the southern Lutherans probably centered in the concern over the normative liturgical character of the orders—would those churches that had developed rites for baptism and marriage different from Luther's orders be forced to change?⁶ Of the three authentic copies of the German text posited in the archives in Dresden, two do not have it. The compromise worked out by Chemnitz was to leave an empty page as a mark, so that one could either include it or leave it out. That, at the very least, shows that both liturgical formulae are not an integral part of the Book of Concord, but rather something like a particular confession of some Lutheran churches, for example, the Visitation articles or the *Confessio Virtembergica* (which also had confessional rank in Württemberg). Nevertheless, the Göttingen Edition of the Confessions includes these writings, putting them after the small catechism.⁷ The standard edition of the German and Latin text of the Book of Concord before the Göttingen

⁴One may see Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Suggested Principles for a Hermeneutics of the Lutheran Symbols," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29 (1958): 1-24, especially 8-14.

⁵One may see Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte der lutherischen Concordienformel und Concordie*, 2 Band (Marburg: Elwert'sche Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1859), 235-242.

⁶One may see *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, fifth edition. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), XLIII. Hereafter abbreviated as BSLK.

⁷BSLK, 528-541.

edition, edited by J. T. Müller, had put them as an appendix after the Catalogue of Testimonies.⁸ They are missing in Henkel's edition.⁹ The booklets were also omitted from the edition by Henry E. Jacobs first printed in 1882.¹⁰ The *Concordia Triglotta*, whose text follows the editions of Dresden 1580 and Leipzig 1584, does not include them.¹¹ Tappert's edition does not contain them.¹² Thus, the inclusion of these orders in the Kolb and Wengert comes to the American Lutheran Church as a novelty.¹³ The claim that the version of the Small Catechism included in the very first edition of the (German) Book of Concord contained the orders for baptism and wedding made in the Introduction of the Kolb and Wengert edition is therefore only part of the truth.¹⁴

The character of the Catalogue of Testimonies and the Saxon Visitation articles was never debated. The latter were published in 1592, and therefore were never part of the Book of Concord. They had only local significance in Saxony as part of the confessional standard until 1836.¹⁵ The Visitation articles were included in an edition of the Book of Concord for the first time in 1702.¹⁶ Their inclusion in the *Concordia Triglotta* is understandable from the Saxon background of the Missouri Synod, which led to their inclusion in the constitution of Trinity Lutheran in Saint Louis.¹⁷ Müller includes them as an appendix,¹⁸ Tappert and Kolb and

⁸*Die symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche deutsch und lateinisch*, besorgt von J. T. Müller, mit einer neuen historischen Einleitung von Th. Kolde, tenth edition (Gütersloh: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1907), 761-778. Hereafter abbreviated as Müller.

⁹*The Christian Book of Concord or Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Newmarket: Solomon D. Henkel and Brothers, 1851). Hereafter abbreviated Henkel.

¹⁰*The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, with historical introduction, notes, appendices and indices by Henry E. Jacobs, 2 volumes (Philadelphia: G. W. Frederick, 1882).

¹¹*Concordia Triglotta: the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

¹²Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

¹³Kolb and Wengert, 367-375.

¹⁴Kolb and Wengert, ix.

¹⁵Müller, LXXXII.

¹⁶Müller, LXXXII.

¹⁷Piepkorn (14) refers to "Gemeinde-Ordnung für die deutsche evangelisch-lutherische Gemeinde ungeänderter Augsburgischer Confession in St. Louis, Mo., 1843" § 3, in *Der Lutheraner* VI (March 5, 1850): 105.

¹⁸Müller, 779-784. Henkel does the same, 685-689.

Wengert omit them. The Catalogue of Testimonies was included in the Book of Concord, but even the headline "Appendix" was deleted after Elector Ludwig of the Palatinate had objected, to avoid any notion that this was a part of the Book of Concord.¹⁹ It is included in Müller, Göttingen, Henkel, and the *Concordia Triglotta*. Of the five printings of the Jacobs, only the most recent one includes the Catalogue, but it is in the historical introduction volume.²⁰ Kolb and Wengert also puts it into its companion volume, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord*.²¹ In sum, editions of the Book of Concord have been eclectic in their inclusion of the *Baptism Booklet*, *Marriage Booklet*, Saxon Visitation articles, and the Catalogue of Testimonies.

The major difference between Tappert and Kolb and Wengert is the different textual basis for the translation of the Apology. All previous editions of the Book of Concord used the first edition of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology for the Latin text, which was published at the end of April or the beginning of May 1531 (the so-called quarto edition).²² The Kolb and Wengert edition made a radical departure by following the text of the octave edition, which was published at the beginning of September 1531. Looking at this particular innovation, the question of what the authentic text of the Book of Concord is takes on some urgency. It seems to be simple: The authentic text of the Book of Concord is the text of the German edition (Dresden, 1580) and the Latin edition (Leipzig, 1584). But these texts are not the *Urtext* of modern editions of the Book of Concord. The problem started with the text of the Augsburg Confession. In preparation for the publishing of the Book of Concord, Elector August of Saxony had asked for a copy of the original German from the arch-chancellery in Mainz. The copy thus obtained and used was, unfortunately, not from the original, read June 25, 1530.²³ Its text is very good, but probably goes back to an earlier draft of the Augsburg Confession. The original is lost; only copies have come to us,

¹⁹BSLK, 1101. Quoted is the article Theodor Pressel, "Churfürst Ludwig von der Pfalz und die Konkordienformel," *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* 37 (1867): 3-112, 268-318, 443-605.

²⁰*The Book of Concord, or, The Symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, with historical introduction, notes, appendices and indices by Henry E. Jacobs, 2 volumes* (Decatur, Illinois: Johann Gerhard Institute, 1996).

²¹Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, editors, *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 220-244.

²²BSLK, XX, XXIII.

²³BSLK, XIX.

from which a text that comes closest to the one read before Charles V can be reconstructed. We have here also a dilemma between the *intention* of the editors of the Book of Concord, namely to present the actual text presented at the diet of Augsburg, and what they – unknowingly – *did*, printing a text that was not what they wanted. What, then, does the modern editor of the Book of Concord do? Does he follow the text of the editors or their intentions? Müller was deeply dissatisfied with the *textus receptus* of the Augsburg Confession, but did refrain from any change in his edition, since he did not feel entitled as an individual to make changes in a churchly received text.²⁴ This kind of restraint was given up in the critical edition published in the year of the four hundredth anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, where a reconstructed text was given and the different readings of the Book of Concord 1580 were put in the critical apparatus. Similarly, the Latin text of the Augsburg Confession is not that of the Book of Concord Leipzig 1584, which used the first edition 1531, but a collation of a manuscript going back to the original in the imperial archives of Brussels. This manuscript was, in all likelihood, brought to Spain and there destroyed, on the command of Philip II of Spain.

The Apology is not the only text affected by this change in approach. Also, the text of the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, and the Catechisms are given in the Göttingen Edition according to the oldest manuscripts, not according to the text in the first editions of the Book of Concord.

Strange consequences result from Kolb and Wengert's quest for the oldest, authentic text. For example, the filioque is put into brackets – since it is not an original part of the Nicene Creed.²⁵ This also shows very clearly what the problem is: these texts are not only historical documents to be reconstructed according to the rules of textual criticism – they are also binding statements of faith. Confessional subscription was to the Book of Concord, not to a hypothetical or not so hypothetical first form of one of the statements. Of course, the majority

²⁴“Die Ergebnisse seines Studiums hat der Herausgeber in den historischen Einleitungen entwickelt; hier, wo es sich um die Darlegung der Grundsätze handelt, welche ihn bei seiner Arbeit leiteten, bemerkt derselbe, daß er sich, bei aller Geneigtheit, der Kritik ihre Ansprüche zuzugestehen, doch als Einzelner nicht für befugt erachten durfte, an dem *kirchlich recipirten* Texte Aenderungen nach seiner, wenn auch gewissenhaften, doch immer nur subjectiven Ueberzeugung vorzunehmen.” Müller, VI and following.

²⁵Kolb and Wengert, 23.

of variant readings have no doctrinal significance. In the case of the Augsburg Confession, one can make a case that the reconstructed text follows the intention of the editors of the Book of Concord. But to bracket the filioque devalues it and is simply misleading. Further, it is the expression of a historization of the Book of Concord. The Nicene Creed was never accepted in the Lutheran Church without the filioque. Yes, historically speaking, the fathers of the sixteenth century were wrong in believing that it was an original part of the Nicene Creed. We cannot, however, correct this historical error in an edition of the Book of Concord. Here following the intentions comes to an end. It is not legitimate to argue that since the fathers wanted to confess the faith of Nicaea, we correct their wrong text and thereby change our theology. Now, I do not think that this is the intention of the editors. My point is to show that a purely historical reconstruction of the text of the Book of Concord misses its character as authority and norm in the church. Unlike the biblical writings, we have, so to speak, the autographa, the first editions.

Let us return to the question of the change in the text of the Apology. The first edition of the Latin text, which is the original, was published in spring 1531, the so-called quarto-edition. In the fall of 1531, a reworked edition was published in octavo, which, in the following decades, became the most influential text of the Apology. Justus Jonas used both the quarto and octave editions to produce his very free German translation in the autumn of 1531. It is rather a paraphrase than a translation. This version was included in the German edition of the Book of Concord. For the Latin, it was decided to go back to the first edition.

Kolb and Wengert, in changing the textual basis of the Apology, follow the results of Christian Peters, who claims that the first edition was just a stage on the way to the definite text, which was reached with the octavo edition.²⁶ Of course, one may choose this way of reconstruction. Yet the question remains: does one then have a right to put "Book of Concord"

²⁶Christian Peters, *Apologia Confessionis Augustanae. Untersuchungen zur Textgeschichte einer lutherischen Bekenntnisschrift* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1997). One may see also Christian Peters, "'Er hats immer wollen besser machen [. . .].'" Melanchthons fortgesetzte Arbeit am Text der lateinischen Apologie auf und nach dem Augsburger Reichstag von 1530," in H. Immenkötter and G. Wenz, editors, *Im Schatten der Confessio Augustana. Die Religionsverhandlungen des Augsburger Reichstages 1530 im historischen Kontext* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1997), 98-126. A short summary is given in Gunther Wenz, *Theologie der Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, volume 2 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 38 and following.

on the title page of a book that includes such a text (something the Göttingen edition avoided anyway)? I do not think that it is justifiable to change the textual basis of a document with such ecclesial weight and legal status as the Book of Concord has without consulting the churches in any way. It was the actual text of the edition of 1580 and not some reconstructed first or final stage that was subscribed by princes and pastors, and that was also the purpose of having original copies deposited in the archives.

Having said that, I still would like to say that in many respects the Kolb and Wengert edition is an improvement compared to the Tappert edition.²⁷

The Relevance and Authority of the Book of Concord in the latest Ecumenical Dialogues

It is one thing to have a new edition of the Book of Concord with all the latest scholarship. It is quite another to ask whether this document is relevant for the life of the church today. Any actual relevance for Lutheran pastors in their teaching and preaching is difficult to assess. Perhaps a graduate student could make a field study with a questionnaire, asking Lutheran pastors if they read the Confessions after their time at the seminary and if they look at them for formation and guidance.

Ecumenical documents adopted by Lutheran churches are more accessible. In how far are the Lutheran position and statements of agreement in ecumenical dialogues in harmony with the Lutheran Confessions and how far do we recognize here a further development of Lutheran theology (to use a neutral term)? Especially since the agreements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* with the Roman Catholic Church; *A Formula of Agreement* with the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America; and "Called to Common Mission" with the Episcopal Church) the question of identity in change is legitimate, and not only from a Missouri Synod perspective. How is the authority of the Book of Concord maintained in these dialogues, and how was it possible to overcome contrary and exclusive

²⁷For example, the false translation of AC V, where *Predigtamt* was rendered with *office of the ministry*, is given up and the footnotes are greatly increased. However, the translation was not improved by efforts to use inclusive language.

statements that made church fellowship impossible in the past? For the sake of brevity, we will restrict ourselves here to the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues, more specifically, to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

The Consensus between Lutherans and Reformed in A Formula of Agreement

A *Formula of Agreement*, which was adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August 1997, is the fulfillment and culmination of a long process.²⁸ The *Formula* is the result of the "Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations," which published *A Common Calling*.²⁹ *A Common Calling* rests on the results of the previous Lutheran-Reformed dialogues, starting in 1962.³⁰ The *Formula* itself says that it has to be understood in that context, but not only the North American context is important here.³¹ In the central part of the *Formula*, where a consensus formulation regarding the presence of Christ is given, the *Leuenberg Concord* is quoted as an adequate formulation. This puts the *Formula* in the history of European, and especially German, Lutheran-Reformed dialogues, which led from Halle 1937 through Arnoldshain 1957 to Leuenberg 1974. The *Leuenberg Concord* says:

In the Lord's Supper the risen Christ imparts himself in body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all people.³²

The *Leuenberg Concord* is, in the decisive point, identical in matter and almost in wording with the Arnoldshain Theses:

²⁸A *Formula of Agreement* is quoted according to the text on this website, <http://www.elca.org/ea/Relationships/formula.html>.

²⁹Keith F. Nickle and Timothy F. Lull, editors, *A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today*, the Report of the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations, 1988-1992 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

³⁰Paul C. Empie and James I. McCord, editors, *Marburg Revisited: A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966); James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess, editors, *The Lutheran-Reformed Dialogue Series III 1981-1983, An Invitation to Action: A Study of Ministry, Sacraments, and Recognition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

³¹A *Formula of Agreement*, Preface.

³²A *Formula of Agreement*, "The Presence of Christ," 10.

The words which our Lord Jesus Christ speaks when he offers the bread and the cup tell us what he himself gives to all who come to the supper: he, the crucified and risen Lord, permits himself to be taken in his body and blood given and shed for all, through his word of promise, with the bread and wine, and grants us participation, by virtue of the Holy Spirit, in the victory of his lordship, so that we, believing in his promise, may receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.³³

A basic shift in theological thinking made these theses possible. Instead of the historic, confessional approach, which thinks in *substances*, a relational and personalistic ontology formed the basic matrix of the understanding of the Lord's Supper. Communion is not about isolated substances, not about the body and blood of Christ, but about an encounter with Christ Himself, which is the primary focus. The historic position, with its fixation on Christ's body and blood threatens to overcome what is believed to be the true nature of the Christian faith, namely, a personal relationship or encounter with the risen Christ. Body and blood are not seen as substances, but as a qualification of Christ: We encounter the entire Christ in the Lord's Supper, not solely His divine nature.

This encounter with Christ is primarily through the word. Gospel and the Lord's Supper are not qualitatively different; they give the same, only in different ways. The relationship between body and blood and bread and wine is subordinated to the giving through the word. The *Leuenberg Concord* used the term "with" to describe the relationship between Christ's somatic reality and the earthly elements. This term bears some historical ballast, because Melancthon used it in the *Confessio Augustana Variata* to indicate some kind of connection between Christ giving Himself in body and blood with the bread and wine, though it does not in any way specify it. In the identification of bread and wine with the body and blood of Christ, the *praedicatio identica* is not confessed. There is nothing in this agreement about the three passwords of a true Lutheran understanding, in harmony with the Book of Concord: *Manducatio oralis*, *manducatio impiorum*, *unio sacramentalis*. At the most, one might interpret this Leuenbergian formulation as a late fruit of the theology of

³³Gottfried Niemeier, editor, *Lehrgespräch über das Heilige Abendmahl. Stimmen und Studien zu den Arnholdhainer Thesen der Kommission für das Abendmahlsgespräch der EKD* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1961), 333.

Melanchthon, who had changed his position in the 1530s, moving from a connection of Christ's body and blood with the elements to a bodily presence of Christ in the act of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. I am aware that one cannot identify the two positions, since Melanchthon was not a personalist. There is, however, a similarity in approach, in so far as the focus is directed away from the elements and their relation to body and blood.

This shift in Melanchthon's position made some of his students — they might be called here the left-wing Melanchthonians — susceptible to Calvinistic teachings, which led to their subversive work at Wittenberg and to the crypto-Calvinistic controversy. Ultimately, this controversy was formative in article VII of the Formula of Concord. A resuscitation of formulations of the late Melanchthon would effectively be a step back behind the Formula of Concord. Such a step would therefore be against the Formula of Concord.

The personalistic approach of the *Leuenberg Concord* is not altogether new. A summary of the thinking of Christoph Pezel on the question of the presence of Christ in his *True and Honest Vindication of the Preachers in Bremen* (1582) illustrates this.³⁴ Pezel was a Melanchthonian professor at Wittenberg, who was deposed when the "crypto-Calvinists" were overthrown. He later lived in Nassau and finally in Bremen, where his transition from Melanchthonianism to Calvinism took place. In his *True and Honest Vindication* he defended Bremen as a church that truly upheld the Augsburg Confession against the charges of heresy leveled against the city by the Lutheran archbishop of Bremen. It became, at the same time, a theological discussion regarding the Formula of Concord.

Basing his remarks on 1 Corinthians 10:16, Pezel reduced the question to "Is Christ present to men for a saving communion." Pezel eliminates the question of the presence of Christ's humanity from the beginning — it is not a meaningful question in his mind. Further, Pezel rejected a bodily presence that is at the same time hidden under the bread of the Lord's

³⁴Christoph Pezel, *True and Honest Vindication of the Preachers in Bremen regarding the articles and points attributed to them, in which they are partly through inexplicable adscription, partly through distorting misinterpretation, are accused of several alleged errors and sectarian opinions, and are slandered among persons of high and low standing. As there are: I. Regarding the Person of Christ. II. Regarding Holy Baptism. III. Regarding Holy Communion. IIII. Regarding divine Election. V. Regarding Ceremonies (in German)* (no place, no publisher: Bremen, Wessel u. Glochstein), Anno M.D. LXXI.

Supper, as the Formula of Concord and his opponents taught, stating that this position lacked scriptural evidence and examples of practice in the early church. Instead, Pezel argued, the only adequate explanation of Christ's promised presence is that by which the person of Christ communicates Himself to the believer according to its humanity in the *unio sacramentalis* with the elements.³⁵

The way to the *Leuenburg Concord's* compromise was open in the sixteenth century, as Pezel's example shows. However, this way was rejected by the theologians and churches of the Book of Concord, because they deemed it absolutely necessary to say that the bread is the body and the wine is the blood. They rejected such an agreement because they were convinced that such teaching was not in harmony with Scripture.

All of which leads to a rather astounding and bewildering observation: Though the Lutherans (and, of course, also the Reformed) believed what they believed because they were thoroughly convinced that this was the teaching of Scripture, there is not one essay that exegetically investigates the witness of the New Testament about the Lord's Supper in all the official dialogues between Lutherans and Reformed. Considering the fact that the Confessions bind us first to Scripture, to which these ecumenical statements also pay homage, this shows a serious lack of confessional spirit on the side of the Lutheran participants. What is emphasized on the other hand, is the christological foundation of the Lord's Supper, namely the connection of the *genus maiestaticum* and Christ's bodily presence in the Lord's Supper. That is, of course, true, but the documents almost evoke the impression that this christological dogma was the foundation of the Lord's Supper, an opinion that is rightfully rejected by Pieper as a Reformed calumny. Luther and the Lutherans believed in the real presence of Christ's body and blood not because they derived it from their Christology, but because the text of the words of institution say just that. The Lutheran doctrine rests on clear passages of Scripture, it is not a conclusion from Christology. Here the Lutheran position is simply misrepresented, and it seems as if this is due to an interest that wants to avoid discussing the question of what the New Testament actually says. In the European dialogues at least there were intensive exegetical

³⁵Irene Dingel, *Concordia controversa: Die öffentliche Diskussion um das lutherische Konkordienwerk am Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, volume 63 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 672 and following.

discussions, and they were more honest, in so far as they led to the conclusion, that the classical Lutheran position is no longer tenable because of the new exegetical insights made possible by the historical-critical approach to Scripture.

Another point that was only casually discussed is the question of the words of institution as words of consecration. The Arnoldshain Theses and Leuenberg exclude such an understanding, which is an explicit teaching of the Formula of Concord (FC SD VII, 73-84). The only point where this topic was brought up was in the first round of dialogue, *Marburg Revisited*, where the Lutheran (!) participant, Martin Heinecken, said: "It is virtue of Christ's promise in the words of institution that he is present without making these words into a formula of consecration."³⁶ That may explain why the question about the words of institution having a function other than proclamation was not discussed at all (it might have led to an investigation of the difference between the sermon and the Lord's Supper). Instead, the consensus was that word and sacrament give the same. The Confessions say that they have the same effect, bestowing forgiveness of sins, but of course, there is a proprium of the Lord's Supper, that it gives the body and blood of Christ in a way the word does not.³⁷

In conclusion, the Doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as it is presented in A *Formula of Agreement* is, at best, deficient. What is declared to be an expression of the pure gospel and the right administration of the sacraments (which also includes the right teaching about the nature and benefit of the sacraments) differs from the teaching of the Book of Concord. Especially the definitions of the Formula of Concord, which have their origin in a fight against a calvinizing Melancthonianism that tried to loose the connection between the body and blood of Christ and the elements in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, are not carried through.

Moreover, if the *Leuenberg Concord* denotes the binding teaching of the churches, then different accents or aspects of the Lutheran or Reformed

³⁶Martin J. Heinecken, "Christology, the Lord's Supper and its Observance in the Church" in Empie and McCord, *Marburg Revisited*, 81-103.

³⁷Apology XIII, 5: "Idem effectus est verbi et ritus, sicut praeclare dictum est ab Augustino sacramentum esse verbum visibile, quia ritus oculis accipitur et est quasi pictura verbi, idem significans, quod verbum. Quare idem est utriusque effectus." (BSLK, 292 and following)

tradition might be added. Sasse's statement on this point in his last comment on the *Leuenberg Concord* is correct:

The acceptance of the Concord implies, as declared by informed places [Stellen] of the Lutherans and Reformed (e.g. Niesel) Churches, a change in the Catechisms. Neither Luther's nor the Heidelberg Catechism can retain the dogmatic rank that they used to have in church law, despite their historical importance.³⁸

The Condemnations: Their Scope and Their Enduring Significance

A stumbling block on the way to a renewed relationship between Lutherans and Reformed are the condemnations in the Confessions. Whereas the Reformed do not have any condemnations of the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper in their confessions, there are specific rejections of various Reformed positions in the Book of Concord. The first is the famous "*improbant secus docentes*," "They disagree with those who teach otherwise," or, according to the German, "The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected," in article X of the Augsburg Confession. *A Common Calling* comments on it: "Only one [condemnation in the Augsburg Confession] is aimed directly at an identifiable Reformed position, in this case Zwingli's (as well as Karlstadt's and Schwenckfeld's) supposed teaching on the Supper, without mention of names."³⁹ Indeed, names are never mentioned in the Lutheran Confessions, since personal condemnations were avoided on principle. As *A Common Calling* accurately states elsewhere, only teachings, not persons or even whole churches, are rejected and condemned in the Book of Concord. The question is, therefore, what positions are excluded. The strategy of *A Common Calling* is a revisionist writing of history to prove that the Reformed doctrine never was condemned. On its way to relativize the condemnations regarding the "sacramentarian" camp—to use the term

³⁸"Die Annahme der Konkordie bedeutet, wie von sachkundigen Stellen der Lutherischen und Reformierten (z. B. Niesel) Kirche erklärt worden ist, eine Abänderung der Katechismen. Weder der Luther'sche noch der Heidelberger Katechismus könnten, bei aller Wertung ihrer historischen Bedeutung, die dogmatische Geltung behalten, die sie bisher kirchenrechtlich gehabt haben." Hermann Sasse, *Corpus Christi. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Abendmahlskonkordie*, (Erlangen: Verlag der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Mission, 1981), 146.

³⁹*A Common Calling*, 37. The enumeration of names is somehow arbitrary. Certainly AC X does not only target Zwingli, although he was the most prominent and posthumously famous theologian, but included in the number of Sacramentarians against which this article is directed were also Oekolampad, Bucer and others.

of the time of the Reformation—doubt is first cast on the scope of AC X. The “supposed teaching” of Zwingli and others is rejected. Now, historically, it is no doubt that AC X aimed at Zwingli and the Upper Germans. The efforts of Landgrave Philip of Hesse to prevent this very condemnation from being included in the Augsburg Confession, directed by his interest in a pan-Protestant alliance as a counterweight to the political power of the emperor and the Roman-Catholic powers in the Holy Roman Empire, demonstrates this. Also, the reaction of Zwingli and the Upper Germans, who tried to mediate between Zwingli and Luther, proves the point. Zwingli handed in his own confession, the *Fidei Ratio*, and the Upper Germans drafted their *Confessio Tetrapolitana*, after the Lutherans rejected their subscription to the Augsburg Confession, because their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper was un-Lutheran. Historically, there can be no doubt whatsoever what doctrine was rejected in AC X: It was Zwingli’s, Karlstadt’s, Schwenkfeld’s, and Bucer’s doctrine.

What about Calvin, who came later? Was his teaching addressed by AC X? *A Common Calling* says no: “The condemnation in CA 10 may [*sic!*] have excluded Zwingli but did not address the nuanced position of Calvin and of many early Calvinist confessions, as the Formula of Concord, art. VII, assumed.”⁴⁰ Of course Calvin’s position was not in Melanchthon’s view when he wrote the Augsburg Confession, but does the condemnation not also fit Calvin’s teaching? Exactly because there are no personal condemnations, the question remains: AC X may and must be applied to Calvin as one of those who has a teaching contrary to that of AC X. After all, the fathers of Nicaea did not have to deal with modern Unitarians, but the creed itself makes it more than clear that Unitarians are outside of the community that confesses the Nicene Creed.

The question of the Formula of Concord VII is this: Are those who claim that a Calvinistic teaching is not excluded by the Augsburg Confession right or not? This was the claim of the so-called Crypto-calvinists and also of Reformed churches in Germany, who, also for political reasons, claimed to be part of the church of the Augsburg Confession. The Formula of Concord emphatically denies their claim and first states that the unaltered Augsburg Confession is the normative text. Second, it states that Luther’s writings are the context in which it has to be understood, thereby tacitly excluding the option that Melanchthon’s

⁴⁰*A Common Calling*, 39

theology is the hermeneutical context of the Augustana.⁴¹ The Formula of Concord thereby rejected an understanding that it was a legitimate Lutheran way to proceed from the Augsburg Variata to a late Melanchthonian understanding of the real presence towards a Calvinistic position — a way that quite a few disciples of Melanchthon and entire churches went. This phenomenon of the *second reformation* was an existential threat to the Lutheran church, since the Reformed claimed that they were fulfilling the Reformation, and not establishing a new church. The Formula rejected the argument that one could draw a continuous line from the Augsburg Confession to the Reformed. Therefore a statement like this is only partly true: "The Formula of Concord addressed internal issues debated within the Lutheran movement, not the external relations of Lutheran churches with others."⁴² Very true, but the question was whether the Reformed position was a position *in* the Lutheran church. By excluding all Reformed positions from the Lutheran church, there is, at least, implicitly a definition of the relationship to the Reformed churches: They are outside the church of the Augsburg Confession, therefore, Lutherans and Reformed do not share fundamental, doctrinal consensus on the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.

That the Formula of Concord not only influenced, but determined, the future relationship between Lutherans and Reformed is shown by the reception it received in Reformed circles. The Frankfurt Convent (September 27-28, 1578), a European gathering of the Reformed churches, dealt with the appropriate reaction to the Formula of Concord.⁴³ Delegates from Germany, England, Poland, Hungary, and Switzerland met to discuss an answer to the Book of Concord and resolved to write a confession against the Formula of Concord and to show in it Reformed agreement with the Augsburg Confession. This project failed but for the publication of a *Harmonia confessionum*, edited by Jean-François Salvard, Lambertus Danaeus, and Theodore Beza. The question of the condemnations was discussed in detail. Hubert Languet was commissioned to write a response to the condemnations. In his *Admonitio* he demanded the retraction of the condemnations. This shows that the Reformed churches realized that the Formula of Concord was also directed against them. This is also proven by the *Admonitio Christiana*, the

⁴¹FC, SD *Binding Summary* 9 (Kolb and Wengert, 528).

⁴²A *Common Calling*, 38.

⁴³One may see also Dingel, *Concordia controversa*, 115-129.

official answer of the Reformed churches of the princely Palatinate, which was already thoroughly Reformed, unlike the electoral Palatinate, which was just then in its last Lutheran phase. Written by Zacharias Ursinus, it is a classic polemical writing against the Formula of Concord. Its publication alone shows that the Reformed were aware that the condemnations were not solely directed to theologians in the Lutheran Church, but also that the Reformed doctrine was rejected.

In a summary, *A Common Calling* was only possible by a redefinition of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper on the Lutheran side, which is, in essence, a toning down of the statements of the Book of Concord. A hierarchy of norms was established, where the Trinity comes first, then follows Christ, the living gospel, the Scriptures, the historic creeds, and then the Augsburg Confession, and the other parts of the Book of Concord as "other valid interpretations of the faith of the Church," a different understanding of doctrine is established.⁴⁴ The Book of Concord is not, as it claims for itself, an exposition of the one true faith in a specific historical setting, its content true doctrine (not a human interpretation), divine and unchangeable. But it is, instead, merely a collection of "interpretations" of the Christian faith of varying authority (the ecumenical creeds have more authority than the Augsburg Confession, and others). These interpretations have to be checked and reinterpreted in different historical settings, and because of their historical limitations, cannot be binding for all times. The Book of Concord becomes then a witness, with which we dialogue, and which is valuable because it witnesses to the gospel, but as a human witness one cannot say: *Haec dixit dominus* ("Thus saith the Lord"). This is obviously much closer to the "pious relativism," as Barth has put it, of the Reformed view of confessions, than the classical Lutheran view.

The Confessions in the LCMS

This summary may not be surprising to many. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod was not a part of *A Common Calling*, although she participated in the foregoing Lutheran-Reformed dialogues. Dissenting statements and abstentions in votes showed the increasing cleave between the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches on the one hand, and the LCMS on the other. Nevertheless, in the first round of

⁴⁴*A Common Calling*, 33.

dialogue, whose results were published in *Marburg Revisited*, LCMS participants Martin Franzmann and Herbert Bouman did not object to the following statement: "As a result of our studies and discussions we see no insuperable obstacles to pulpit and altar fellowship and, therefore, we recommend to our parent bodies that they encourage their constituent churches to enter into discussions looking forward to intercommunion and the fuller recognition of one's another ministry."⁴⁵

The resolution passed at the last convention of the LCMS, which declares that she no longer regards the ELCA to be an orthodox church demonstrates the growing chasm between the two largest Lutheran bodies in the United States. A characteristic feature of orthodoxy is to teach the faith once delivered to the saints, as it is taught and confessed by the church, which includes the Book of Concord. But what about the LCMS? Do we have the right to be self-congratulatory? To ask the question is, of course, to negate it. By saying that I do not want to deprecate in any way all the faithful Christians, congregations, and pastors who sincerely uphold the confessions in the LCMS. The LCMS has been a beacon of Lutheran orthodoxy, and it is the largest church left in which heresy has not been declared to be official doctrine or expression of a healthy pluralism. But, coming from somebody from the outside, these remarks might be allowed. There are also problems in the LCMS, and they did not originate in the sixties nor were they caused by the baby boomers. Hermann Sasse observed in 1951 in his article "Confession and Scripture in the Missouri Synod": "The Lutheran Confessions no longer play the role in the life and in the theological thinking of the Missouri Synod, in fact, of all of American Lutheranism by far which they played during the 19th century."⁴⁶

Sasse criticizes a mindset that takes the confessions for granted, that no longer seeks to demonstrate their biblical foundation, that no longer applies the Confessions to the current theological questions, but rather produces new theological documents, like the *Brief Statement*, which then—for all practical purposes—take the place of the Confessions. He points to the strange lack of confessional reflection in liturgical matters, so that, for example, in the case of the debate on the introduction of an

⁴⁵Empie and McCord, *Marburg Revisited*, 191.

⁴⁶Hermann Sasse, "Confession and Scripture in the Missouri-Synod" in Herman Sasse, *Scripture and the Church: Selected Essays*, edited by Jeffrey J. Kloha and Ronald R. Feuerhahn (Saint Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1995), 205.

epiclesis, the theology of consecration in the Formula of Concord VII is not considered.

Sasse sees another area of conspicuous absence of the Confessions in the debate between the Statementarians and those represented by the *Confessional Lutheran*. In *A Statement* there is no reference to the Confessions, instead of that there is mentioned "the great Lutheran principle of the inerrancy, certainty, and all sufficiency of Holy Writ" and a general appeal to every article of the "historic Lutheran position."⁴⁷ The great deficiency Sasse sees in *A Statement* is that the question of church fellowship is not discussed as a dogmatic issue:

By moving the whole problem into the area of ethics and pastoral theological casuistry (how does the individual pastor, or the individual Christian, or the individual congregation act in a given case on the basis of Scripture?), the "ecumenical" Missourians overlook the fact that the problem is dogmatic and theological, and therefore cannot be solved with the means of pastoral care alone.⁴⁸

There *The Confessional Lutheran* was right, when they saw that a supposed ethical reform had become a dogmatic one. The problem is on both sides that in a time of crisis and change, when traditional concepts are challenged, there is no further and new examination, which leads either to a new proof or a revision, but there is either an agenda shaped by politics (pan-Lutheran union), or ethics (less judgmental and more loving), or a mere repetition of traditional statements, without being able to show their confessional and biblical foundation.

Reading this assessment of Missouri after more than fifty years, one cannot miss the parallels to the present situation. The discussion on worship is, if anything, much more heated than in 1951. Those who favor a diversity in worship and "new" forms of worship (that are rather modern forms of camp revivals) invoke AC VII and FC X. However, they adopt a proof-texting method that avoids the theological issue – do these forms really serve the pure preaching and proper administration of the sacraments or do they carry a theology in themselves that is alien to Lutheran theology?

The question of church fellowship has troubled Missouri Synod since the middle part of the twentieth century. The present controversy

⁴⁷Sasse, "Confession and Scripture," 205.

⁴⁸Sasse, "Confession and Scripture," 213.

highlights the perpetual struggle to find an adequate understanding of what the condemnations in our confessions mean, and that these condemnations are not a sad sign of the lack of Christian love of the people in the fourth, fifth, or sixteenth centuries. Such condemnations are a characteristic feature of the church of all times, because a church that no longer condemns false teachings and has communion in sacred things with heretics, is thereby betraying her Lord. The spirit of our time and others, which is permeated by a totally relativistic mindset, is inherently inimical to confessional Christianity in any form. To uphold the Confessions not only on paper, but to allow them to form the life of the church means, for example, to practice closed communion. One of the great challenges is to teach this practice today in congregations, so that they understand that this is not expression of a loveless, judgmental, and/or sectarian mindset (the LCMS as a kind of very exclusive country club), but an integral part of the institution of Christ, and that open communion is not a sign of love, but rather of doctrinal and pastoral indifference. Sasse once remarked that every church that gave up closed communion consequently lost the doctrine of the real presence. That is only logical, because, after all, it is up to you, what you think, and to which church you belong. It does not matter in the end, because what is important is your personal relationship to Jesus, abstracted from any ecclesiological context, void of doctrinal content.

A third area of theological debate where Missouri's confessional stand is challenged today is the question of the office of the ministry. The ongoing saga of the Wichita amendment to Augsburg Confession XIV shows a church that is, to say the least, deeply confused about the doctrine of the call.⁴⁹ What makes a pastor a pastor? Obviously not the

⁴⁹At the Synodical convention in Wichita 1989, in Resolution 3-05B, the Missouri Synod invested the "Certified Professional Church Workers, Lay" with the duties to preach the word, administer the sacraments, and administer the keys *without* a regular call. The reasoning was, that AC XIV does not apply to exceptional situations (Convention Proceedings, 57th Regular convention The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Wichita, Kansas, July 7-14, 1989, 111-116). In 1995 the convention adopted Resolution 3-07A, which urged all lay ministers to seek ordination, failing which their service should be terminated (Convention Proceedings, 59th Regular convention The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Saint Louis, Missouri, July 15-21, 1995, 120-121). In 2001, Resolution 3-08B reaffirmed the Wichita Resolution, thereby effectively abolishing the Resolution of 1995 (Convention Proceedings, 60th Regular convention The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Saint Louis, Missouri, July 14-20, 1989, 138-139).

call or appointment to preach the word and administer the sacrament, because then there would be no layministers and licensed deacons in Missouri. The distinction between the priesthood of all believers and the divinely established ministry is blurred, and the traditional polity of the Missouri Synod is not to blame for that. The problem, again, lies in a general lack of formation through the Confessions. In this confessional vacuum, egalitarian ideas rooted in American evangelicalism stream in. Another variety of the destruction of the ministry is a mixing of the two kingdoms, so that suddenly democracy becomes a theological value.

Where Sasse worried that the *Brief Statement* would overshadow the Confessions, today the issue is, what governs the theological debate of the LCMS: CTCR documents and Handbook regulations or Scripture and Confessions? Certainly, such an opposition might seem to be a caricature and misleading. And, although I sadly miss in our church calendar December 10, the anniversary of the burning of the canon law by Luther in front of the Elster gate in Wittenberg, I by no means want to condemn all and any form of church law. In this world we must have it. Nevertheless, when theological issues are no longer decided by Scripture and its correct exposition, the Confessions, but by other documents, however good and orthodox they might be in themselves, then the question of the reality of confessional subscription must be posed. There is always the danger that a church becomes a self-referential system; unfortunately, Christ would then be outside of this system.

Conclusion

The new translation of the Book of Concord is a good occasion for a renewed and thorough study of this book to which we all pledged our allegiance. The Annual Symposium on the Lutheran Confessions, over the twenty-five years of its existence, continues to do its share to stimulate and foster the study and application of the Confessions in the life of the church today. I want to mention, at least, the book by George Kraus, late professor of this seminary, *The Pastor at Prayer*, which, to my knowledge, is the only devotional book that includes a schedule for the reading of the Lutheran confessions.⁵⁰ A critical look at our ecclesial

⁵⁰George Kraus, *The Pastor at Prayer* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1983). It was reprinted by Concordia Theological Seminary Press and is available from the Concordia Theological Seminary Bookstore. Henry E. Jacobs did something similar in arranging readings from the Book of Concord for Sundays and festivals according to the church year (Jacobs, editor, *The Book of Concord*, vol. 2. [Philadelphia:

environment must not lead us into despair or into self-righteousness, if we remember the words spoken to Peter after his confession: The gates of Hell shall not prevail.

Sasse saw something lacking in Missouri's orthodoxy:

The great rediscovery of the Confession of the church which was the most joyous experience of the German Lutherans in the years between the two world wars was not shared by our American brethren in the faith. For this reason even where, as is the case in Missouri, the unshakable authority of the Confession is held in complete earnest, there is nevertheless lacking in the affirmation of the Confession the great joy which should accompany genuine confessional loyalty. To confess, ἐξομολογήσεται, *confiteri* always includes praise to God. Therefore Luther rightly counted the "*Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur ...*" among the Confessions.

Are we mistaken if we miss this joy with our brethren in the Missouri Synod when they speak of the Confession? Are we mistaken in believing that their understanding of the doctrine is wholly orthodox, but only in the sense of correct doctrine, while real orthodoxy includes a joyous praise to God? In the case of the old Missouri of Walther it is still plainly noticeable that here even as in the classical time of Orthodoxy dogma and liturgy belong together — how greatly St. Louis formerly influenced liturgy in America! If it were still so today would not then orthodox Lutheranism in particular have something of importance to say to the liturgical movement in America?⁵¹

Orthodoxy is both: the right doctrine *and* the right praise of God. The Confessions' aim is to lead us so that we may join into the confession of the church catholic and thereby praise God with our confession and learn to praise Him properly in worship, first and foremost by receiving Christ's gift. All polemics have just this goal: To fight the deadly cacophony of heterodoxy in Christianity, so that there might be the harmonious preaching of the gospel among us.

G. W. Frederick, 1893], 423-425).

⁵¹Sasse, "Confession and Scripture," 207-208.