

2015

“I Make These Confessions My Own” Lutheran Confessional Subscription in the Twenty-first Century Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand

Robert Kolb

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, kolbr@csl.edu

Charles Arand

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, arandc@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kolb, Robert and Arand, Charles (2015) "“I Make These Confessions My Own” Lutheran Confessional Subscription in the Twenty-first Century Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand," *Concordia Journal*: Vol. 41: No. 1, Article 4.

Available at: <http://scholar.csl.edu/cj/vol41/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Journal by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

"I Make These Confessions My Own"

Lutheran Confessional Subscription in the Twenty-first Century

Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand

"I make these confessions my own because they are in accord with the Word of God." With these words, in the ordination rite in Lutheran Service Book, pastors place themselves under the secondary authority of the Lutheran Confessions—Holy Scripture being their primary authority—as these confessions are contained in the Book of Concord. Pastors thereby pledge themselves to be truthful in advertising just who their congregations may expect them to be as teachers of the Scriptures and the church. However, members of the congregation and even pastors are sometimes not clear as to what it means precisely to accept the Augsburg Confession as a repetition of the ancient creedal faith and the later documents of the Book of Concord as repetitions of the teaching of the Augsburg Confession.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, concerns about confessional subscription frequently revolved around the question of the extent of confessional subscription: what does it mean to say "*because* [italics added] they are in accord with the Word of God"? And so questions dealt with the difference between an unconditional subscription (*quia* . . . because they agree with Scripture) and conditional subscription (*quatenus* . . . in so far as they agree with Scripture). This in turn raised questions about the content of the confessions and what was included in confessional subscription and what was not included.¹ By the end of the twentieth century, it was suggested that the question had shifted from the extent of confessional subscription to the biblical rationale for having confessions.²

In addition to those important questions, we face the issue of how we use the confessions today. Are they theological dictionaries? Collections of quotable theological quotes? Do they exhaust theological activity and thought? At this point, it may be helpful to see how they came to be regarded and used in the two generations during which they were written and accepted. The Augsburg Confession provides the point of departure as it marked the first of a new genre of theological writing called a confession. In the process, it becomes evident that the continuing value of the confessions for them—and for us—lies in what they confess. The content of those confessions con-

Robert Kolb is mission professor emeritus of systematic theology and former director of the Institute for Mission Studies at Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis.

Charles P. Arand is the Waldemar A. and June Schuette Chair in Systematic Theology, director of the Center for the Care of Creation, and dean of theological research and publication at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.



vinces us to make them our own because it is evangelically centered, biblically faithful, and pastorally effective.

The Augsburg Confession Then

The Augsburg Confession has meant many things to many people. Never was that more true than in the quarter century between its composition in 1530 and its incorporation into German imperial civil law in the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555 when it became the defining document of those who were given legal, albeit inferior, status alongside those who remained faithful to the papacy. Philip Melanchthon composed the document as an explanation for why the princes and city councils that had introduced Wittenberg-style reform in their territories during the 1520s. Emperor Charles V had demanded such an explanation be presented at the diet of the imperial estates of the German Empire in Augsburg in the spring of 1530. His demand actually presumed that no justification could be made for following Luther's proposals for the life of the church.

Melanchthon served not only as a professor in Wittenberg but also as the chief diplomat on theological matters for his own prince, Elector John of Saxony, and for John's associates among the princes and city counselors in the Evangelical camp. As he began drafting his—their!—explanation for their reforms, he entitled the manuscript “Apologia” (Defense). The manuscript was to serve as the script for the oral presentation of the Evangelical case for reform and was to be read to the emperor and the diet of the German estates by the vice-chancellor of elector Saxony, Christian Beyer. But as events unfolded in Augsburg, Melanchthon came to realize that John Eck, the leading voice of the Roman Catholic party in Germany at the time, had changed the situation. Eck had challenged Wittenberg theology to prove its catholicity in a set of 404 propositions gleaned and sometimes twisted out of writings of Luther, Melanchthon, and their colleagues, but also from the writings of a wide range of rebels within the church.³ Melanchthon decided that Beyer's speech should go beyond a defense of reform of practice and testify to the faithfulness of Wittenberg theology to the Holy Scripture and the catholic tradition of the church. He entitled the document a “confession.” The term “confession” had occasionally been used in connection with formal decrees of bishops and councils in the Middle Ages, but it had never been the label for a definition of the faith, an equivalent of the ancient creeds. Melanchthon, without really being aware of it, created a new genre of Christian writing and a new way of defining what it means to be Christian.⁴

This new definition and mode of definition matched the thinking that had brought Luther to his reform proposals. He had grown up with a concept of being Christian that saw in human ritual performance the single most important key—alongside God's grace but more critical than that gift—for establishing and maintaining the relationship of sinners with God. The *ex opere operato* participation in the mass and performance of other sacred or religious activities had come to mean to many that God's favor comes to those who perform the proper rituals whether they do so in faith or not. Luther's reading of Scripture joined with his own personality and the presuppositions he had learned from the

Ockhamist tradition led him to define being Christian as a relationship based on God's approach to sinners, not their approach to him. God comes to human beings as a Creator who creates and re-creates through speaking. He speaks us free of sin with a word parallel to his creative word in Genesis 1. As the word made flesh, Jesus Christ had come, Luther rejoiced to proclaim, as the one who put sin and sinful identities to death through his death and who raises up his people to new life and justifies them through his resurrection (Rom 4:25). He makes sinners into new creatures, his children, by absolving them of their sins and thus restoring their righteousness in his sight.⁵

The expression of these convictions fell naturally into the form of a "confession," a public acclamation of the God of conversation and community who, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, is found talking and through his talking makes all things new. Melancthon had found the right word for what he and Luther believed stands at the heart of being God's child.

Nonetheless, neither Luther nor Melancthon recognized what Christian Beyer's speech could mean and how it could serve the church. Inevitably within the Wittenberg circle, in which the Gutenberg galaxy had come to shine as never before in the three-quarters of a century since Johann Gutenberg had invented movable type, the speech came into print. That gave Beyer's words legs that could deliver the message far beyond the streets of Augsburg. Once printed in early 1531, it did just that.

But just how the printed speech could function in the life of the church was not yet clear. Melancthon as author and Luther as his team partner regarded the document in several ways during their lives. Throughout the 1530s, the Wittenberg establishment as a whole did not know what it meant to have a "confession." Elector John's son, John Frederick, who succeeded his father at his death in 1532, thought that the document belonged to him. He and his father had commissioned it to be written by their chief ecclesiastical diplomat and spokesman, and he as Saxon duke had risked his life and lands having it read before the emperor. He and his fellow princes thought of it as a sort of mission statement. When negotiations with the emperor and the Roman Catholic theologians became serious in the late 1530s, John Frederick wanted to update the document. He had Melancthon work out a *Variata*, expanding especially the articles related to justification by faith so that the heart of the Lutheran message could be made clear to Roman opponents. Of this *Variata*, Martin Chemnitz argued in 1561, the year in which it became potentially an instrument for providing legal protection for the Calvinists, that the revisions of 1540 and 1542, largely on the doctrine of justification, should not be rejected simply because of Calvinist misinterpretation of the revision of Article 10.⁶ Luther had accepted it because the language it used regarding the true presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper had been understood in Wittenberg, also by Melancthon, in a manner consistent with Luther's view of the true presence of Christ's body and blood. The Lutheran churches wisely returned to the printed version of 1531 but in that process lost some helpful exposition of justification.

After 1555, the Augsburg Confession became a legal tool for early modern governments to enforce unity in public teaching, and it served that and other purposes

into the twenty-first century in lands with Lutheran establishments. Those establishments recognized that the Augsburg Confession required commentary and expansion and added to it Melancthon's own Apology and the Formula of Concord, both intended to be such commentaries, and Luther's catechisms and Smalcald Articles for further expansion and clarification. In the Book of Concord, the ancient creeds set the foundation for the Lutheran summary of the biblical message in these documents. The Book of Concord was published to define how Lutherans believed this biblical message should be conveyed to people around the globe.

The Augsburg Confession and its associate documents do not serve to meet every need of the church directly. The Augsburg Confession was always viewed as inadequate for purposes other than its intended one. It is inadequate as a dogmatics textbook for all questions of biblical interpretation that can arise; it is more than adequate as a hermeneutical foundation for searching the Scriptures and applying their message in God's ever-changing world. The Confession is inadequate as a pastoral handbook for every casuistic case that surfaces, for instance. It is more than adequate to console troubled consciences, to call the erring and suffering back to their Creator, to show the repentant what God is doing for them and what he wants them to be doing for him and for others. Melancthon himself recognized the Augsburg Confession as inadequate and wrote his Apology in the aftermath of the emperor's rejection as a commentary which filled in details raised in the Confutation. His and Luther's students recognized that it left certain issues unresolved, and they offered the Formula of Concord as another commentary which addressed the teachings of the Confession to another time with other questions and circumstances.

The Augsburg Confession has, however, over time proved its adequacy and excellence as the rule of faith which provides a firm foundation for taking the heart of the biblical message to people in different times, societies, and cultures. Already in the 1530s, the Wittenberg team regarded the Augsburg Confession as the *analogia fidei* (rule of faith) which guided its teaching. The printing press allowed for longer rules of faith and more precise use than before. Historical circumstances led the king of Denmark-Norway-Iceland to reject all but the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism, but the following generation accepted and confessed and taught the theology represented in the Formula of Concord as well.

Neither the apparatus of state bureaucracies nor the efforts of denominational leadership can enforce the unity for which the Book of Concord strove in cultures in which state and church are "separated" and in a time when denominational loyalty ever weakens. But the message of the Augsburg Confession and the entire Book of Concord needs neither mechanisms of state nor regulations of churches to stand on its own as the standard to which Christians wish to conform as they share the biblical message with the people of our day. The Book of Concord convinces its adherents on the basis of its faithfulness to Scripture and its helpfulness in giving good pastoral care to God's people. The spirit of Augsburg and the method of the Wittenberg theologians carry the content of the Lutheran confessional documents into the many societies and cultures of the twenty-first century in which God calls Lutherans to repeat their confession of faith for the benefit of church and world.

The Augsburg Confession Now

What do we make of all this today? As the Book of Concord was presented to pastors in the late 1570s, their governments expected that they would subscribe to it as their own confession, but the possibility of rejecting it was granted even at the cost of losing one's office. In accord with Luther's conviction that the temporal sword could not coerce belief, however, the intent was never to force subscription. Both church leaders and temporal officials believed that the testimony to the biblical message contained in the confessional documents was sufficient to convince in itself. Indeed, its authors and first adherents found it to be the most practical, pastoral exposition of God's truth in Scripture imaginable. The Lutheran confessions were and remain living documents, as apt and applicable today as they were then, even though they must be addressed to radically different cultural presuppositions and practices. It does a disservice to the Book of Concord to regard it merely as a museum piece that shows us how people thought in the sixteenth century and limit its significance to that of historical precedent.

Lutherans do not regard the Book of Concord as golden plates, fallen directly from heaven or delivered by an angel to a committee meeting at Bergen Abbey in May 1577. The confessional documents arose in response to specific situations and address those situations with the biblical truth that still addresses our situations. Today, though, that address may occur with other emphases, language, illustrations, or comparisons determined by the different historical situation in which God has placed us. We render the confessions useless if we leave them trapped in the sixteenth century. They bring the dynamic of God's word in Scripture that is apt for every time to its full force when their formulations are effectively translated into answers for the fundamental questions of the human dilemma under sin and Satan in a direct and fresh way within the framework of thought of the culture where God calls us to speak his word. The Book of Concord makes concrete for twenty-first-century Christians a pattern for the *spirit* in which we practice the proclamation of God's word, for the *method* which we employ in delivery of his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation, and for the *content* of our sharing his word in the situations to which he calls us.

The Lutheran confessions provide a model for Lutheran action and theological activity that excites and impels their adherents to live out the *spirit* demonstrated by the Evangelical princes and municipal representatives who put their lives on the line in Augsburg.⁷ To accept the Book of Concord in their spirit means to see that the Creator has come to rescue his rebellious human creatures and restore them as his children and their world as his own through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ is God's word come in human flesh and blood, skin and bones, as the truly incarnate second person of the Holy Trinity. When you have said "Jesus," you have not said it all, but you have struck the center of God's message for sinners and of human life itself. All the rest fills in the details of the conversation God wants to have with his people. Second, to accept the Book of Concord in its spirit means to recognize the eschatological nature of human life in a world of sin and evil. Lutherans live in the consciousness of the constant attacks of Satan and the immediacy of God's judging and liberating presence. Thus, they regard the whole life of the Christian as a life of repentance, of

dying and rising in Christ Jesus, following the pattern of life that he established for his people in baptism (Rom 6:3–11; Col 2:11–15). To accept the Book of Concord means to be committed to ecumenical witness, just as the first confessors at Augsburg came there to call the entire church to faithfulness to the biblical message. Lutherans have confidence in their confession, and they freely encounter fellow believers of all stripes in order to hear their testimony with respect and to give witness to the message contained in the Book of Concord. To accept the Book of Concord means to practice faithfully the edification of the church itself, building up Christ's body into an ever more mature witness to God's conversation with us. To accept the Book of Concord means to be committed to the witness to those outside the faith. Evangelization is the unavoidable consequence of confessing with the Wittenberg reformers. The impulse that comes naturally from the message of justification by faith in Christ drives Lutherans into conversation with those outside the faith so that they may be brought to trust in Christ as well.

Propelled by the spirit of Augsburg, twenty-first century Lutherans practice the application of God's word to hearers according to the *method* which enabled Luther and Melancthon to bring the message of Scripture to their hearers and readers with a force that changed church and society in their day. They recognized what dramatists of every age in every culture have known. Human life encounters problems and seeks solutions. Luther's evangelical maturation—his movement from medieval ways of thinking to a fresh approach to Scripture and to daily life—centered on his redefinition of the terms “law” and “gospel.” He abandoned a “salvation history” approach to the usage of the terms, which posited that the law was for the Old Testament people of God and that Christ brought the new law, the gospel, to earth in his own person in the New Testament. Instead, Luther saw the existential relevance of law and gospel to every human life by using the term “law” for God's plan and design for human life and activity while defining “gospel” as God's action of rescuing and restoring rebellious human beings to life as his children through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God come in human flesh.⁸

God's law functions as a gatekeeper in human society; although as Luther says, that function can provoke worse rebellion or can turn into the basis for works righteousness. This happens when the deeds prescribed by the law are taken out of the horizontal dimension of life, where they are performed for the sake of the neighbor, and placed in the vertical dimension of life, where they are performed for one's own sake, to make us look good in God's sight. The primary function of the law as Luther experienced it crushes sinners, reveals the cracks in their own pretentiousness, and destroys their hopes that the gods they create will save them.⁹ Luther also used the law to instruct Christians, who are motivated by the gospel but need information on God's will, as they seek the right paths for serving him as their faith produces fruits. The gospel, Luther taught, focuses life on Christ, whose death and resurrection changed the identity of those who trust in him by burying their sinful selves in his tomb, and raising them up to follow in his footsteps (Rom 6:3–11). This message is a re-creative word, which transforms sinners into children of God. Despite the mystery of the continuation of sin and evil in the lives of the baptized, they are truly saints, holy in God's

sight, because God's regard—his "imputation" of righteousness, his word of absolution—determines reality. That word of forgiveness becomes a word of consolation and comfort when believers are hard pressed by the attacks of Satan and the foulness of the world, and it becomes a word of empowerment as it impresses upon them who they really are in God's sight: his servants and children, who carry out the plans for good that the Father wants the family to implement for the neighborhood.

The *content* of the Book of Concord summarizes faithfully the entire teaching of Scripture. That content does not lie exclusively in the words and formulations that spoke to sixteenth-century Germans. If that were true, as some nineteenth-century immigrants believed, we would still be speaking German and, like Muslims with Arabic, teaching it to converts. The content belongs to the Holy Spirit, who spoke in many tongues on Pentecost and continues to do so. The message and meaning that God wishes to convey to people comes from the Lord of history into specific historical and cultural circumstances as he has shaped them. He speaks out of the past to the histories he is creating today in every society.

The Book of Concord faithfully follows Scripture in presenting the God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies sinners. He is triune, and he has come to us in his second person, God and man, to rescue and restore us to righteousness in God's sight and in our practice of our humanity. He lives with us and dwells within us as the Holy Spirit, who leads us to trust in Christ and to produce the fruits of faith within the context of the whole Christian church on earth, as his daily forgiveness prepares our flesh for resurrection and eternal life. The creedal formulations of the early church suffice as the foundation for our presentation of the person of our God. The description of the actions of each person of the Holy Trinity opens up opportunities for appropriate expressions in the languages and worlds of images among all peoples. Some examples may help in showing the magnificent potential of the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord for guidance in pastoral care and proclamation in our day.

The Book of Concord tells the story of God and of humankind, from creation to fall to restoration, of our identity as children of God, and then to the restored life that will never end. Particularly in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon laid out the view of what it means to be human that makes Lutherans particularly suitable for speaking to a culture which emphasizes personal performance as the source of true identity and thus impels us all toward shipwrecked hopes and dreams and even the inability to cope and survive.¹⁰ Luther broke with the entire medieval tradition, which taught that human performance is the only kind of human righteousness there is. Augustine insisted that only God's grace can produce that righteousness, as did some other medieval theologians, but even he believed that God's restoration of righteousness was measured in the human performance of God's law. Luther revolted against his own teachers, who insisted that he must perform as best he could to attain the grace that would perfect his works. He distinguished two kinds of righteousness, two kinds of identity, which he first labeled *aliena*—from outside myself—and *propria*—works of my own performance (1519). He later turned to the labels "passive" and "active" for the righteousness of human beings in God's sight and

for their righteousness in relationship to other creatures, especially of the human variety.¹¹ In a culture which focuses on the identity of the individual, as western societies today do, it is impossible to overemphasize the significance and appeal of the message that a person's core identity is a gift, just as life itself is given without any merit or worthiness in the child apart from that given by the love of the parent. Performance creates secondary identities that, though they are very important to the person and to the neighbor, come and go even though they provide satisfaction and joy in daily life. In a world driven by establishing the integrity and identity of the individual on the basis of outstanding performance of tasks on the job or on the sports field, in the home or in the community, the assertion that the core value of the human being lies in God's perception of us breaks through a host of crippling judgments that blame the self for failure or accuse others of sabotaging our efforts.¹²

Thus, the false impression that with the term "justification," restoration of righteousness or core identity, Luther focused only on questions of perpetrating sin and suffering guilt must be set aside. Luther recognized that the crushing force of the law calls attention to the most important dysfunction in human life—failure to fear, love, and trust in God above all things—by revealing to us that we and our false gods are inadequate for preserving and protecting our lives. Both victims and perpetrators of evil are called to face their failure to trust the true God by the law's work, whether explicitly or implicitly voiced. Justification thus addresses in our day, as it did for Luther and Melancthon, not only our guilt and shame but our terrors and our vulnerabilities. The law stops us on false paths, so that the Holy Spirit can turn us to the righteousness-restoring Savior, Jesus, who gives us life through forgiveness of sins. He restores our identity as children of God.

For Luther "justification" was one word among several synonyms for salvation that delivered the gospel. It was his most important term, for it focused on the gift of righteousness that Christ has delivered to us through his death and resurrection. But in his Small Catechism, he spoke of Christ's "deliverance" or "redemption" of sinners which renders them "his own, people who live under him in his rule, and serve him"—an apt summary of justification. Luther's German defined "justify" not only as a courtroom action which pronounced innocence but also as "doing justice to" the accused. Luther understood Paul's baptismal teaching as a summary of justification. Following Romans 4:25, he taught that justification brings about the death of the sinner, the loss of identity as sinner, and creates a new person through Christ's resurrection. In a world full of people discontented with the identity they have rendered for themselves, framing the gospel as the gift of new identity through resurrection with Christ offers a strong appeal.

Paul Gerhardt demonstrated the breadth of how Lutherans of the Book of Concord might formulate "justification" in "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You." Gerhardt depicts the dilemma of sinners as "lying fetters, groaning," and justification "setting free;" the dilemma of the "shame" which leads to bemoaning" and justification in God's honoring of his chosen people. With many North Americans feeling trapped by their pasts and feeling dishonored, discarded, and shamed by others, the resources

Gerhardt found in the Book of Concord, for which he placed his pastorate and his life on the line, can serve us well.¹³

Luther and Melancthon taught that justification takes its concrete form in the lives of individuals through trust. Trust is not merely one more human activity, one good work that comes before other good works. The Wittenberg reformers recognized what the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles had recognized and what the modern psychological philosopher Erik Erikson has taught the North American public: trust is fundamental to human personhood and personality.¹⁴ Trust in elements in our surroundings enables us to get out of bed in the morning, to take public transport to work and to shop, to relate to neighbors, fellow workers, and above all family members. Luther taught in the Large Catechism that trust also establishes the core and foundation of human life as the link to what provides us a haven in every need and all the good things we need. For Luther, trust is our source of an ultimate sense of identity, security, and meaning, of a place we belong, and the respect of others and ourselves.¹⁵

Lutherans distinguish God's gift of that identity from his gift of being able to pursue the callings he gives in love for the neighbor and care of all of creation by truly demonstrating God's love in the horizontal dimension of human life.¹⁶ God's word creates reality, the Wittenberg theologians confessed, and the reality of the word of absolution is that those who trust in Christ are no longer the devil's servants but God's. Thus, the Book of Concord leads believers to the active practice of the righteousness which God designed for humanity in our performance of his plan for human life in his law. The footsteps of Christ are the place where one finds those who trust in him. This message of the practical impact of the freeing and liberating word of justification that the Book of Concord proclaims, brings joy and peace in the midst of trial and tribulation to the people of the twenty-first century.

The Augsburg Confession joins its presentation of God's justifying restoration of our identity as his children with a treatment of his word as his instrument for carrying out his call to repentance through the law and his restoration of our identity and righteousness as God's children in the gospel. Since the end of the sixteenth century, Lutherans have called the several forms of this gospel—in oral, written, and sacramental concretizations of the word of Christ—the "means of grace." Though this term is little used in the confessional documents, it expresses what can be more easily explained today than a half century ago because of the introduction of the concept of "performative" speech in modern linguistic theory.¹⁷ God's speech not only does things, it recreates. When God says "forgiven," a new reality emerges from the chaos and darkness of our revolt against him. It gives a solid assurance to those who experience themselves as sinners (even if they do not use the words "sin" and "guilt," they suffer them) while God regards them as saints. This new reality makes its impact in the self-perception of believers who now are able—are compelled—to realize that they are the empowered people of God, who act like his children and carry out his will in dealing with others. Twenty-first century North Americans realize that speech makes a difference: the reason that parents tell children that "words can never hurt you" is that words have hurt the child. Our contemporaries respond positively to the idea that God's words create a new

reality, even in the face of contrary experience.

Particularly Article 16 of the Augsburg Confession and Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments in the Large Catechism provide the basis for addressing the daily life and lifestyle of believers. Luther and Melancthon combined God's structure for human living in his callings to serve him in family, occupation, society, and congregation with his commands for human performance. Twenty-first-century Western cultures do not provide the traditional biblically-derived framework for morality and civic behavior that was taken for granted in sixteenth-century Germany. Therefore, cultivating the ethical argument that leads to Christian thinking about moral questions in the congregation today requires special efforts. This formulation of God's will and plan for daily life finds rich resources in the Wittenberg way of thinking.

The Book of Concord is not a manual for congregational life nor a handbook of pastoral care. Nonetheless, the insights of Formula of Concord Article 10 on *adiaphora*¹⁸ strengthen the teaching of Augsburg Confession Article 15 on human rites and ceremonies in the church.¹⁹ Luther's radical redefinition of what it means to be Christian removed all matters of ritual and practice from the essential core of the faith (the *esse*) and placed them in the realm of that which must serve the gospel and strengthen the faith of believers (the *bene esse*). Different issues beset the contemporary congregation than what the reformers faced in 1530, but the model for approaching such challenges in a way that reflects and reinforces proclamation of the gospel serves us well and provides tools for addressing the down-to-earth frictions that sometimes loom larger in our consciousness than do matters of doctrine.

This review of the content of the Book of Concord could touch many more topics—church, sacraments, eschatology, and others—which are illuminated and explicated by Luther, Melancthon, and the authors of the Formula of Concord in ways that may need translation into our culture but that set down the content of Scripture in a compelling and inviting manner. Because of this, subscription to the Book of Concord—claiming its teaching as our own—flows from the conviction that the book itself creates in its readers. When this does not happen, subscribers must honestly say that this confession of the faith is not their own and find another allegiance and secondary authority.

Subscription to the Book of Concord does not mean that the pastor masters the book. It means that the book has sufficiently mastered the pastor to serve as foundation, guide, reference, and secondary authority as a faithful witness to Scripture's revelation of God and his work and will for humankind. Such subscription creates comfort for those who realize that they do not understand the Bible completely but wish to bring its message effectively to the people to whom God has sent them, even when they are five centuries and six thousand or more miles from the Germany in which the confessions emerged.

This liberating effect of subscription to the Book of Concord makes it a friend of the people of God.

Endnotes

¹ See for example C. F. W. Walter, "Why should our pastors, teachers and professors subscribe unconditionally to the symbolical writings," *Concordia Journal* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 1989): 274–284 and A. C. Piepkorn, "Do the Lutheran symbolical books speak where the Sacred Scriptures are silent," *Concordia Journal* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 1989): 351–359. See also Charles P. Arand, *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity*, 2nd Ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2012).

² See John F. Johnson, "Confession and confessional subscription," *Concordia Journal* 6, no. 6 (November 1, 1980): 235–24 and Charles P. Arand, "'The Vitality of Creeds and Confessions: A Study of Homology in 1 John' in And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday, ed., Gerald Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn, MI, 1990), 213–36.

³ Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 31–82.

⁴ See Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 3–6.

⁵ Robert Kolb, "Resurrection and Justification: Luther's Use of Romans 4, 25," *Lutherjahrbuch* 78 (2011): 39–60.

⁶ Kolb and Nestingen, *Sources and Contexts*, 202–203.

⁷ Arand et al., *The Lutheran Confessions*, 9–11.

⁸ Erik Herrmann, "'Why then the Law?' Salvation History and the Law in Martin Luther's Interpretation of Galatians 1513–1522" (Ph.D. dissertation, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, 2005), 113–29, 147–193.

⁹ Smalcald Articles, III, ii, BSLK 435–436, *Book of Concord*, 311–312.

¹⁰ Charles P. Arand, "Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 15 (2001): 417–439.

¹¹ Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 23–128.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ LSB, 334.

¹⁴ *Child and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: Norton, 1964), *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

¹⁵ LC, Ten Commandments, 2: BSLK, 560, *Book of Concord*, 386.

¹⁶ Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg, 1957).

¹⁷ James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-modern World*, 2nd ed. rev. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 276–292.

¹⁸ BSLK, *Book of Concord*.

¹⁹ BSLK, *Book of Concord*. Cf. Charles P. Arand, "The Apology as a Backdrop for the Interim of 1548," *Politik und Bekenntnis. Die Reaktionen auf das Interim von 1548*, ed. Irene Dingel and Günther Wartenberg (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007), 211–227.