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### An Analysis of the Confessionalism of Edmund Schlink, Based on his "Theologie Der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften," Together with a Translation of the Original German

Herbert Bouman

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THE CONFESSIONALISM OF EDMUND SCHLINK,  
TOGETHER WITH  
SHORT TITLE:  
THE CONFESSIONALISM OF EDMUND SCHLINK

Presented to the Faculty  
of the Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Systematic Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Sacred Theology

3152

by

August John August Souzen

June 1960

Approved by



AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONFESSIONALISM OF EDMUND SCHLINK,  
BASED ON HIS "THEOLOGIE DER LUTHERISCHEN  
BEKENNTNISCHRIFTEN," TOGETHER WITH  
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THE CONFSSIONALISM OF EDMUND SCHLINK

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

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<sup>1</sup> AD I, I.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The question concerning the nature and essence of Lutheranism has been asked for more than four hundred years, in fact, ever since the theological concerns of Martin Luther received public notice. Historically, one may speak of a "Lutheran movement" from the time that Luther's theological insights to which he had come, under God, through years of personal anguish and unremitting pre-occupation with biblical theology, began to be accepted and appropriated by an ever widening circle of disciples. This somewhat amorphous phase of the Reformation may be said to cover, roughly, the third decade of the sixteenth century. The principal accents of the new evangelical orientation of Christian theology, Christology, anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, etc., were given public expression in some of the great Reformation writings of Luther in 1520 and, in the succeeding years, won a large and enthusiastic following until, at the great Diet of Augsburg, 1530, without Luther's personal presence, an imposing fellowship of princes, cities, and theologians presented to the imperial court what "our churches teach with great unanimity."<sup>1</sup> The Lutheran Church had come into

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<sup>1</sup>AC I, 1.



being, it had declared its theology in "the contemporary symbol"<sup>2</sup> of its faith. To this Symbol Lutherans generally have committed themselves ever since. Subsequent Lutheran creedal statements were prepared in direct or indirect relation to the Augsburg Confession as defense, amplification, clarification, or protection against misinterpretation.

What, then, is Lutheranism? The question intrigued many who came to Augsburg openly hostile, suspicious, skeptical, or woefully misinformed. After the reading of the Confession many had received the answer.<sup>3</sup> But the question has persisted through the centuries. Not only have people continued to inquire into the genius of Lutheranism, but they have often questioned the very right of the Lutheran Church to maintain a separate existence. To the Papalist Church the Lutheran movement has represented an unjustified schism and a pestilential heresy, while from the Reformed side Lutheranism has consistently been viewed as an ecclesiastical hybrid that retained too much of the papal leaven, on the one hand, and stopped short, on the other, of the radical reformation that was believed to be necessary.

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<sup>2</sup>B of C, Pref. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. "Tributes to the Augsburg Confession," Triglot Concordia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), Historical Introductions, p. 23.

What is Lutheran? The answer to the question must, of course, be sought in an analysis of the official statement of Lutheran belief, the collection of creedal formulations encompassed in the Book of Concord. At various times men have attempted to do justice to this task. There is a vast amount of literature dealing with the Reformation, with the history of the Lutheran Church, and with Lutheran Dogmatics. There are untold monographs on one or the other of the Lutheran Symbols, or on individual articles, or on individual doctrines treated in the Book of Concord. Relatively few have undertaken to present a full-orbed treatment of Lutheran confessional theology, based on a comprehensive investigation and systematic discussion of the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Symbols. Among the latter may be mentioned the work of Charles Porterfield Krauth and, more recently, of Werner Elert, Herman Sasse, Friedrich Brunstaed, and, perhaps the best effort to date, the work of Edmund Schlink.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Charles Porterfield Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1871); Werner Elert, Morphologie des Luthertums (Muenchen: C. H. Beck, 1931, 1932); Herman Sasse, Was heisst Lutherisch? [Here We Stand], translated by Theodore G. Tappert (New York: Harper's, 1938); Friedrich Brunstaed, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1951); Edmund Schlink, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (First edition, 1940; third edition, Muenchen: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1948). The writer's translation is based on the third edition and all references in this study are to it. Other significant treatments of Lutheran confessional theology: Leonhart Hutter, Libri Christianae Concordiae: Symboli ecclesiarum *γρηγοριωσ*

This present study is concerned with the last-named work and grew out of long pre-occupation with the task of producing an English version. The importance of Schlink's book has been widely recognized in Lutheran circles. To make it available to additional thousands of English-speaking Lutherans who are not able to make full use of the material in its original German, the work of translation was begun by the late Paul F. Koehneke of Milwaukee, and after his death, carried forward to completion by the present writer.<sup>5</sup>

This essay proposes to subject Schlink's theology of the Lutheran Confessions to a critical analysis and evaluation. The investigation will address itself principally to three areas of inquiry:

1. Does Schlink accurately and adequately reproduce the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Book of Concord?
2. Is Schlink's personal theological orientation in harmony with Lutheran confessional theology?
3. Is Schlink's attitude toward Lutheran confessional theology correct and is it valid for confessional Lutheranism today?

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Lutheranorum (Wittenberg: Zacharias Schuerer, 1609); Fr. H. R. Frank, Die Theologie der Concordienformel (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1858-1865); Hans Asmussen, Warum noch lutherische Kirche? (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1949).

<sup>5</sup>Prof. Koehneke had prepared a first draft of the main portions of the book at the time of his death. The present writer took over his material, revised it word for word three times, and retranslated major portions. The Introduction, Excursus, Appendix, Index, and Footnotes are the present writer's original translation.

To facilitate references, the following abbreviations will be used:

B of C The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959). All direct quotations from the Lutheran Symbols will be from this edition.

AC Augsburg Confession or CA

Ap. Apology

S. A. Smalcald Articles

Tr. Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

L. C. Large Catechism also abbreviated to Cât.

S. C. Small Catechism also abbreviated to Cat.

F. C. Formula of Concord  
or FC

## CHAPTER II

### THE SCOPE OF SCHLINK'S TREATMENT OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

When Schlink titles his book "The Theology of the Lutheran Confessions" he is making a claim and a promise. He claims to know and understand what the Lutheran Symbols are and what they teach, and he promises to present an accurate and adequate summary of their content. The promise of a "theology" involves a correct grasp of the basic perspective from which the Symbols present Christian doctrine and an orderly, systematic treatment of the given material, to demonstrate its unity, cohesion, and integrating principle. To discover how well the author has fulfilled his promise it will be proper to ask if in his study he has adequately and objectively included all of the Lutheran Confessions and if he has done justice, extensively and intensively, to all doctrines treated in the Confessions, and, finally, if he has combined the entire material into a unified whole on its own terms. But before these questions can be intelligently considered, we must ourselves be clear on the scope of the Lutheran Symbols, both in volume and in content. It will, therefore, be profitable to proceed by way of an overview of the Book of Concord to an investigation of Schlink's treatment.

While it is true that historically not all branches

of the Lutheran Church have formally accepted and subscribed all of the Symbols included in the Book of Concord,<sup>1</sup> and while in general a universal acceptance among Lutherans is limited to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism, it is nevertheless, also true that all the Symbols, including the Formula of Concord, published in the Book of Concord received such wide-spread recognition that there can be no doubt of the right of any of them to be heard and taken seriously in any discussion of what is Lutheran theology that lays claim to comprehensiveness.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, a full "Theology of the Lutheran Confessions" must a priori include the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Tractatus, Luther's Catechisms, and the Formula of Concord in both its parts, Epitome and Solid Declaration.

However, merely quoting all of the Symbols with more or less frequency does not yet constitute a use of them on their own terms. The Symbols claim for themselves an inner

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<sup>1</sup>Edmund Schlink, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (First edition, 1940; third edition, Muenchen: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1948), p. 18: "So hat auch der lutherische Tag von Hannover, auf dem im Juli 1935 die lutherischen Kirchen in Deutschland ihre gemeinsame Bekenntnisgrundlage feststellten, die Schmalkaldischen Artikel, nicht aber die Konkordienformel genannt." It may be observed that the Lutheran Churches of Scandinavia have never formally subscribed the Formula of Concord.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of the varying attitudes regarding the symbolical authority of the Formula of Concord cf. Triglot Concordia, Historical Introductions, pp. 247-256.

relation and an interdependence. They all claim to present the same theology from the same point of view. Thus, the Augsburg Confession at once establishes connection with the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds,<sup>3</sup> the Apology defends the correctness of, and provides further penetration into, the Augsburg Confession. The Smalcald Articles represent a re-affirmation of the Athanasian Creed and the Augsburg Confession for a specific purpose, and the Formula of Concord is titled "A thorough, pure, correct, and final restatement and explanation of a number of articles of the Augsburg Confession."<sup>4</sup> Even the Catechisms of Luther are drawn into this continuity, both as the explication of the Apostles' Creed and as a teaching instrument of the churches committed to the Augsburg Confession.<sup>5</sup> It will be seen, therefore, that the Augsburg Confession, as the "contemporary symbol of their faith," stands in the center of Lutheran confessionalism, from which the line is to be drawn backward and forward. In any theology of the Lutheran Confessions it is proper to give priority to the Augsburg Confession, but it is not proper to pit one symbol against another, although there can be no valid objection to a critical scrutiny of the Confessions' claim to unity and

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. AC I and III.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. B of C, Title of Formula of Concord, p. 463.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Schlink, Theologie der Lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften, p. 17.

harmony. It is important to discover this reciprocity, for, as Schlink suggests, the simultaneously valid creedal statements of one church cannot contradict each other.<sup>6</sup>

Having established the extent of the Lutheran Confessional corpus that is basic to a theology of them, it goes without saying that their doctrinal content must also be adequately reflected in a comprehensive treatment. This does not mean, of course, that every doctrine presented in the Symbols should get equal space with every other in a mechanical side-by-side. A nice sense of proportion, dictated by the confessional emphasis itself, must be evident in the study. What the Symbols stress should be stressed, what they brush in passing may be disposed of in a few words. The central must remain in the center, and the peripheral must in strict discipline remain peripheral, however tempting it might be to the individual student to pursue a pet concern and inflate it out of all proportion. From this perspective all doctrinal aspects of the Symbols should be given appropriate attention. None should a priori be ignored.

What, then, do the Confessions teach? Resting on the Ecumenical Creeds, the Confessions are trinitarian and christological in a massively evangelical and soteriological

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 398: "Es gehoert zwar zum Wesen des Bekenntnisses, dass die in der Kirche zugleich gueltigen Bekenntnisschriften sich in der Bezeugung des Evangeliums nicht widersprechen duerfen."



perspective. This is the distinctively Lutheran thrust. The doctrines treated, as demanded by the historical setting, are presented from this orientation and include: God, man and sin, Christ's person and work, justification, sanctification, the church together with its means of grace and ministry, worship, the Christian's attitude toward the civil government and its functions, human relations in various aspects, and eschatology and the final consummation.<sup>7</sup> The Symbols also present implicitly and explicitly a doctrine concerning the Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> In this broad outline all of the doctrines treated in the Confessions may be included, many of them directly, many others by association.

We are now ready to ask Schlink whether he has objectively reproduced the theology of the Lutheran Confessions both extensively and intensively. A brief

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<sup>7</sup>God: Ecumenical Creeds, AC I, Ap. I, Catechisms II, S. A. I; Man and Sin: CA II, Ap. II, S. A. III, i and ii, Cat. I, F. C. I, II, CA XVIII, XIX; Christ: CA III, XVII, Ap. III, S. A. II, i, Cat. II, F. C. VIII, IX; Justification: CA IV, XX, XXI, Ap. IV, S. A. III, xiii, FC III; Sanctification: CA VI, XX, Ap. IV, Cat. I, Table of Duties, FC IV, VI; The Church and its means of grace and ministry: CA V, VII, VIII-XV, XXII-XXVIII, Ap. (same numbers), S. A. III, iv-x, xii; Civil Government: CA XVI, XXVIII, Table of Duties; Human Relations: CA XX, XXIII, XXVII, Ap. (same numbers), S. A. II, iii, III, ix, Cat. I, Table of Duties; Worship: CA and Ap. XXI, Cat. III; Eschatology: CA XVII, L. C. II, FC XI.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. the Prefaces, conclusions, many incidental references, and especially Part I of the Formula of Concord, both Epitome and Solid Declaration.

inspection of his book will quickly reveal a host of references to all parts of the Book of Concord, including the Catalog of Testimonies. If my check is correct, Schlink quotes every article of the several Symbols, many of them repeatedly and at considerable length, with the exception of Augsburg Confession 15 and 27, Apology 19 and 28, Smalcald Articles II, iii, and III, xi, xiv, xv. All articles of the Formula are referred to, as well as all parts of the Catechisms, with the exception of the Table of Duties. It would seem, then, that Schlink does indeed utilize the entire Book of Concord for his discussion. Since Augsburg Confession 15 and Apology 19 are quite short, it may be argued that their concerns are met incidentally in connection with other more extensive discussions.

Yet, in spite of Schlink's apparent coverage, there appear to be certain doctrinal areas that receive little, if any, explicit treatment. Among these I would list the whole question of Monastic Vows, the Marriage of Priests, Celibacy, and the broad subject of Prayer and Worship. Surely these are important elements in the Lutheran Symbols and undergo significant metamorphoses in the evangelical perspective. With some justification it may be urged, however, that these points receive their self-evident re-orientation from the strong positive presentation of the primacy of the Gospel.

Again, though Schlink does draw all parts of the

Book of Concord into his discussion, it does not follow per se that he treats them adequately. He does, indeed, express his admiration for the Formula of Concord as a model of theological work and as a correct explication of Reformation insights.<sup>9</sup> For that reason he states that he will not dispense with the Formula, even though it is not subscribed by all Lutheran groups. Yet Schlink manifests a certain negative and disparaging attitude over against the last Lutheran symbol. He questions the validity of much of its content and faults it for introducing an unwarranted expansion of pristine Lutheran theology.<sup>10</sup> A rather persistent pattern of disparagement in comparison with other Symbols may be traced. This attitude has influenced Schlink to limit his use of the Formula of Concord to its exact correspondence with the earlier Confessions. In fact, he declares explicitly that his

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.: "Allerdings soll die Konkordienformel auch nur insoweit herangezogen werden, als in ihr eine legitime Auslegung der frueheren lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften erblickt werden kann." ". . . Frage, ob nicht in ihr die Aufgabe einer Explikation der frueheren Bekenntnisschriften ueberschritten ist, ob sie sich nicht hier und da von den reformatorischen Bekenntnissen entfernt und bereits die Ansaetze zu Fehlentwickelungen der spaeteren Orthodoxie aufweist." Cf. also p. 282, n. 18; p. 179, n. 14; p. 181, n. 15; p. 392.

"theology" will not offer a theology of the Formula of Concord.<sup>11</sup>

We have seen the scope of Schlink's use of the Confessions and his citation of individual articles. There remains a survey of the book's structure and the systematic treatment of the confessional theology. In eight chapters Schlink gives attention to the following themes: Scripture and Confession; the revelation of God the Creator; Law and Gospel (in two chapters); Baptism and Lord's Supper; the Church; Civil and Ecclesiastical Government; Judgment Day. Within the framework of these broad topics Schlink attempts to develop and integrate the many doctrinal discussions contained in the Book of Concord. Thus, the first chapter presents detailed treatment of the Lutheran sola scriptura principle and shows that the normative character of the Scriptures consists in their prophetic and apostolic witness to the Gospel. The relation of the Confessions to Scripture is seen in their summary commentary of Scripture on its own terms. In this task the Confessions indicate the continuity of the Lutheran Church with the orthodox past and the rejection of error. As such the Confessions are intended to be the model of all teaching in the church.

The chapter on the revelation of God the Creator

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

comprises not only that aspect, but the doctrine of God in general, the Holy Trinity, the essence and nature of God, as also the activity of God, the opera Dei ad extra. This involves a discussion of cosmology and specifically, anthropology, man in his creatureliness and in his total estrangement from the Creator through sin, which makes him an object of God's wrath, while at the same time he remains the object of God's love.

In his extensive discussion of Law and Gospel the author enters thoroughly not only into their mutual relation, but also their content and their functions. The Gospel includes the entire Christology and soteriology, the work of redemption and God's justifying activity. Faith and unbelief are given their place together with the work of the Holy Spirit. This leads to the inclusion of the whole subject of regeneration, renewal, and sanctification, all of which again involve man with both Law and Gospel in their proper distinction.

Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar are brought into an intimate and constant relationship with the daily life of the Christian.

The doctrine of the church is presented as the dynamic rule of Christ against the somber backdrop of the realm of the devil, an antithesis that exists not only between church and non-church, but also within the church between the true believers and the hypocrites.

Under the caption of civil and ecclesiastical government Schlink subsumes the broad field of the state and its functions, the church in its administrative and organizational structure and the place and authority of its ministry in relation to the total membership, and the relationship between church and state.

The final chapter comprises a treatment of all the eschatological material in the Symbols, recapitulated in the perspective of the total confessional theology. At this place the author incorporates the confessional material on the Antichrist and on the doctrine of predestination.

From this sketchy and somewhat fragmentary survey it may be gathered that Schlink has managed to work most of the doctrinal content of the Symbols into his study. And he has done it in a fresh and imaginative way with a fine sensitivity for the central Lutheran emphasis of divine monergism. The body of the book has a transparent and almost too symmetrical structure. Every chapter except the first develops its material under ten topic sentences which indicate the progression of thought. In an introduction, an excursus following chapter one, and an appendix at the close, Schlink launches into an extensive discussion of the respective spheres of the Confessions and Dogmatics as well as their relation to each other.

Having examined the extent of Schlink's treatment of the Confessions, we are prepared to ask the next question, whether he has correctly reproduced the Lutheran confessional theology, quite apart from his own agreement or disagreement. In our investigation we shall follow the order of Schlink's book. The first chapter has to do with the confessional view of the Holy Scriptures. In this purview we are concerned with what the Confessions teach about Scripture and from what perspective. The question is, therefore, a hermeneutical and an exegetical one, in addition to its theological overtones. There is no doubt that the Symbols operate with the sola scriptura principle. Scripture is the only source, norm, and authority for all doctrine in the church. Scripture is the unfailing, immovable, and completely reliable Word of God. The content of Scripture is the Law and the Gospel, which must be seen in their proper distinction, that is, the Law in the service of the Gospel. This means the primacy of the Gospel. The Scriptures are the vehicle of the Holy Spirit who uses the Law to convince man of his sin and expose him to the condemnatory wrath of God, but only in order to confront him with the saving grace of God and lead him to accept that grace by faith, which will manifest itself in a transformed life.

A glance at Schlink's theses on the confessional doctrine of the Scriptures reveals that he has correctly

reproduced it.<sup>12</sup>

### The Doctrine of God and the Doctrine of Man

In explicit antithesis to ancient and modern anti-trinitarianism the Symbols re-affirm the orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity as presented in the Ecumenical Creeds. God is the Creator and Preserver of all things. Man is God's creature, yet utterly corrupt and in rebellion against his Maker. Original sin describes man's nature, a condition in which he is without fear and love of God and full of evil inclinations, both unable and unwilling to acknowledge God and recognize Him as Creator. Whatever knowledge of God the natural man may have, it is distorted and perverted, and only the regenerated person can with the eyes of faith see and know God, the Triune, truly.

Without going into detail, it may be said that Schlink presents these doctrines with high fidelity to the confessional theology.

For this and the remaining points I shall merely

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<sup>12</sup>See the theses headlining the discussion in chapter I of the book. Note also p. 23: "Diese Aussagen die die heilige Schrift als Norm aller Lehre voraussetzen. . . ." P. 24: "Die Schrift selbst wird . . . selbstverstaendlich als Norm vorausgesetzt. . . ." P. 25: "Die Schriftzitate . . . haben . . . den Charakter der entscheidenden und abschliessenden Begrueudung." P. 28: "Die Inspiration der Schrift ist zwar vorausgesetzt, aber es fehlt eine ausgefuehrte Inspirationslehre." P. 54: "Entscheidend ist . . . allein der Grundsatz, dass die Heilige Schrift unica norma ist." Cf. also pp. 58ff.



register the fact of Schlink's correct reproduction of confessional doctrine and reserve my critique for a later chapter. In this way much unnecessary duplication may be avoided.

### Law and Gospel

The Law-Gospel theme in its full implications involves the whole Christology, the doctrine of the two natures in personal union, the vicarious atonement, the universal redemption, and the sinner's justification. It involves also the conversion of the sinner and the relation of justifying faith, born of the Gospel, to the new life. Here we are pre-eminently on Lutheran ground, as is well known, in the sense that the Lutheran Reformation restored the Gospel in its true content and function to its central and determinative position in Christian theology.

Schlink is emphatic in his recognition of this basic Lutheran affirmation. In ever new turns he calls attention to this doctrine and correctly presents it. This is what he says:

The Gospel is the message concerning the work of Christ. This, it is true, is both Law--yes, his cross is the most terrifying proclamation of the divine wrath (cf. S. D. V, 12)--as well as Gospel. But Christ's proper office is the Gospel, and His work becomes Gospel by not remaining with Him, but by being imputed to the sinner by God without any merit by grace alone. Jesus Christ takes the sinner's place, and now the sinner is accounted righteous before God just like His only-begotten Son. The Gospel permits us to believe this, and by this faith we become righteous for Christ's sake.

Hence the decisive point is not the side-by-side of God's wrath and God's mercy, and of sin and grace, but it is the victory of mercy over wrath, the triumph of grace over sin and condemnation. Therefore, according to the Lutheran Confessions the sum of Scripture, and that means also the content of the Lutheran Confessions, is not only law and promises (e.g., Ap. IV, 5 & 102), but the promise of the Gospel, pure and simple (e.g., Ap. IV, 37 & 2f.).<sup>13</sup>

Statements of similar burden could be multiplied. The theme of justification, says Schlink, is the justifying Word, its sole foundation (propter Christum) and the rejection of all human pre-suppositions (sola fide).<sup>14</sup> The decisive fact remains that all gifts of God, justification, faith, the new life, are gifts of grace.<sup>15</sup>

#### Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar

According to Lutheran doctrine the Gospel is the divinely chosen means of grace, whether by the Word alone, or connected with visible signs, as in the Sacraments, the vehicle of the Holy Spirit's operation, and therefore divinely efficacious. The regenerative power of Holy Baptism for children as well as adults, and its life-long use as a gracious covenant of God to which the sinner may return in daily repentance---these are the salient features of Lutheran Baptism. As for the Holy Eucharist, the

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. ibid., p. 136, n. 16.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. ibid., pp. 137 and 165.

explicit sacramental realism of the "true body and blood under the bread and wine," the manducatio oralis and the manducatio indignorum, as well, of course, as the efficacy to forgive sins--these distinguish Lutheran teaching from Roman Catholic and Reformed.

Schlink clearly acknowledges all of these points and correctly presents them.<sup>16</sup>

### The Church

In Lutheran confessional theology the church in the strict sense is the body of Christ, consisting of all true believers who are thus in living connection with Christ, the Head. The Holy Spirit has made them members by creating saving faith in their hearts through the means of grace. The church, strictly speaking, is a spiritual fellowship that evades empirical, statistical identification. Yet the church has unfailing marks by means of which it can be recognized, namely, the preaching of the Gospel and the use of the divinely instituted Sacraments. In its outward appearance the church presents an external

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 251: Es ist "ein und dieselbe Vergebung, die durch die Absolution und durch die Sakramente zuteil wird, und ein und dasselbe Leben, das der Glaubende im Hoeren des Evangeliums und im Empfang von Taufe und Abendmahl empfaengt. Ist es doch derselbe Christus, der uns 'durch Wort und Sakrament zum neuen Leben bringt' (Ap. IX, 2). Ist es doch auch derselbe Heilige Geist, der durch Wort und Sakrament wirkt und Glauben und Leben schenkt."

mixture of saints and hypocrites, of true and false Christians. But the latter do not, in truth, belong to the church.

Again, Schlink properly recognizes this as the Lutheran approach to ecclesiology.<sup>17</sup>

#### Civil and Ecclesiastical Government

Lutherans recognize both the temporal and the spiritual realms as institutions and precious gifts of God, each in its own sphere performing the functions assigned to it without interfering with the other. The organizational structure of both governments is of no special concern to the Symbols, so long as the state discharges its God-given duties with the means provided for it, and the leaders of the church confine their administration to the use of the spiritual resources of Word and Sacrament. The ministry in the Lutheran view is not per se a position of rank or hierarchical authority, but a service to promote the blessings of the Gospel. The only authority in the church is the Lord Jesus Christ who exercises His rule through His Word and His Spirit.

Schlink has correctly presented this teaching,<sup>18</sup> although the validity of some of his personal judgments

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 266ff.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. ibid., pp. 306ff; especially pp. 318, 333, 334, 337ff.

is not beyond debate, as will subsequently be demonstrated.

### CHAPTER III Eschatology

Lutheran theology is oriented to the final consummation of history in the return of Jesus Christ. The confessors state their theological convictions in conspectu aeternitatis. All church activity is geared to the eternal salvation of the sinner. Great and devastating dangers beset the heaven-bound pilgrim, such as the kingdom of Antichrist. For comfort and assurance the believer is directed to God's eternal plan as actualized in the work of Christ and guaranteed in the promises of the Gospel. Thus the doctrine of predestination is a further manifestation of the grace of God. For the Lutheran Symbols the facts of eschatology involve spiritual realities, and therefore all carnal chiliastic ideas are repudiated. Eternal life for the believer and eternal condemnation for the despiser of God's gracious will in Christ are the final judgment of God.

All of these emphases are recognized and discussed by Schlink. As we shall see, he presents some strictures of the views expressed in the Symbols, but he has in the main faithfully stated them.

## CHAPTER III

### AN ANALYSIS OF SCHLINK'S CONFSSIONALISM

It is one thing to perceive objectively what the Lutheran Confessions teach and it is quite another matter to agree with that teaching and identify oneself with it. The questions to be examined and answered here deal with Schlink's personal attitude toward the Lutheran Symbols and his own theological orientation. In other words, is Schlink in his "theology" a good Lutheran in terms of the confessional claims?

To discuss these questions intelligently, it will be necessary to look briefly at the claims which the Confessions make for themselves. One of the things they want to be from beginning to end is truly and exclusively scriptural. Even a cursory perusal of the Book of Concord reveals a constant dependence on Scripture. Without explicit treatment of the extent of the biblical canon or of isagogical questions, the Symbols accept unreservedly the divine, authoritative, definitive character of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the introductory paragraphs of the Formula of Concord expressly declare. It never occurs to the Lutheran Symbols to question the finality of scriptural pronouncements or to admit the right of any other authority, no matter how great or entrenched, to establish doctrine for

the church. In prefaces, conclusions, and scattered throughout the several documents, the same refrain is repeated: What Scripture teaches must be accepted, what Scripture does not teach cannot compel submission, no matter how plausible it might be.<sup>1</sup> The authority of the Confessions themselves is inextricably bound up with their scripturalness.

Not only do the Confessions articulate what they think of the Scriptures, but they also desire to be regarded as a comprehensive summary of Scripture doctrine.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean, of course, that the Symbols presume to furnish a verse by verse, word for word exegesis of all that is comprehended between the covers of the Bible. Though the material quoted directly from the Scriptures is sizable in the total confessional compass, with not many less than a thousand citations from all but a few comparatively minor biblical books, the sum is still only a small fraction of the total biblical content. The Lutheran claim to comprehensiveness can, therefore, not be assessed in mechanical, statistical, formally exegetical terms. The claim rests rather on a theological decision

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Preface to the B of C, Preface to the AC, and to the Ap., Part I of the F. C., and passim.

<sup>2</sup>E.g., L. C., Preface, pp. 17, 18; Epitome, Comprehensive Summary, p. 5.

regarding the content and purpose of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> God revealed Himself through the Scriptures for the purpose of confronting the sinner in His judgment and in His mercy. To have adequately reproduced this thrust is the reiterated claim of the Lutheran Symbols.

This leads to a third claim, namely, that the Symbols see the Law and the Gospel in their proper relationship and in their distinction, an insight that issues in establishing and maintaining the over-riding primacy of the Gospel. That is to say, the Lutheran Confessions claim to present an evangelical theology, a theology that understands all doctrines from the perspective of sola gratia, propter Christum, per solam fidem. This approach does not eliminate the Law or works, but assigns them their fitting place.

This, the Confessions insist, is the way the Word of God deals with these matters and the way the true Christian faith of all ages has understood and transmitted them. Repeatedly the charge of sectarianism and neology is indignantly rejected and agreement with the universal Christian

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Ap. IV, 5, "All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises," and passim.



Church is emphasized.<sup>4</sup> In a word, the Lutheran Symbols assert a complete catholicity or ecumenicity for themselves.

Furthermore, since what they confess is the orthodox doctrine of the universal church, "solidly and well" grounded in the Holy Scriptures, it follows that the Lutheran confessional theology bespeaks permanent validity for itself. By their own appearance the Confessions indicate that new historical situations, new heresies, new needs of the church may make new formulations and specific emphases necessary, something that is not excluded for the years following the completion of the Book of Concord.<sup>5</sup> There is no attempt to absolutize the confessional formulations. Nor is there any suggestion of symbololatry, of letting the Symbols supersede the authority of the Scriptures, or even of placing the Symbols

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. the condemnations in many articles of CA and FC, repudiating all heretical, schismatic, and sectarian opinions. See the conclusion of the first section of CA, B of C, p. 47: "not contrary or opposed to that [the teaching] of the universal Christian church." The inclusion of the Ecumenical Creeds in the Lutheran corpus points in the same direction.

<sup>5</sup>Edmund Schlink, Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften (First edition, 1940; third edition; Muenchen: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1948), p. 61: "Darum kann auch keine Bekenntnisschrift als abschliessendes Bekenntnis der Kirche in dem Sinn gelten, als duerften ihr keine weiteren Bekenntnisschriften folgen. . . . Zum mindesten wird die Kirche gegenueber neuen Irrlehren neue verbindliche Auslegungen der gueltigen Bekenntnisschriften zu geben haben."

beside the Scriptures as a second norm. Scripture remains the undisputed Queen. Only because they expressly expound the content of Scripture, the immota veritas, can and do the Confessions claim abiding validity for their teaching.

Finally, by virtue of their close integration and reiterated interdependence, the Lutheran Symbols imply that their total testimony is united, harmonious, and without inner contradiction. Scriptural, comprehensive, orthodox, ecumenical, evangelical, permanent, and harmonious—these are the claims of the Symbols for their theology.

How does Schlink respond to these claims? He leaves no one in doubt as to his intentions to take the confessional claims seriously,<sup>6</sup> and he is willing to accept them. To take the Confessions seriously means to come to terms with them on the basis of the Scriptures.<sup>7</sup> The validity and authority of the Confessions depend entirely on their scripturalness.<sup>8</sup> Schlink acknowledges the

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 6ff.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Ibid., p. 10: "Da die Bekenntnisschriften als Schriftauslegung anerkannt zu werden beanspruchen, nimmt nur diejenige Stellungnahme sie ernst, die sie auf Grund der Schrift bejaht oder verwirft."

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Ibid., especially p. 58.

comprehensiveness of their biblical exposition<sup>9</sup> and their claim to authority based thereon.<sup>10</sup> Particularly explicit is the author in his approval of the confessional claim to an evangelical orientation which pervades the whole theology.<sup>11</sup>

As to the confessional claim of permanent validity for the Lutheran theology, Schlink says that it must not be restricted in either a spatial or temporal way. The Confessions of the Book of Concord address their claim not only to Lutherans, but to all of Christendom, and this not only for their own time, but for all subsequent times until the return of Christ.<sup>12</sup> They speak not only to contemporary heresies in a concrete historical situation, but as exposition of Scripture and as witness to the one

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 7: "Darauf, dass hier die Kirche (nicht ein Einzelner) die Summa der Heiligen Schrift (nicht ein beilaeufiges exegetisches Fuendlein) bezeugt, gruendet der Anspruch der Bekenntnisschriften, die Regel zu sein, . . . verpflichtendes Vorbild aller kirchlichen Verkuendigung und Lehre zu sein."

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 14: "Denn jedes einzelne Lehrstueck ist nur von der Mitte der Bekenntnisschriften, naemlich von dem Artikel von der Rechtfertigung her, zu verstehen."

Ibid., p. 17: "von der Mitte aus, naemlich von der Unterscheidung von Gesetz und Evangelium her. . . ." Ibid., p. 30: "nicht nur ausfuehrliche einzelne, sondern letztlich alle ihre Artikel vom Evangelium handeln." Cf. also ibid., pp. 31, 59, 399.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

eternal truth their validity continues permanently.<sup>13</sup>

Also the confessional claim of ecumenicity finds ready acknowledgment and acceptance with Schlink.<sup>14</sup>

To the confessional implication of mutual agreement Schlink responds, on the one hand, by emphasizing the vital importance of the church's publica doctrina being loyal to the Symbols,<sup>15</sup> by repudiating noncreedalism,<sup>16</sup> and by pointing up the necessity of harmony among a church's Confessions.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, he appears

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 9; cf. ibid., p. 51: "Ist aber das Evangelium Gottes gnaediger Zuspruch fuer Zeit und Ewigkeit, so ist auch der Auftrag der Evangeliums predigt bleibend identisch. Daraus folgt, dass das Bekenntnis als doctrina evangelii verpflichtende Bedeutung fuer das Reden und Handeln der Kirche aller Zeiten hat."

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 303: "eine heilige apostolische christliche Kirche sind die Kirchen der Augsburgischen Konfession in Gemeinschaft mit allen Glaebigen auf Erden. . . ." Cf. ibid., p. 281, n. 17: "So muessen von der Kirche Augsburgischen Bekenntnisses mit Notwendigkeit starke Impulse oekumenischer Arbeit ausgehen."

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 298f.: "So wie die Norm der Kirche das zugesprochene biblische Evangelium ist und so wie die Kirche bestimmt ist durch die Predigt des Evangeliums und die Darreichung der Sakramente, so sind auch die Bekenntnisschriften nicht als solche, naemlich als Schriften Zeichen der Kirche, sondern in der Predigt und Sakramentsverwaltung [all emphases original], die gemaess den Bekenntnisschriften, naemlich gemaess dem Evangelium geschieht. Kirche ist nicht da zu erkennen, wo die rechten Bekenntnisschriften verfassungsgemaess gueltig sind, aber nicht ihnen gemaess gepredigt wird."

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 299: "so leichtfertig die Kirche handelt, die auf Bekenntnisschriften verzichtet. . . ."

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 398, 283, n. 19.

at the same time to limit the necessity for agreement to the confessional witness to the Gospel. Beyond that, contradictions do not seem to matter. Yes, Schlink believes that such contradictions actually exist.<sup>18</sup>

Concerning the confessional conception of Scripture in general Schlink finds occasion for adverse criticism,<sup>19</sup> particularly as far as the Formula of Concord is concerned.<sup>20</sup> In an appendix, where Schlink makes suggestions for further study, he is rather consistently in a questioning mood with regard to the correctness and adequacy of the confessional exegesis.<sup>21</sup> Yet he also concedes that the Confessions want to present Scripture doctrine comprehensively as the synthesis of all the pertinent passages, even though only a few may be quoted,<sup>22</sup> and that their exegesis is judged fairly only in the perspective

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 17: "gelegentlich Lehraussagen, die einander widersprechen."

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 416: "Ist es erlaubt, in der dogmatischen Sprache formelhafte Ausweitungen biblischer Begriffe vorzunehmen, die wichtige Differenzierungen biblischer Begrifflichkeit zugunsten einer abstrakten Ueberordnung und Abbiatur verlassen?"

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 34: "Man mag gegen die Konkordienformel einwenden, dass sie . . . eine Verschiebung zum formalen Schriftprinzip hin bedeutet. . . ." See also ibid., p. 282, n. 18.

<sup>21</sup>cf. ibid., pp. 401ff.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

of the central doctrine.<sup>23</sup> Schlink recognizes that the confessional exegesis must be evaluated also in its historical context to deal justly with seeming omissions and one-sided emphases. He says:

There is such a thing as an omission of scriptural statements which constitutes a confession, and an abridgment of biblical concepts which bears witness to the full scope of these concepts. All confessional statements are directed against the datum that certain biblical concepts and declarations had been usurped by concrete heresy. The biblical exegesis of the Lutheran Confessions is in a certain sense concentrated in taking a stand against the late mediaeval-Roman doctrine of grace. That is to say, the false exegesis of the opponents had to be corrected at specific points, in the explanation of precisely those statements of Scripture which the opponent misinterpreted or ignored.<sup>24</sup>

Schlink reveals his attitude toward the Lutheran Symbols also on a more personal and subjective note. The confessional claim to being exposition of Scripture is properly met only, says he, by one who permits the Confessions to instruct, judge, and comfort him, and also to compel him to check the claim against the Holy Scriptures.<sup>25</sup>

A study of the Lutheran Confessions

is for everyone who is suspicious of the theological originality of the Old Adam and who submits as a pupil to the discipline of the teaching church and thus approaches the Holy Scriptures anew in the act of hearing jointly with the fathers, indiscribably

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.: "Die zu ueberpruefenden Aussagen der Bekenntnisschriften muessen von deren Mitte, der Rechtfertigungslehre, her verstanden sein."

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 422.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

enriching and satisfying. [Being bound to the Lutheran Confessions] becomes thoroughly liberating and enlightening the moment this obligation is recognized as a liberation through the Gospel, which we are privileged to distinguish from the Law anew each day and which is attested by the Lutheran Confessions in the act of making this distinction. For that reason the last word of this introduction must be an expression of gratitude: . . . I should like to state already here that the statements of the Confessions have to an unexpected degree been confirmed by results of modern exegesis, and also that they have opened up new insights into scriptural expressions and contexts.<sup>26</sup>

There is a great deal of pathos in Schlink's profoundly devotional approach to the Symbols, as these words testify:

The theology of the Confessions is . . . a part of the way which the Christian must traverse between his baptism and his official proclamation of the Church's doctrine. . . . As a pupil instructed by the biblical exposition of the Church the theologian must himself expound the Scriptures and instruct the Church. . . . In a moment of church history such as ours--following a long period of evangelical theology, in which Dogmatics had largely become a playground for the individual originality of a philosophizing piety, an era, that is, in which Christians have largely forgotten how to pray through their Catechism --it must be regarded not only as possible but, beyond that, as advisable to listen to the doctrine of the Confessions expressly and exclusively, before one begins to speak himself.<sup>27</sup>

In the theological confusion and indecision of our day Schlink turns gratefully to the solid theology of the Lutheran Symbols.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

Many a person may well experience that he will hungrily and greedily receive into his heart the doctrine of the Confessions amid the current confusion of the church's teaching and activity, and will be saturated with that overwhelming consolation which the Symbols offer the embattled conscience, and with the clear wealth they provide for theological thought. Thus the further pre-occupation with the Symbols will again lead to a strengthening of confidence in their source, and from the recognition that the Symbols witnessed the summary of Scripture over against a specific heresy of their time will arise an understanding of what the Church of today must say in expounding the Scriptures over against the new heresies of today.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear that Schlink has approached his study of Lutheran confessional theology not as an outsider but as an avowed Lutheran and as one committed to the Lutheran Symbols. This does not mean, however, that he agrees with all doctrinal matters treated there. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this adverse criticism.

#### Law and Gospel

Schlink seems to feel that the confessional bipartite alignment of the biblical content may be of questionable validity.<sup>29</sup> He wonders if the difference between Old and New Testament concepts has been properly observed and if the three uses of the Law are a correct biblical distinction.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 421f.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 415; cf. ibid., p. 175, n. 11.



## Justification and Regeneration

Quoting K. Thieme, who insists on the forensic character of justification as the only valid Lutheran accent in this doctrine, Schlink indeed gives cautious support to this over against the opposite view of F. Loofs, but he maintains, nevertheless, that a purely forensic view of justification is untenable.<sup>31</sup> He is particularly critical of the Formula of Concord on this subject, believing that this document fails to do justice to the Lutheran concept of regeneration.<sup>32</sup> He appears to rank the Apology above the Formula and concludes, "the unity of justification and regeneration is indeed stronger in the Apology than the Formula of Concord is willing to recognize."<sup>33</sup>

## Christology

While Schlink criticizes the Reformed Christology which lurks behind Gollwitzer's views on the Sacrament of the Altar, and says that "this separation of the human nature from the divine person and from the work of Jesus

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<sup>31</sup>Cf. ibid., p. 138, n. 17.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 179, n. 14.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 181, n. 15.

Christ contradicts Luther's Christology,"<sup>34</sup> he is again critical of the Formula of Concord in this matter. He thinks that the Christology of the Formula displays an increasingly independent interest in the relation of the two natures to each other at the expense of the soteriological aspects.<sup>35</sup> Yes, he asks whether the Christology of the Formula "should be regarded as explanation or as repeal of the Chalcedonian Christology to which the Church of the Augsburg Confession has always been committed."<sup>36</sup>

#### Baptism

Schlink feels that the biblical basis of the doctrine of Baptism is inadequately reflected in the Symbols. The use of Romans 6 in connection with the question, What does such baptizing with water signify? appears to the author to come short of its proper scope.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, he thinks Matthew 28:19 is employed improperly and beyond its intended sense.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 225, n. 15.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 406.

### The Sacrament of the Altar

While Schlink affirms the Real Presence of the body and blood of our Lord, and warns against an identification of the eucharistic body with the church, there seem to be some problems about the precise understanding which Schlink has of the Real Presence.<sup>39</sup>

Schlink sees the failure of the Symbols to treat the eschatological features of the institution of the Holy Supper as a shortcoming of Lutheran theology.<sup>40</sup> Once more he is critical of the argumentation of the Formula of Concord for the Real Presence of the body and blood, when the Formula argues from Christ's omnipotence and omnipresence according to the genus majestaticum.<sup>41</sup>

### Church and Ministry

In the area of the church's essence, or the question concerning the church's membership, Schlink may at first

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 222f. From 1947 to 1957, German theologians representing Lutheran, Reformed, and Union churches studied the doctrine of the Holy Communion and on November 1 and 2, 1957, unanimously adopted a set of eight theses at Arnoldshain. These theses are a compromise on the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar. In view of Schlink's participation in the formulation and approval of these theses, and his membership in a Union church, it may be proper to ask whether he understands the Real Presence in terms of the Lutheran sacramental realism, or of the Reformed spiritualistic personalism.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. ibid., especially p. 262.

glance appear to contradict the definitions of Augsburg Confession VII and VIII which speak of the sancti and vere credentes, when he says that it pleased Christ in His incomparable grace to call this mixture of the pious, the godless, and the hypocrites His Church in spite of all godlessness and hypocrisy.<sup>42</sup> He may, however, be thinking in terms of the ecclesia large dicta, where one may speak of the mali admixti.

Schlink's view of the ministry may be influenced by the historic development of church administration in Germany, a development which may well be adumbrated in the Lutheran Symbols. The author observes that the Symbols contain no concrete directives regarding the relationship between the ministerial office and the congregation.<sup>43</sup> He does remark that the bishop has the right to fix festival days, the order of worship, and matters of administration, and that the parish pastors are held to obey these episcopal directives.<sup>44</sup> On the opposite side, considering the refusal to submit to the clergy and the church administration, Schlink asserts that hypocrisy and vice on the part of the incumbents of the office do not yet constitute

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 372.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

a valid ground for disobedience.<sup>45</sup> Again, false doctrine on the part of the church authorities need not necessarily mean an immediate separation from such authorities or result in an immediate rupture of relations.<sup>46</sup> Reflecting the centuries-old church-state situation in Europe, Schlink suggests that in times of emergency for the Church it is the duty of the Christian in civil government to lend his civil power to the restoration of the Church's order.<sup>47</sup>

#### Predestination

Schlink believes that Augsburg Confession V (ubi et quando visum est Deo) must be taken in a predestinarian sense.<sup>48</sup> Augsburg Confession XIX (non adjuvante Deo) is said to be one of a number of statements in the area of the enslaved will and of grace which make a doctrine of double predestination mandatory. There is no choice but

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 357: "Der Grund zum Ungehorsam gegenueber Pfarrer und Kirchenleitung sind noch nicht Heuchelei und Laster der Person im geistlichen Amt. . . ."

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 359: "Das heisst also, dass Irrlehre des Kirchenregiments noch nicht ohne weiteres Scheidung von diesem Kirchenregiment und Kirchenspaltung zu bedeuten braucht." It should be stated that these views of the ministry admit of a correct explanation and are not necessarily to be condemned.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 348, paragraph 2 of footnote.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 388.

to accept a divine determinism and ultimately to trace the difference between the saved and the lost sinners to God's deed and therefore to God's decree.<sup>49</sup> Yet Schlink acknowledges that the Confessions stop short of teaching a double predestination.<sup>50</sup>

At a number of places the author is critical of the doctrine as presented by the Formula of Concord. Here is a typical statement:

In making a distinction between foreknowledge and predestination FC XI is no "restatement and explanation" of an article of the Augsburg Confession. The latter not only has no special article on predestination, but it does not contain this distinction either. Beyond this it must be asked whether the doctrine of predestination as presented by the Formula of Concord agrees with the prior Lutheran Confessions or contradicts them. Is not this rejection of a double predestination in the distinction of election and foreknowledge, in spite of all awe in the presence of the mystery, perhaps the beginning of a rational solution of the mystery of divine election, as it later became obvious in Lutheran Orthodoxy?<sup>51</sup>

In view of this Schlink asks, "Can the doctrine of predestination as taught in the Formula of Concord, with its Scripture proof and its basic theological concepts (praedestinato--praescientia), be maintained as the Church's doctrine?"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 389.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 390.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 392. It is true that Schlink does not himself answer the questions which he raises.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 417. Schlink does not answer his question. The propriety of asking it may be debated. Even a negative answer, it may be argued, could be correctly construed.

This brief survey is not intended to note and discuss every instance of Schlink's agreement with, or criticism of, confessional material. It rather aims at indicating the areas and the relative weight and cogency of his critique.

The author's familiarity with the Symbolic Books, a knowledge that betrays years of study, is evident. This familiarity extends to an acquaintance with the significant literature in the field, as the footnotes amply demonstrate. Schlink also manifests a complete grasp of the Lutheran confessional theology. It will be difficult to discover any serious gap in his treatment.

The way in which Schlink manages to weave the Symbolic Books into a grand scheme is particularly ingenious and refreshing. The message is not to live and move. The account of the Holy Trinity is skillfully interwoven with the work of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Christian life in the church is beautifully portrayed as a life between, and intimately associated with, Baptism and the Holy Communion. Finally, the whole of Christian theology, Christian faith and Christian life, and all the great acts of God, are powerfully presented in the perspective of the *pascha*.

As for Schlink's subjecting the Symbols to a searching and critical analysis in the light of the Scriptures, no fault can be found with that. Failure to do so would signify failure to take the Symbols themselves seriously.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In his book Schlink displays a thoroughgoing knowledge of the Lutheran Symbols, an knowledge that betrays years of earnest study. This familiarity extends to an acquaintance with the significant literature in the field, as the footnotes amply demonstrate. Schlink also manifests a comprehensive grasp of the Lutheran confessional theology. It will be difficult to discover any serious gap in his treatment.

The way in which Schlink manages to combine the symbolical doctrine into a dynamic whole is particularly ingenious and refreshing. The theology is made to live and move. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is skillfully interwoven with the works of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification. The Christian life in the church is beautifully portrayed as a life between, and intimately associated with, Baptism and the Holy Communion. Finally, the whole of Christian theology, Christian faith and Christian life, and all the great acts of God, are powerfully presented in the perspective of the parousia.

As for Schlink's subjecting the Symbols to a searching and critical analysis in the light of the Scriptures, no fault can be found with that. Failure to do so would signify failure to take the Symbols themselves seriously.



On every page they direct attention away from themselves and point to the Scriptures, that is to say, to Christ, the Lord and content of the Scriptures. In common with all writings the Symbols place themselves under the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be judged by them. They are not above responsible criticism. Nor may Schlink be faulted per se for raising questions about the adequacy of the scriptural basis offered for some points of doctrine in the Symbols. His objections may not be convincing, but his confessionalism suffers no diminution merely because he registers them. Even the most loyal supporter of the Lutheran creedal corpus will agree that the use or exegesis of individual texts could be improved. Of course, the question of the choice of texts must be distinguished from the correctness or, at least, admissibility of their use in specific contexts. It is possible to express a preference for other texts without overthrowing the general aptness of the theological argument.

As to the specific criticisms of Schlink, it will be well to remember that they fall into several categories. Some deal with hermeneutical and exegetical problems. Historically, the Lutheran Church has declined to establish an "official" exegesis of individual texts. Some of Schlink's judgments are in the area of personal opinion, about which there is room for debate. And some conclusions, it seems to me, are unwarranted and untenable.

In our discussion there has been repeated reference to Schlink's attitude toward the Formula of Concord. Much of the problem appears to stem from his interpretation of the Formula's sub-title according to which that document claims to be a "restatement and explanation of a number of articles of the Augsburg Confession." In Schlink's strict construction this seems to mean that the Formula is out of bounds and, in a sense, meta-Lutheran, whenever it introduces material which is not specifically treated or, at least, foreshadowed in the Augsburg Confession. Schlink speaks of "Verschiebungen" and "Fehlentwickelungen." He sees in the Formula the entrance way to the "scholasticism" of Lutheran Orthodoxy. It is, of course, true that the Formula is quite different in structure, emphasis, and antithesis from all prior Lutheran creeds. It would be strange, if it were not so. All other Lutheran Symbols belong into the same decade and move, to a considerable degree, in the same theological Gedankenwelt despite notable differences. But the Formula appears more than a generation later, and, in a way, stands quite alone. The theological, political, ecclesiastical scene has changed greatly since Augsburg and Smalcald. Luther is gone, Trent has taken place, the Calvinistic-Reformed wing has come of age, decades of intra-Lutheran agony have left their scars. In the theological warfare new battle lines were drawn, new generals needed new tactics, and new

attacks called for new counter measures. Is it, then, quite fair to fault the Formula for being different and to construe that difference as an unwarranted distortion of pristine Lutheranism? It would seem that the "restatement" which the Formula promises ought to be examined in terms of the Reformation perspective of the Gospel and to interpret its "differences" in terms of the application of that central principle in specific directions as the exigencies of the moment required.

On balance, however, the plus far outweighs the minus. The question concerning Schlink's basic Lutheranism, as reflected in his "theology," must be answered affirmatively. He has made a distinguished contribution to the study of Lutheran confessional theology. A careful, discriminating use of this book is bound to lead to a new and increased appreciation of the Lutheran Symbols which everywhere drive men into the Scriptures on their terms, that is to say, with the Gospel of the grace of God in constant focus, eliciting faith and love and ceaseless praise of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and all His wondrous works.

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