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THE PROBLEM OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION
AS UNDERSTOOD IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--
MISSOURI SYNOD

By
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PREFACE

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, of which the writer is a member maintains that ~~its~~ doctrinal standards are the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Inasmuch as other Lutheran bodies lay claim to the same doctrinal basis the historic isolationism of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod requires explanation. The purpose of the present study is to consider the problem of confessional subscription with particular reference to that concept as it is understood within the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Official constitutions and handbooks of the major Lutheran bodies in the United States set forth the standards of doctrine that pertain within those bodies. An effort has been made to shed light on official declarations by a study of documents in which Church leaders and students of the Lutheran Symbols have expressed themselves concerning the place of the Lutheran Confessions in the life of the Lutheran Church.

INTRODUCTION

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The Statement of the Problem

The Lutheran Church is a confessional Church. Luther's heroic confession at Worms was followed by the majestic witness made at the Diet of Augsburg. The reaction of Roman Catholicism to this forthright declaration as well as the need for clarification and additional statements necessitated the formulation of additional creeds or Symbols. These, together with the three ecumenical creeds are usually considered the Confession of the Lutheran Church. The collection is known as the Book of Concord and consists of the three ecumenical creeds, viz., The Apostles', The Nicene, and The Athanasian as well as the six specifically Lutheran Creeds, i.e., The Augsburg Confession, The Apology of The Augsburg Confession, The Smalcald Articles, The Small Catechism of Luther, The Large Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

Even as it was confessional in its formative years so the Lutheran Church emphasizes the Symbols today. Challenged by the ecumenical movement and confronted by changing theological trends it looks to the Scriptures and its Confessions for it is held together neither by a hierarchy nor by government power but by its Confession.¹ Throughout world Lutheranism there is a revival of interest

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¹Martin Gunther, Populare Symbolik (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1896), P.9

in the Confessions which interest is very real also in the United States.

Although, historically and currently, Lutheranism has stressed the importance of the Confessions The Lutheran Church has been and is divided. This lack of unity in spite of Confessional concern is difficult to comprehend until one realizes that there is agreement neither as to which Symbols are binding nor to what extent they must be accepted.

On the following pages an endeavor will be made to consider the normative character of the Confessions and the divergent conceptions of confessional subscription. Although, historically, the creeds mentioned above constitute the Lutheran Confessions there is no agreement as to the number of creeds which must be accepted to mark a church as Lutheran. Therefore the matter of confessional canonicity will be treated.

For practical purposes it can be said that there are three major Lutheran groups in the United States today. They are The Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, and The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. The approaches to the question taken by these church bodies will be considered although the major thrust will be upon the problem of confessional subscription as understood in The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

To put the matter in proper focus the history of Lutheran confessionalism will be surveyed and the varying approaches noted. After the official statements of the major American Lutheran groups have been adduced the differing views of subscription will be considered and compared. The conclusion will evaluate the possible approaches and make suggestions for a rapprochement.

In addition to the constitutions of the three major Lutheran bodies the Confessions themselves, as well as books and periodicals representing various points of view have been consulted. If there seems to be an undue emphasis upon sources emanating from The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod this is because the views of that body constitute the major concern of the present study.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF LUTHERAN CONFESSIONALISM

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It is possible to understand the interest presently being manifested in the Confessions by all Lutheran bodies only as one understands the history of Lutheranism. Originating as it did in a situation which required unequivocal confession before representatives of an authoritarian Church Lutherans were very naturally forced to consider what was definitive for them and to what extent this was the case. The intention of this chapter is to scan some of the resultant problems and the manner in which they were approached.

A. POST-REFORMATION GERMANY

1. Acceptance of Augsburg Confession and Apology

During the birth and early years of Lutheran Confessionalism (1517-30) Luther and his writings (95 Theses) served as unofficial confessions.² It can be said that Dr. Martin Luther himself constituted the great Confession of that period. The earliest books to so serve

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²Erwin L. Lueker (ed.), Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p.630

were the Catechisms of 1529 published for the instruction of congregations.

The Augsburg Confession was adopted by various Leagues and groups in Germany so that by 1530 candidates for theological degrees at Wittenberg University were pledged to it under oath and after 1535 ~~no one was~~ admitted to the ministry in Wittenberg who was not in agreement with the doctrines of the Confession.³ Although the Augsburg Confession is not always named in ordination vows the references to doctrina incorrupta clearly refer to it and the German "Ordinanden Examen" of 1552 expressly name the Augustana which was made the indispensable basis for every religious colloquy.⁴

This response was precisely what the Reformers Chemnitz and Chytraeus, had in mind when in the Preface to the Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord they wrote:

To this Christian Augsburg Confession, so thoroughly grounded in God's Word, we herewith pledge ourselves from our inmost hearts. We abide by its simple, clear and unadulterated meaning as the words convey it, and regard the said Confession as a pure Christian Symbol with which at the present time true Christians ought to be found next to God's Word....We intend also, by the grace of the Almighty, faithfully to abide until our end by this Christian Confession, mentioned several times, as it was delivered in the year 1530

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³M. Reu, The Augsburg Confession (Chicago, Ill. Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), pp.142-144

⁴Ibid., p.140

to the Emperor Charles V and it is our purpose, neither in this nor in any other writing, to recede in the least from that oft-cited Confession nor to propose another, or new Confession.

Again:

We confess also the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession as our symbol for this time (not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been taken from God's Word and is founded firmly and well therein), precisely in the form in which it was committed to writing in the year 1530, and presented to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg.⁵

The Augsburg Confession was endorsed by John, Duke of Saxony, Elector; George, Margrave of Brandenburg; Ernest, Philip, Landgrave of Hesse; John Frederick, Duke of Saxony; Francis, Duke of Luneburg; Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt; the Senate and Magistrate of Nuremberg, and the Senate of Reutlingen as follows:

The above articles we desire to present in accordance with the edict of Your Imperial Majesty in order to exhibit our Confession and let men see the summary of the doctrine of our teachers.

In the preamble to the signatures of 1537 the Lutheran preachers unanimously confess:

We have reread the article of the Confession presented to the Emperor in the Assembly at Augsburg, and by the favor of God all the preachers who have been present in this Assembly at Smalcald harmoniously declare that they believe and teach in their churches according to the articles of the Confession and Apology.

John Brenz, (1499-1570) the precocious follower

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⁵F. Bente (ed.) Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1921) p.8

of Luther from the year 1518, declared that he had read the Apology, etc. and judged "that all these agree with Holy Scripture and with the belief of the true and genuine Catholic Church (haec omnia convenire cum Sacra Scriptura et cum sententiae verae καὶ ὁρίσθαι καθολικαὴν ἐκκλησίαν)."

Another subscription to the Smalcald Articles reads: "I, Conrad Figenbotz, for the glory of God subscribe that I have thus believed and am still preaching and firmly believing as above." Brixtus writes in a similar vein: "I,...subscribe to the Articles of the reverend Father Martin Luther and confess hitherto I have thus believed and taught and by the Spirit of Christ, I shall continue thus to believe and teach."⁶

2. Acceptance of additional Symbols.

In like manner the remaining Lutheran Symbols, viz., the two Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord, were adopted. Other books, the Formula of Concord declares, are accounted useful, "as far as (wofern, quatenus) they are consistent with" the Scriptures and the Symbols. The Symbols, however are accepted "that we may have a unanimously received, definite, common form of doctrine, which all our Evangelical churches together and in common confess, from and according to which, because (cum, weil) it has been derived from God's Word, all

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⁶Ibid.

other writings should be judged and adjusted, as to how far (wiefern, quatenus) they are to be approved and accepted."

After its adoption by the Lutheran electors, princes and estates, the Formula of Concord, and with it the entire Book of Concord, was solemnly subscribed by about eight thousand theologians, pastors, and teachers, the pledge reading:

Since now, in the sight of God and of all Christendom we wish to testify to those now living and those who shall come after us that this declaration herewith presented concerning all the controverted articles aforementioned and explained, and no other is our faith, doctrine, and confession, in which we are also willing, by God's grace to appear with intrepid hearts before the judgement-seat of Jesus Christ, and give an account of it: and that we will neither privately nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it but, by the help of God's grace intend to abide thereby; therefore, after mature deliberation, we have, in God's fear and with the invocation of His name, attached our signatures with our own hands.⁷

In the Preface to the Book of Concord the princes and estates declare that many churches and schools had received the Augsburg Confession "as a symbol of the present time in regard to the chief articles of faith, especially those involved in a controversy with ~~the~~Romanists and various corruptions of the heavenly doctrine." They solemnly protest that it never entered their minds "either to introduce, furnish a cover for, and establish any false doctrine, or in the least even recede from the Confession presented in the year 1530 at Augsburg." They declare:

⁷Ibid.

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This Confession also, by the help of God, we will retain to our last breath, when we shall go forth from this life to the heavenly fatherland, to appear with joyful and undaunted mind and with a pure conscience before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."..."

"Therefore we also have determined not to depart even a finger's breadth from the subjects themselves or from the phrases which are found in them (vel a rebus ipsis vel a phrasibus quae in illa habentur discedere) but, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of pure doctrine."⁸

H. Winckel of Goettingen in December, 1529 drew up a form in which the candidate for ordination declares: "I believe and hold also of the most sacred Sacrament... as one ought to believe concerning it according to the contents of the Bible, and as Doctor Martin Luther writes and confesses concerning it especially in his Confession" (of the Lord's Supper, 1528). The Goettingen Church Order of 1530 however, did not as yet embody a vow of ordination. The first pledges to the Symbols were demanded by the University of Wittenberg in 1533 from candidates for the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1535 this pledge was required also of the candidates for ordination. The oath provided that the candidate must teach in agreement with the Ecumenical Symbols and the Augsburg Confession. Even before 1549 the candidates for philosophical degrees

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⁸Ibid.

were also pledged by oath to the Augsburg Confession.⁹

New members entering the Smalcald League at the Diet of Smalcald in 1535 had to provide for pure teaching of the Augsburg Confession while the Pomeranian Church Order drawn up by Bugenhagen in the same year pledged pastors to the Augsburg Confession and Apology. Capito, Bucer, and all the others who took part in the Wittenberg Concord the following year pledged over their signatures "to believe and to teach in all parts according to the Confession and the Apology." (Corpus Reformatorum, opp. Melanchthonis, 3,76). In 1540 John Wigand promised to abide by the Augsburg Confession and Apology and stated that if he were found to teach otherwise he should be deposed from the ministry. Veit Pflugmacher in 1541 also at Goettingen made essentially the same pledge.¹⁰

Opposition to this consistent binding to the Symbols arose when in 1550 and again in 1552 Andrew Osian-der attacked the oath of confession in vogue at Wittenberg on the ground that it was an involvement in oath-bound duties after the manner of the Papists. He claimed it led students from Scriptures to "Philip's doctrine." Melanchthon himself replied to the charge in 1553 stating that Luther had introduced the oath for the purpose of

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⁹Ibid.
¹⁰Ibid., p.9

maintaining true doctrine since many enthusiasts had been teaching falsely. He took the position that a doctrinal pledge was necessary "in order correctly to acknowledge God and call upon Him to preserve harmony in the Church, and to bridle the audacity of such as invent new doctrine." (Corpus Reformatorum, 12,5.)¹¹

In 1561 an assembly of German estates "again unanimously subscribed this Christian confession, i.e., the Augsburg Confession." At this time it could be said, "This Christian agreement (The Book of Concord) is called and also is the unanimous and concordant confession not only of a few of our theologians but generally of each and every minister and schoolmaster in our lands and territories."¹² It was in this year also that the Reformers said no doctrine was to be taught in their churches which was contrary to the Augsburg Confession and that all controversies were to be settled by the Book of Concord.¹³

3. Normative use and reaction

The normative character of the Confessions was

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¹¹Ibid.

¹²Theodore G. Tappert (ed.) The Book of Concord (Philadelphia, Penna., Muhlenberg Press, 1959) p.5

¹³Ibid., p.12

clearly enunciated in the Preface to the Christian Book of Concord which stated on the one hand that other writings of theologians are not to be rejected if they agree with the Book of Concord¹⁴ and on the other, that amid all the errors there should exist a godly explanation and agreement concerning these controversies from God's Word by which the pure doctrine might be discriminated and separated from the false so that those who refuse to be bound by any confession of the pure doctrine might be revealed.¹⁵

By 1577 it was established that only such were to be admitted to subscription as had read the Formula of Concord and were in complete agreement with its doctrinal contents. In Electoral Saxony, Elector August, learning that the Wittenberg professors were trying to avoid an unqualified subscription said he was determined to keep doctrine pure and "in agreement with the Formula of Concord." Those professors and teachers in Leipzig and Wittenberg who declined to accept the Formula of Concord were dismissed.¹⁶

As the result of an order by Duke Frederick William in February 1592 that there be a visitation of all the churches in Electoral Saxony there were published

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¹⁴Ibid., Bente, p.17
¹⁵Ibid., p.21
¹⁶Ibid., p.248

in 1593 "Visitation Articles in the Entire Electorate of Saxony, together with the Negative and Contrary Doctrines of the Calvinists, and the Form of Subscription, as Presented to be Signed by Both Parties." All teachers and ministers in Electoral Saxony were required to subscribe to the articles as doctrinal norms up to the year 1836 although they are not an integral part of the Book of Concord.¹⁷

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Lutheran Confessions had become merely an empty form due to the influence of Pietism, Rationalism, and sectarianism. However men like August Friedrich Christian Vilmar (1800-1868), the most prominent Hessian theologian of the Nineteenth Century, kept alive a sense of the importance of confessionalism contending that while Scripture must ever be the primary norm the Symbols are valid as secondary norms.¹⁸ Vilmar viewed the Symbols as a witness to the experience of the Catholic Church, a living experience guided by a living, active Holy Spirit. "To adhere to the Symbols" he stated, "is nothing else than to recognize the experience of the Church as such and to live according

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¹⁷Ibid., p.192

¹⁸Edward Frederick Peters, "The Sacraments and Sacramental Actions in The Works of August Friedrich Christian Vilmar" (unpublished S.T.M. Thesis, Concordia Sem. St. Louis, June, 1958,)p.13.

to these experiences and to know them and appropriate them as one's own experiences."¹⁹

As Lutheranism spread through the various countries of Europe and beyond there was, in one form or another, subscription to one or all of the Confessions.

B. THE UNITED STATES

1. Importance of Confessionalism In The New Environment

The Lutheran Confessions included in the Book of Concord have generally occupied a more important place in American than in European church life. In most countries of Europe a close relationship was established between church and state and between Lutheranism and national culture. In America Lutherans were compelled to come to terms with their new environment and to find their unity in a common confession, in "agreement in the teaching of the Gospel." It may be maintained that Lutherans in America have thus come closer to realizing the intention of the reformers than have many of their European brethren. Be that as it may, the Confessions have on the whole been taken more seriously in North America than in Europe, although the recent revival of interest in the Confessions abroad should not be underestimated.²⁰

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¹⁹Ibid. p.14

²⁰Essays on The Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation (Publ. jointly by The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and The National Lutheran Council, N.Y., 1961) p.27

In early American Lutheranism church conferences and synods did not emphasize confessional loyalty and frequently constitutions made no mention of the Confessions. Although Henry Melchior Muehlenberg **sought** to rally Lutherans around the Augsburg Confession "and other Lutheran Symbols", after his death rationalism brought about a trend away from the confessions so that, by the Nineteenth Century, some even favored abandoning the Confessions.²¹

2. Development of Rigid Confessionalism

The Tennessee Synod, organized 1820, was probably the first to insist on strict confessionalism as a reaction to this ultra-liberal attitude. With the greater prominence accorded the Symbols distinctions were made between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines.²²

After 1845 as a result of the new confessional trend in Germany and the newly organized Missouri Synod's *Lutheraner and Lehre u. Wehre* which demanded an unconditional adherence to the Augsburg Confession and, if possible, to all the Symbolical Books there was a serious emphasis on Confessionalism.²³

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²¹Lueker, p. 634

²²Ibid.

²³Rue, p.203

3. Reaction To Rigid Confessionalism

The opposition to this rigid emphasis, sparked by S.S. Schmucker in his "Definite Platform" of 1855, defended an American Lutheranism with a revised Augsburg Confession eliminating certain doctrines which were regarded as non-fundamental by some and rejected by others^{24,25}.

Schmucker was unsuccessful for many synods left the General Synod and in 1867, organized the General Council which pledged all of its members to the whole Book of Concord of 1580.²⁶

4. The Four Divergent Attitudes

Actually there were four sharply divergent attitudes toward the Confessions among American Lutherans in the Nineteenth Century. One of these was stated by J.A. Probst, a pastor near Easton, Pennsylvania when in 1826, he published "Die Wiedervereinigung der Lutheraner u. Reformierten", in which he wrote:

To Christian people in general, dogmas about which the preachers of former days quarreled in their publications no longer matter. Such writings are now of interest only to scholars. All the old confessional writings too...are with time become obsolete and have only historical value. Those times and circumstances are past...consequently we are not bound to

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Ibid.

²⁵Lueker, p.634

²⁶Reu, p.203

them but to the Bible...all enlightened and informed preachers are mutually agreed in this, that much in the hitherto existing confessional writings must be stricken as obsolete and absurd.²⁷

A second attitude grew out of opposition to such men as Probst and out of an effort to stem the tide of rationalism. As aforementioned, Samuel Simon Schmucker professor of theology at Gettysburg, proposed not an abandonment but a revision of the Confessions. He wanted everyone to subscribe the Augsburg Confession and to declare by such subscription before God that it corresponds with the Bible. However, he rejected the "obsolete authority" of all the church's "enormous symbols" except the ecumenical creeds and the Augsburg Confession. He advocated and defended the adoption of "only the twenty-one doctrinal articles" (of the Augsburg Confession), omitting even the condemnatory clauses of these, and also the entire Catalogue of Abuses Corrected. To this he added the statement "No minister, however, considers himself bound to believe every sentiment contained in these twenty-one articles, but only the fundamental doctrines." By fundamental doctrines he evidently meant only those common to all Christendom. The principle on which he based his famous "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession" was this; "To omit the several portions which

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²⁷E.C. Fendt (ed.) What Lutherans are Thinking (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1947) p.345

are rejected by the great mass of our churches in this country, and to add nothing in their stead."²⁸

C.F.W.Walther (Der Lutheraner, XL St. Louis 1854, p.203) set forth a third view which embraced all the confessions in the Book of Concord and received them as literally binding. He required "unconditional subscription" to the confessions and defined this as solemn declaration by the candidate that "he acknowledge the doctrinal contents of the Symbolical books of our church, and these without any exceptions, as in full agreement with the Scriptures, and in conflict with them at no point (whether a primary or a secondary point)...Accordingly, no matter what the location of a teaching may be in the doctrinal system of the symbols, and no matter in what form it may appear...whether it be treated as an ex professo topic or as an incidental remark...the unconditional subscription applies to every one of them: none of them is accepted with reservations by the subscriber,....All the elaborations of doctrine included in the Symbols become, by virtue of the reception of these by the church, parts of the Confessions." (Reported in Synodalbericht der deutschen ev. luth. Synode von Iowa, p.p.8,16.)²⁹

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²⁸Ibid., pp. 345, 346
²⁹Ibid., pp. 347, 348

As is evident from the foregoing the history of American Lutheran attitudes towards the confessions is one of reaction and action. Thus, in protest against what was deemed the extravagant dogmatism of Walther, George M. Grossmann, one of the founders and the first president of the former Iowa Synod, in a fourth position, agreed with an insistence upon the authority of all the Confessions but said that they should be interpreted "historically and practically", rather than "dogmatically". He wrote: "The Church should embrace the Confessions because it acknowledges all the symbolical decisions, in matters which were in dispute before and during the age of the Reformation, as being in accord with the Word of God."

(Georg J. Fritschel, ed., Quellen und Dokumente zur Geschichte und Lehrstellung der ev. luth. Synode von Iowa u.a. Staaten. Chicago, N.D., 223-28. Cf. George J. Fritschel, Aus den Tagen der Väter, Chicago: 1930, p.p.134-42). He stated that in the face of the tendencies exemplified by **Schmucker** and Walther the Iowa Synod professes its adherence to that which, on the basis of the Scriptures and guided by the Confessions, strives toward the development and perfection of the Lutheran church. He felt that Schmucker's position rejected light from the past and that

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Walther's denied there could be new light in later times. He "could not but declare that it is contrary to the whole history of the church to say that the time of symbolical formulation has terminated in the year 1580", that is with the publication of the Book of Concord. (Quellen u. Dokumente, p.225)³⁰

While none of these four views is accepted by any church officially each of these men contributed something. Probst centered attention on the primacy of Scriptures, Schmucker on the relation between the Confessions and later theological apprehension, Walther on the Confessions as official expositions of the Scriptures, and Grossmann on the historical and secondary character of the Confessions.³¹

Thus it is evident that while the founders of American Lutheranism confessed to the whole body of the Symbols³² Lutheranism was soon troubled by questions regarding the binding nature of various confessional statements and the very meaning of subscription itself. At the end of the nineteenth and during the twentieth century many mergers and separations occurred among the various

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³⁰Ibid., pp 348,349

³¹Ibid., pp 354,355

³²Charles P. Krauth, The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology, (Philadelphia, Penna., General Council Publication Board, 1871), p.274

Lutheran bodies and in practically every case there were statements and resolutions as to the meaning of confessional loyalty. Since the purpose of the present study is a consideration of the current scene the official statements of the three major Lutheran bodies in America will be surveyed, the question of confessional subscription will be dealt with, and a comparison will be made between the two basic approaches.

Whatever their differences the Lutherans of America came to grips with the question of confessionalism and their struggles have had a profound influence upon the confessional positions held by Lutherans of our day.

CHAPTER II
OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OF THE MAJOR LUTHERAN BODIES
IN THE UNITED STATES

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OFFICIAL STATEMENTS OF THE MAJOR LUTHERAN BODIES

The official constitutions and handbooks of the major Lutheran bodies in the United States set forth the place which the Confessions occupy in the life and teaching of those groups. The following are statements from such constitutions. Since the primary subject of this study is the stance of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, the liturgical rites of that group in which reference to the Confessions is made are also adduced.

A. THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

1. Constitution

At its constituting convention The Lutheran Church in America adopted a constitution and by-laws which were published together with the amendments to the by-laws adopted at that convention. The pertinent statements follow:

Article II...Confession of Faith

Section 4. This church accepts the Apostle's, the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds as true declarations of the faith of the Church.

Section 5. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism as true witnesses of the Gospel, and acknowledges as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of these Symbols.

Section 6. This church accepts the other symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord as further valid interpretations of the Confession of the Church.

Section 7. This church affirms that the Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures, to which the creeds and confessions bear witness, is the true treasure of the Church, the substance of its proclamation, and the basis of its unity and continuity.

Article III...Membership

Section 3. Congregations and ministers when organized into a synod may through such synod unite with this church upon application for membership, subscription to this constitution including its Confession of Faith, and acceptance by a two-thirds vote of the delegates present and voting at a convention of this church.

Article V...Objects and Powers

Section 1, d. To safeguard the pure preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Sacraments by all its congregations in conformity with its Confession of Faith.

Section 2. To achieve these ends this church shall... decide all questions of doctrine and life on the basis of the Holy Scriptures in accordance with the Confession of Faith of this church.

Article VII...Ministers

Section 3. Each minister shall conform his preaching and teaching to the Confession of Faith of this church and shall lead a life befitting his holy office.

Article XXI...Associated Churches

Section 1. Any Lutheran Church which has been fostered by the Board of World Missions of this church and which concurs in Article I (Confessions of Faith) and Article XXI (Associated Churches) of this constitution, shall be recognized as in filial association with this church upon certification to the secretary of such concurrence and of its desire to assume such relationship.

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2. By-Laws

Section II...Ministers

Item 13 A. Ministers shall be subject to discipline for the following offenses:

- (1) Preaching or teaching doctrines in conflict with the Confession of Faith as set forth in the foregoing constitution.³³

B. THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

In the Handbook of this church body, Edition of 1960 revised to 1963, we find the following:

1. Constitution

Article IV...Confession of Faith

Section 2. As brief and true statements of the Word of God the Church accepts and confesses the following Symbols, subscription to which shall be required of all its members, both congregations and individuals:

- a. The ancient ecumenical Creeds, the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian.
- b. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism.

Section 3. As further elaboration of and in accordance with these Lutheran Symbols, the Church also receives the other documents in the Book of Concord of 1580: the Apology, Luther's Large Catechism, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, and recognizes them as normative for its theology.

Section 4. The American Lutheran Church accepts without reservation the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, not insofar as but because they are the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and summary of the faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

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 33 Constitution and By-Laws Lutheran Church in America including amendements to by-laws Lutheran adopted at constituting convention (Philadelphia, Penna., Muhlenberg Press), 1962

Article XX...Amendments

Section 1. The doctrinal basis and the confessional subscription of The American Lutheran Church, as contained in Article IV of The Constitution, shall be unalterable and no amendment to this Constitution shall **conflict** therewith.³⁴

C. THE LUTHERAN CHURCH--MISSOURI SYNOD

1. Handbook

The Handbook of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, 1963 edition, states the following: (Articles of Incorporation)

Article II...Objects

The objects of this corporation shall be:

- a. To unite in a corporate body the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church who acknowledge and remain true to the Book of Concord of the year of our Lord 1580 as a true exhibition of sound Christian doctrine.

2. Constitution

Article II...Confession

Synod, and every member of Synod, accepts without reservations; All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, to wit: the three Ecumenical Creeds (The Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.

Article VI...Conditions of Membership

Conditions for acquiring and holding membership in

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Handbook of The American Lutheran Church,
 edition of 1960 (Revised to 1963)

Synod are: (1) Acceptance of the confessional basis of Article II.³⁵

Since the primary concern is the concept of confessional subscription within the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, the following rites found in the official Agenda of that church body are adduced with only the pertinent excerpts being recorded.

3. Church Orders

A. The Order For The Ordination of a Minister:

Dost Thou Accept the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures and dost thou reject all the errors which they condemn?

Dost Thou Believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran Church and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, as contained in the Book of Concord are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?

Dost Thou Solemnly Promise that thou wilt perform the duties of thy office in accordance with these Confessions and that all thy teaching and thy administration of the Sacraments shall be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the aforementioned Confessions?³⁶

B. The Order For The Installation of a Minister

Wilt Thou **Preach** and teach the pure Word of God in

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³⁵Handbook of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod
1963

³⁶The Lutheran Agenda (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House) pp 106-107

accordance with the Confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church and adorn the doctrine of our Savior with a godly and holy life?³⁷

C. The Order For The Installation of a Professor

Thou art to instruct in....., and in all thy teaching thou shalt adhere strictly and without wavering to the truth of the Word of God as revealed in the Canonical Books of the Old Testament and the New Testament, as this truth is set forth and expounded in the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord.

Dost Thou Accept the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian...as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and dost thou reject all the errors which they condemn?

Dost Thou Believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran Church, and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, as contained in the Book of Concord...are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?

Dost Thou Solemnly Promise that thou wilt perform the duties of thine office in accordance with these Confessions and that all thy teaching will be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the afore-mentioned Confessions?³⁸

D. The Order For The Ordination and Commissioning of a Missionary

Dost Thou Accept the three Ecumenical Creeds...the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as faithful testimonies to the truth of Holy Scripture, and dost thou reject all the errors which they condemn?

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³⁷Ibid., p. 112

³⁸Ibid., pp. 123-124

Dost Thou Believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran Church, and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, as contained in the Book of Concord, are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?

Dost Thou Solemnly Promise that thou wilt perform the duties of thine office in accordance with these Confessions and that all thy teaching and thy administration of the Sacraments shall be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with the afore-mentioned Confessions?

E. The Order For The Installation of a Teacher

Dost Thou Promise to discharge faithfully all the duties of thine office, in accordance with the Word of God and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, according to the ability which God giveth?³⁹

F. The Order For The Installation of a Church Council

Will You diligently and faithfully perform the duties of your office in conformity with the ordinances of God, the Confessions of our Church, and the constitution of this congregation, according to the ability which God giveth?⁴⁰

G. Formulary For The Induction of The President and Vice Presidents of the Synod

Your acceptance of these offices obligates you to serve Synod, not only in the duties laid down in its constitutions as pertaining to your respective office, but also to promote and preserve among its congregations the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, to maintain to the best of your ability its truly Christian and Lutheran character, and to do your utmost that it will continue uncompromisingly to adhere to God's Word and in no point swerve from the Scriptural position clearly stated and defined in the Confessions of the evangelical Lutheran Church.

Will You Endeavor faithfully to perform all the

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³⁹Ibid., p.132
⁴⁰Ibid., p.142

duties of such offices as laid down in the constitution and by-laws of the...., and in accordance with the doctrines of Holy Writ as set forth in the Confessions of our Church, and to adorn your offices with a godly life?⁴¹

H. The Rite of Confirmation

Do you Hold all the canonical books of the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and the doctrine of the evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Bible, as you have learned to know it from Luther's Small Catechism, to be the true and correct one?⁴²

Although it is actually beyond our scope the emphasis which Lutheranism generally places upon the Confessions is underscored by the doctrinal basis of The Lutheran World Federation which speaks of the "confessions of the Lutheran Church" but calls special attention to the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms. "The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice and sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Catechism a pure exposition of the Word of God."⁴³

From the foregoing it is entirely evident that the three major Lutheran bodies in the United States are confessional in character. It is at the point of defining and clarifying the exact meaning of Lutheran confessionalism that differences become apparent.

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⁴¹Ibid., p.196

⁴²Ibid., p. 24

⁴³Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weissgerber (ed.)The Church and The Confessions (Phila., Pa., Fortress Press 1963) p.4

CHAPTER III
CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

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CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

Having noted the position of **prominence** which is accorded the Confessions in three major Lutheran groups one would suspect that there is complete harmony among them. That this is not the case is due, at least in part, to the fact that there have been differing approaches to the Confessions. While in one sense or another these books have been accorded a position secondary to the Holy Scriptures they have not been accepted in the same manner by all concerned. In this chapter the position of the Confessions as well as the two basic approaches to them will be delineated.

A. NORMA NORMATA

The quotations in the previous chapter were limited to those having to do with the Confessions. Each of the Lutheran groups is very emphatic in its statement regarding the ultimate authority of Holy Scripture. Each recognizes that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are norma normans while the Symbols are norma normata. The Confessions are viewed as authoritative only because of their agreement with the Gospel as witnessed in Holy Scripture.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴Edmund Schlink Theology of the Lutheran Confessions. (Phila., Pa., Muhlenberg Press, 1961) p.25

Lutheran orthodoxy circumvented the Symbols precisely for this reason that they were merely norma normata.⁴⁵

On the other hand C.F.W. Walther seems to have overstated his case when he wrote: "Some make the fallacious claim that there is no better interpretation of the Symbols than that which is according to Scripture. Only Scripture can be interpreted by Scripture. On the other hand a human document must be tested and if necessary, improved, but not interpreted according to Scriptures. A subscription to the Confession is the Church's assurance that its teachers have recognized the interpretation and understanding of Scripture which is embodied in the Symbols as correct and will, therefore, interpret Scripture as the Church interprets it. If the Church therefore would permit its teachers to interpret the Symbols according to the Scriptures, and not the Scriptures according to its Symbols, the subscription would be no guarantee that the respective teacher understands and interprets Scripture as the Church does. In fact, the Church would make the personal conviction of each teacher its Symbol."⁴⁶

The fathers of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, felt that if the Symbolical Books are to mean

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⁴⁵ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, The Significance of The Lutheran Symbols for Today. (The Seminarian, Concordia Seminary of St. Louis, Mo., p.35

⁴⁶ C.F.W. Walther, Why Should Our Pastors Teachers and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church? C.T.M., Vol. XVIII No.4, p.246

anything public teachers must interpret the Sacred Scriptures according to the Symbolical Books and not Vice Versa.⁴⁷ This view regarded the Reformation a finality so far as the Biblical teachings are concerned and the definitions of its doctrines, having been fully elucidated in the Confessions and Symbols of the Lutheran Church, were no longer subjects for an historical analysis or revision.⁴⁸

Sharp issue was taken with this view by The Lutheran Observer which declared that the so-called Symbolists "merely argued in a circle." "Why do you receive the Symbolical Books?" "Because their interpretation of Scripture is correct." "How do you find out what is correct?" "By comparing with the Symbolical Books and interpreting them in accordance."⁴⁹

While also in this area there was considerable disagreement and tension Lutherans of all persuasions have held to the ultimate authority of the Scriptures and have recognized that their Symbols must be normated by Scripture as the great and final norm.

B. QUATENUS

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⁴⁷piepkorn, p.35

⁴⁸Carl Maulshagen, American Lutheranism Surrenders to Forces of Conservatism (Ph. D. Thesis submitted to Graduate Faculty of University of Minnesota, Published by U. of Ga., Div. of Publ., Athens, Ga., Copyright '36, p.106)

⁴⁹Ibid., p.107

1. Various Forms of Conditional Subscription

The question remains: "What is subscription to these normated norms?" Conditional subscription began with the rise of Pietism when Spener very cautiously sowed the seed indicating that if a person could **not bring himself beyond** a quatenus his conscience should be respected although it would be better to have a clear-cut quia subscription. (Cf. Spener's *Aufrichtige Uebereinstimmung mit der A.C.*, p.p.91,92)⁵⁰

By a conditional subscription the subscriber does not pledge himself to accept every doctrine contained in the Symbols as in full agreement with Scripture but reserves the right to distinguish between the doctrines presented.

The conditional subscription took various forms after Spener's initial suggestion. Those with rationalizing tendencies soon contended for the quatenus formula.⁵¹ Reformed and Zwinglians declared themselves ready to subscribe the Augsburg Confession if they would be permitted to interpret it according to Scripture. The Calvinist Peter Martyr said that he would be glad to accept the Augsburg Confession "if it is properly and suitably understood." Even John Calvin subscribed to the Unaltered Augsburg

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⁵⁰C.F.W. Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.252
⁵¹Ibid., p.243

Confession in the sense "in which its author himself interpreted it."⁵² There were those who desired to subscribe to the Symbols of both the Lutheran and Reformed Churches if and in so far as they agreed with each other.⁵³ When the Reformed proposed setting up a Reformed Confession in contrast to the Augsburg Confession Ursinus, author of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote to Beza, "No, it is better to give the Augsburg Confession another form of burial, i.e., by subscribing to it, but secretly, in the calvinistic sense."⁵⁴

2. Difficulties in Conditional Subscription

That the bald quatenus formula created many problems and fails to solve many which confessionism seeks to solve soon became apparent. These difficulties were pointed out early by those who felt a stricter form of subscription was desirable and necessary. It was understood that a wholesale declaration that one accepts the Lutheran Confessions "as far as" they agree with Scripture not only throws suspicion on the Confessions but also opens the door to doctrinal latitudinarianism and insincerity.⁵⁵

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⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p.244

⁵⁴C.F.W.Walther Der Concordienformel Kern und Stern (Concordia Publishing House, St.Louis, Mo., 1887) p. 77

⁵⁵Vergilius Ferm, What Is Lutheranism? (New York N.Y., The MacMillan Co., 1930), p.218

Samuel A. Ort, Professor at Wittenberg Seminary and later President of the General Synod, wrote, "A qualified subscription is the making of a qualified confession and a qualified confession is a breaking away from convictions and development and this is ecclesiastical suicide."⁵⁶

C. QUIA

1. Necessity for Unconditional Subscription

In the forefront of those who pointed up what they believed to be the inadequacy of the quatenus were the so-called symbolists. C.F.W. Walther and the founders of the Missouri Synod were very vocal in contending that a meaningful subscription must be quia. While pointing out that such a subscription was essential they did circumscribe their requirement as they sought to define precisely what in the Confessions must be thus unqualifiedly accepted.

Walther felt that it was fully in accord with the spirit of the Symbols themselves to demand an unconditional subscription from the servants of the Church. He quoted the Conclusion of the Augsburg Confession which reads, "Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak in order that

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⁵⁶ Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies In the Lutheran Confessions (Philadelphia, Penna., 1952) p.9 (Muhlenberg Press)

it might be understood that in doctrine and in ceremonies nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic." (Triglotta p.95) The words of the Preface to the entire Book of Concord of 1580 were also adduced, "Therefore we are also determined not to depart even a finger's breadth either from the subscriptions themselves or from the phrases which are found in them but, the Spirit of the Lord aiding us, to persevere constantly, with the greatest harmony, in this godly agreement, and we intend to examine all controversies according to this true norm and declaration of the pure doctrine." (Triglotta, p.23). In addition the Formula of Concord designates all the previous Lutheran Confessions as "a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine, which all our evangelical churches together and in common confess from and according to which, because (not in so far) it has been derived from God's Word, all other writings should be judged and adjusted as to how far they are to be approved and accepted." (Triglotta, p.855)⁵⁷ These citations indicate that the Symbols themselves require an unconditional acceptance and that any who desire to subscribe conditionally deny what the Symbols themselves demand.

This was the attitude over against subscription

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⁵⁷C.F.W.Walther, "Why Our Pastor's, etc. p.249

also in practice. Duke Henry of Saxony, for example, demanded that the theologians of the University of Leipzig accept the Augsburg Confession and the Apology and teach according to these confessions. When they declared "they would not oppose the Apology and the Confession in so far as they do not contend against the Gospel and the truth (cf. C.G.Hoffmann's Ref. Hist. der Stadt und Universitaet Leipzig, p.409) the duke rejected this as an ambiguous declaration."⁵⁸

The attitude of those who insisted on an unqualified subscription was summed up in Muller's book of 1886 when he wrote, "The Church requires that those who belong to it and teach in it recognize that the Symbols are in harmony with God's Word...The Church forces **no one** to accept the Symbols but requires that those who would be members accept her teachings as their own."⁵⁹

The Saxon emigrants of whom C.F.W.Walther was one included a statement in their Emigration Regulations which, while firm and definite, made no reference to quia or quatenus. It read, "All the undersigned acknowledge with sincerity of heart the pure Lutheran faith as contained in the Word of God, the Old and New Testaments, and set forth and confessed in the symbolical books of the Lutheran

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⁵⁸Ibid., p.251

⁵⁹J.T.Muller, Die Symbolischen Bücher der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche (Gutersloh, Germany C.Bertelsmann, 1886), p.XXVI

Church.⁶⁰

When Walther became the dominant figure among the Saxons he set forth the following reasons for which the Church demands a subscription. First, that the Church might convince itself that its teachers really possess the orthodox understanding of Scripture and the same pure, unadulterated faith as the Church. Secondly, that the Church may bind these teachers with a solemn promise to teach this faith pure and unadulterated or to renounce the office of teaching instead of disturbing the Church with false teaching. He felt that these purposes would be nullified if a conditional subscription were permitted for such permission would be an admission that the Symbols may contain doctrines contrary to Scripture. In his thinking the Church would thus lose all means of convincing itself as to the belief of the teacher and would, in effect, be releasing him from the obligation of teaching the pure Word of God according to the Symbols. He foresaw the situation arising when congregations would no longer be in a position to depose teachers who taught contrary to the Symbols and he feared that a conditional subscription would open the way for renewal of theological controversies which would be and had been settled by the Confessions, thus paving the way for continual discord.⁶¹

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⁶⁰W.H.T.Dau, Ebenezer, (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p.8

⁶¹C.F.W.Walther, "Why Our Pastors, Etc.", p.245

Walther's loyalty to the Confessions and his conviction that they must be accepted unreservedly was set forth by him in a lengthy article in Der Lutheraner. Here he repeated the warning of Saint John against false prophets and contended that, because of them, countless sects had arisen. To distinguish itself from all such sects The Evangelical Lutheran Church has set forth its doctrine in The Book of Concord by which it is set apart from all false teachers and factions.

Walther, fully aware that confessionalism was under attack, nevertheless insisted on rigorous adherence to the Symbols because he said, they were grounded in Holy Scripture. He continues:

"But some men ask, 'Aren't the Symbols of the church written by men who are likely to err? Who can depend on them?' We answer, 'The question is not here whether the authors of the Symbols were men who could err, but rather whether they erred in the teachings which are confessed in these books and have been set down in them.' We admit very readily that they could err, but we deny the thought that they did err in the articles of faith which they set down. Who could deny that the whole mode and manner in which the Biblical doctrines are confessed in our Symbols and are defended in them is a human and therefore not a perfect one? But that the teachings should themselves be human, imperfect and admitting error, that we reject with all earnestness for thereby we would be declaring that God's Word itself is imperfect and full of errors...Does the Bible doctrine become a doctrine of men when those who are giving witness to it are men?

Does the Word of God, when spoken by a mortal sinner become a changeable wisdom of this world? Oh, then the millions of beloved martyrs who were men who could err would not forever have the truth but would have shed their blood for uncertain opinions and

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views under nameless martyrdom. Then also the church of Christ, because it consists of men, could never say, "We have found the truth." Oh, away with such blasphemous skepticism; with such heathenish despair of finding the truth. For this reason the Bible was given to men that they would no longer be without light, without hope, without certainty in this world, but, defying world and hell, could rejoice in firm faith.. 'We have found the truth.' And just the Church itself should be a pillar and a firm foundation of the truth. (I Tim. 3:15). If nowhere else in the world, then at least in the Church, this most precious of all treasures ought to be found....

It is not enough that one say that the writers of the Confessions could err, but it is necessary to prove that they erred and where they erred. How certain we Lutherans can therefore be! For this kind of proof no one has yet offered. They have been able to strike at our Confessions with their reason and with the thoughts of their hearts, but with the Word of God they have never been able to refute them. If one were to ask his reason or his heart regarding many of the doctrines, one could say with Nicodemus, 'How can this be?' But never could one object to them as with the Symbols of other churches with an 'It is written.' It is true that for three hundred years the Lutheran Church has been accused of insisting too rigidly, too firmly on the very letters of Holy Writ in the symbolical writings, but seldom has anyone dared to say...and never has anyone been able to prove...that she has departed from the Scriptures. If then we would fall away from the teachings of the symbolical writings, then we would not be falling away from the word of men but rather from the Word of God. We would not be denying Luther, but Christ. We would not only cease to be true Lutherans but we would cease to have the right to be called Christians.

But many will say, 'Granted that your Confessions agree fully with Holy Scripture. Yet you cannot deny that they are still human confessions. Why would you not rather remain with Scripture alone and go back to it as the pure Word of God?'

To this we would answer as follows: 'It is folly to make a comparison between the Scriptures and the Confessions. The Bible is, so to say, God's con-

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fession to us. The symbolical writings are our confessions to God. The Bible is the question of God to men... 'Do you believe My Word?' The symbolical writings are the answer of men... 'Yes, Lord, we believe what You say.' The Bible is the chest in which all treasures of wisdom and the knowledge of God lie hidden. The symbolical writings are the jewel-room in which the Church has deposited, as in a spiritual arsenal, all of the treasures which in the course of hundreds of years with great effort she has drawn and dug out of the treasury of the Bible. The Bible with its teachings is the handwriting of God concerning our salvation, which Satan always wishes to falsify and declare as unauthentic. The symbolical writings contain the records which have been laid down, from which one can see how the Church has believed these teachings from time to time and has ever held fast to them. The Bible is the revealed Word of God itself. The symbolical writings however, are the correct understanding of the Word of God as God has given it to His church...

Then we should give up these precious Confessions which our fathers have worked out and fought for with such unspeakably difficult sacrifices?... We should throw them away as worthless? Would we dissolutely throw away the fruit of the Reformation, the booty of a thousand year long battle of the whole Christian Church of all times? The spiritual inheritance of our spiritual fathers? Would we actually now faithlessly surrender into the hands of our enemies and sacrifice to the indifference of our times that for which countless martyrs shed their blood and which the Church after enduring the most terrible persecutions has as its trophy of victory?

But men will say, 'Wouldn't it still be good to go back to the Bible? Isn't the Bible enough?' If the doctrines of the symbolical writings were taken from the Bible, will the Bible not be sufficient then to permit any and everyone to find in them everything even without the Symbols?' We answer, 'To hold fast to the true Symbolical writings is actually no different than to go back to the Bible for the symbolical writings are nothing but the Confession of the Church for the Bible. How would a person hope to find the light singlehandedly after which Christendom had sought for many hundreds of years? Will God give us His Holy Spirit in these last times to find that which God has already permitted His Church to

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find, if we do not accept that which has already been found, but desire rather to seek it out ourselves? No, he who will not as a humble student accept the pure doctrine from the Church to which God gave it 1800 years ago and to which He again gloriously revealed it 300 years ago, to him God will not give the light and grace to find it himself.

God dispenses His gifts in different ways. He does not give all to everyone, nor does He give all in every age. He gives to every Christian and to every age their particular measure. Therefore a Christian should use the gifts of others and those in a later generation should use those of a previous one. Yes, it is God's holy, wise and saving will that men who form a great earthly family, their later generations stemming from previous ones, should also be a great spiritual family. These younger members are begotten by the older. Therefore Paul says in the name of all believers, concerning the Church, 'She is the mother of us all....' The Church today should therefore be in a relation of daughter to mother and we should all be children. The faith of the ancient church should be the faith also of the living church. Her doctrine, her teaching, her confession should be our doctrine, teaching and confession. Her victory over the enemies of the truth should be our victory. Her treasures in knowledge should be our possession.

O let us then, dearly beloved, fellow believers, be on guard against the thought of those who refuse to build on the building of the past, but would begin with something new. Let us bear in mind as the Apostle writes to the Ephesians in the fourth chapter that there is one body, one faith, one baptism, so also one true church and one right doctrine which should not now for the first time be found but always was and will continue unchanged until the end of days so that all new doctrines and new churches are false doctrines and false churches. For the church has the promise, 'My words which I have put in thy mouth shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, says the Lord, from henceforth and forever.' (Isaiah 59:21)...Let us hold fast to her confessions as being our own. Thus we place ourselves in membership with all of the children of God the witnesses of the truth. Thus we prove that we

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are of equal birth with our faithful fathers. Thus we join ourselves to the true church of all times and of all places. Thus we take part in the victory of all true contenders of the unadulterated Word of God and are fellow-heirs of the full blessings of the Reformation.....' ⁶²

Thus it is not surprising that in his Pastoral-theologie he contended that candidates for the preaching or teaching offices should pledge only after having persuaded themselves of the truth of the contents in rebus et phrasibus. ⁶³

Against the "insofar as" subscription he cited the famous dictum of Johann-Conrad Dannhauer, (1603-1666) professor at Strassburg, in his Liber conscientiae apertus that one could subscribe to the Quran "insofar as it appears to our private judgement to be consonant with the Sacred Scriptures." ⁶⁴ In short, Walther contends for an unconditional subscription and, in doing so, refers to the whole content of the Symbols allowing the subscriber to make no mental reservation in any point, even if the doctrine is discussed only incidentally in support of another teaching. ⁶⁵

2. How Unconditional Subscription Is Circumscribed

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⁶²Mark J. Steege, Dr. C.F.W. Walther in The Springfielder Vol. XXV No. 3; Autumn, 1961 (Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois), pp 5-10

⁶³Arthur Carl Piepkorn, Walther and The Lutheran Symbols, Concordia Theol. Monthly, Vol. XXXII No.10 May, 1961, p.614

⁶⁴A.C. Piepkorn, Walther and The Luth. Symbols, p; 614

⁶⁵Ibid., p.611 Footnote 1

In a Referat (read at the synodical meeting held at St. Louis in 1858, *Lutheraner*, p. 201.) Walther defines the meaning of an unqualified subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confessions.

Since the Symbols are confessions of the faith or doctrine of the Church (and can be or aim at being nothing else), an unqualified **subscription can be** understood as nothing else than a solemn oathlike promise to the Church by the person who is entering its service that he considers the doctrinal content itself of the Confessions (but this without exception) as differing in no single instance (either in a primary or secondary point) from the Scripture and as being in harmony with it in every point, and for that reason believes in it as in God's Word itself and thus intends to preach that doctrine without falsification. Therefore whatever position a teacher occupies in the doctrinal structure of the Symbols and in whatever form it is presented, be it that of a matter specifically (ex professo) treated or that of an individual statement, the unqualified subscription applies to all of them.⁶⁶

3. Doctrinal Statements Alone are Binding

Again Walther states...

An unconditional subscription is the solemn declaration which the individual who wants to serve the Church makes under oath, (1)..that he accepts the doctrinal content of our Symbolical Books because he recognizes the fact that it is in full agreement with Scripture and does not militate against Scripture at any point, whether of major or minor importance, and (2) that he therefore heartily believes in this divine truth and is determined to preach this doctrine without adulteration....Whatever position the doctrine occupies in the doctrinal content of the Symbols, whatever the form may be in which it occurs, whether the subject be dealt with ex professo or only incident-

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⁶⁶E.L.Lueker, "Walther and The Free Lutheran Conferences 1856-1859, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XV, No. 8, August 1944 (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, p.544

tally, an unconditional subscription refers to the whole content of the Symbols and does not allow the subscriber to make any mental reservation at any point. Nor will he exclude such doctrines because of the fact that they are so used stamps them as irrevocable articles of faith and demands their joyful acceptance by everyone who subscribes to the Symbols.⁶⁷

Walther's view was not new but in harmony with that expressed in the classic German work by Rudelbach in 1841. In that work this pastor and superintendent at Glauchau, Saxony who fought uncompromisingly for sound Lutheranism stated, (1)..The Church binds its teachers to the Confessions so that they will teach the Word of truth according to the Confessions.⁶⁸ Pledging to the Confessions involves pledging to the totality of the Confessions, the faith and teaching, the thetical and antithetical statements. It is a pledge not merely of a negative nature, i.e., not to deny the Symbols but of a positive nature, to press for them vigorously. (2).. The mode of Confessional subscription must (a) express an identification with the revealed truth and therefore must not be quatenus but quia. He argues that as little as the state could afford to have an official who subscribed to the laws "in so far as" so little can the Church

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⁶⁷ C.F.W. Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., pp241-242

⁶⁸ A.G. Rudelbach, Historische-Kritische Einleitung in die Augsburgische Confession (Dresden, Germany., Verlag von Justus Naumann, 1841) p.212

have leaders who do this (b.) The pledge must be of a binding nature. (c.) The pledge, while categorical and binding, is not obligatory on one who later becomes persuaded that the Confessions are not true. Therefore it must be made easy for one to leave the service of the Church.⁶⁹

Nor has Walther's position been without its adherents beyond the church body of which he was the foremost leader. Schmauk and Benze, the two distinguished theologians of the General Council, published a memorable work on the question in 1911 in which they wrote:

He who is a faithful teacher of the Church confesses and teaches the Confession, not because the Confession forces him to do it as a law laid upon him but because he recognizes and acknowledges the Scriptural truth in the Confession. Therefore he also assumes the obligation, not in so far as the symbol agrees with Scripture, but because it does so. Without this conviction he should not desire membership, much less public service in the Church.⁷⁰

Thus, by 1961, the statement could be made:

That which is in use among Lutherans is the type of subscription indicated by the word quia. In this sense, the Confessions are signed because they agree with the Word of God. It is presumed that pastors have examined the Confessions carefully and are prepared to develop the doctrines contained therein as their faith. They make the choice freely but they have come to have convictions and are willing to

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⁶⁹Ibid., p 225

⁷⁰Theodore E. Schmack and C. Theodore Benze, The Confessional Principle and the Confession of The Lutheran Church (Phila., Penn. General Council Publication House, 1911), p.19

profess them.

As J.L.Neve writes, 'The subscription of a servant of the church must be a real confession, not anything evasive but positive.' Introduction to the Symbolical Books of The Lutheran Church (2nd ed., Columbus Lutheran Book Concern, 1920., p.32).⁷¹

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, has consistently required such an unequivocal subscription to the Symbolical Books. It has done so in the conviction that anything less would lead to unwarranted licenses in its preaching and teaching ministries and, ultimately, to the situation wherein the convictions of each theologian, minister, or teacher would become a symbol in itself.

4. Contents of Confessions that Need Not Be Accepted

This position of Missouri has not been without its difficulties as the proponents of the Quatenus view were quick to indicate . The Confessions contain factual errors due to the authors' limited knowledge of historical and scientific matters. In the nature of the case the Confessions contain exegetical opinions some of which cannot be shared by those who have newer and more complete insights. The confessors made certain historical

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⁷¹Erwin L. Lueker, Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements, Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol XXXII, No. 5, May 1961, p.9

judgments which involved not merely an awareness of Scriptural truth but required the use of human reason in determining that to which Scriptural statements applied. Succeeding generations of Lutherans were not always ready to accept the **judgment** of the confessors. Hence it became imperative that there be definition as to the matter involved in a subscription and that which is not involved.

Having insisted on an unqualified subscription as the only approach having any validity whatsoever the proponents of this view were now forced to define rather precisely that which must be accepted in a quia subscription and that which, although contained in the Confessions, is not binding.

The line was drawn at the point of dogma. For this the Saxons had good precedent in the position of J.T.Muller, the German theologian who held that the Church must insist that in everything which pertains to dogma the Confessions be accepted by her teachers not quatenus but quia.⁷²

Walther held that because the doctrinal articles contained in the Confessions are eternal truths there was no choice but to accept them without reservation or qualification.⁷³

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⁷²J.T.Muller, p.XXX

⁷³C.F.Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.248

This, in essence, has been the attitude within The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Rudelbach had pointed out already in 1841 that the contents of the Confessions varied in degrees of importance. He held that all articles of faith which were thus designated and all doctrinal statements through which this faith is expressed are essential.⁷⁴ He labeled less essential all that is advanced as proof as well as the methods by which opponents are answered.⁷⁵ Passing explanations and remarks he considered less essential and practically of no consequence. He dismissed as non-essential all statements of a historical or literary nature.⁷⁶

The distinction between "articles of faith" by which the subscriber is bound and ordinary factual statements was prominently elaborated by C.F.Schaeffer, theologian of the General Synod, in an article in the Evangelical Review in 1850. Some years later in trying to define the meaning of subscription Walther held that inasmuch as a confession is a statement of belief the subscriber binds himself to all the doctrines therein contained but not to historical references, matters belonging to human sciences, logic, method of presentation, adia-

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⁷⁴A.G. Rudelbach, p.165

⁷⁵Ibid.; p.167

⁷⁶Ibid., p.169

phora, etc. (Luth. XIV, 201ff.)⁷⁷

He made it clear that since the symbols are confessions of faith or doctrine the Church cannot require a subscription to those matters which do not belong to doctrine. They cannot be made the norm for German or Latin orthography or for perfect linguistic style or for other things which belong to the sphere of human knowledge. Nor is the servant of the Church bound by that which falls within the sphere of criticism or of history or exegesis.⁷⁸ As Allbeck indicated this form of subscription (quia) does not mean that the Church or the subscriber is bound to every aspect of the theological proof. Not every word of patristic quotations is guaranteed by The Lutheran Church.⁷⁹

Thus Walther held that although it is true that subscription to a doctrinal confession manifestly concerns only essentials in a doctrinal confession everything that belongs to the doctrinal content is essential since the essence of a doctrinal confession is doctrine.⁸⁰ Conceding that Symbols must be understood in the historical setting which sheds the necessary background on "the manner in which men understood and interpreted Scripture at the time when certain articles were in controversy in the Church and the contrary doctrines were rejected and con-

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⁷⁷Erwin L. Lueker, Lutheran Cyclopedia, p.634

⁷⁸C.F.Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.242

⁷⁹Willard Dow Allbeck, Studies in The Lutheran Confessions, p.10

⁸⁰C.F.waltner, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.247

demned" he emphasized that the doctrinal articles contained in the Symbols are eternal truths.⁸¹

Unconditional subscription, Walther felt, does not at all imply that the form, method, and process of proof used in the Symbols is to be followed rather than any other. In this connection he quotes John Conrad Dan-nhauer who wrote: "Although the Symbols do not bind us to retain all the circumstances, terms, arguments, and illustrations that have been used the doctrinal content or the substance of the doctrine must be retained just as it is recorded in Scripture."⁸² This was in keeping with the approach of those German theologians who held to the view that subscription must be without qualifica-tion but maintained that while there are historical, linguistic and other errors in formulation in the Con-fessions this is irrelevant inasmuch as doctrine alone was the object of subscription.⁸³

The present chairman of the Department of Sys-tematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis of which Dr. Walther was president wrote in 1954 as follows:

The Book of Concord is not infallible. Its authors were not twentieth century nuclear physicists and they lacked the prescience that might have made it possi-ble for them to foresee the shape of things to come. The physical world of the Book of Concord is a simple

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⁸¹Ibid., p.248

⁸²C.F.Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.242

⁸³J.T.Muller, p.XXVII

one by modern standards. It has four elements: Earth, fire, water, and air. It is from this physical world that it draws its illustrations and analogies. For people who must have things precisely right and who read in last week's newspaper that the number of discovered chemical elements had just topped one hundred, such analogies are likely to be something less than wholly convincing.

When we look at the arguments it uses, we find that occasionally they are **distinctly** ad hominem, as when the Augustana argues that human nature is becoming weaker as the world grows old and that priests must be allowed to marry or there will be a clergy shortage.

The Book of Concord sometimes falls short of modern standards of bibliographical accuracy. Luther, for instance on occasion quoted his sources from memory. Thus one reference to a passage in the Sacred Scriptures in the Smalcald Articles is two chapters wide of the mark. There are conflate combinations of quotations that it is almost impossible to disentangle. At least one quotation...St. Augustin's reference to the accession of the Word to the element...is repeated.

There is a considerable amount of second-hand quotation like Melanchthon's citations from Archbishop Theophylact of Bulgaria, which he seems to have introduced into the first edition of the Apology in part at least to give him an opportunity to talk back to Oecolampadius and which he eliminated from the next edition.

Modern patristic research has shown that many of the ascriptions of quotations are inaccurate. St. Augustine did not write the Hypomnesticon. St. Ambrose did not write De Vocatione gentium. It was a Pseudo Thomas, not St. Thomas Aquinas, who wrote De venerabili sacramento altaris, as it was a Pseudo Cyprian who wrote De Coena Domini.

The Formula of Concord raises no objection to the principle that magnetism can be hindered by rubbing the magnet with garlic juice.

Obviously this thoroughly normal fallibility actually has nothing to say about the applicability of the theological and religious and spiritual and moral

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principles which the Book of Concord enunciates.⁸⁴

Dr. Theodore Tappert, the great confessional authority in The Lutheran Church In America concurs with the foregoing when he points out that in addition to lapses of seemliness or memory and shortcomings of an historical, philological, and scientific nature the confessions contain dubious statements of a third kind which are, directly or indirectly, doctrinal in application. The Augsburg Confession in its opposition to the Anabaptists declares flatly without any qualifying "ordinarily" that baptism is "necessary to salvation." With an apparently unconditional endorsement of Aristototele's Ethics, the Apology affirms that "Aristotle wrote concerning civil morals so learnedly that nothing further concerning this need be demanded." The Latin text of the Smalcald Articles refers to the "pure, holy, and ever virgin Mary." Melancthon's **treatise** "Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope" teaches a conception of the relation between church and state which has no adherents among Lutherans in America and this is supported by Luther in his Preface to the Small Catechism.⁸⁵

It must be entirely evident that an unqualified

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⁸⁴A. C. Piepkorn, The Significance of The Lutheran Symbols for Today, pp.32,33

⁸⁵E.C.Fendt (ed.) What Lutherans Are Thinking, pp. 358,358

subscription to the Confessions cannot embrace the entire content of the Symbols but that upon the demand for such a subscription there must follow immediately a very careful delineation of the contents concerning which the subscriber speaks his "yea."

While all interested parties are agreed that the Confessions are norma normata they are not agreed concerning the sense in which subscriptions are to be made. The proponents of the conditional subscription are faced with the fact that theirs is a relatively meaningless pledge. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and those who share the view that subscription must be unconditional are confronted by the apparently impossible task of defining "doctrinal content."

From the foregoing it can be seen that all parties concerned with retaining a valid position have had to come to grips with very real and practical problems. The difficulty of obtaining a meaningful subscription in the face of the inequality of confessional content remains.

CHAPTER IV
QUATENUS AND QUIA COMPARED

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Inasmuch as conscientious Lutheran theologians who are seriously concerned about the place of the Confessions in the life of the Church do not agree in so far as the mode of subscription is concerned a comparison between the two basic views is attempted on the following pages. The hope is that an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of each may indicate the direction to be taken by a confessionalism that will be both valid and meaningful for this age.

A. AREAS OF AGREEMENT

1. Importance of Confessions

As Lutherans have re-evaluated their varying stances over against the confessions it has become apparent that **none is** without its difficulties. It is a fact that there are large areas of agreement but also real areas of tension regarding the proper approach to the matter of subscription.

That the proponents of both views have a lot in common is evidenced by the fact that they hold the Confessions in such high esteem that they are vitally concerned about a proper approach to those historic

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documents. Both are prepared, when pressed, to acknowledge as Lutheran individuals as well as church bodies who do not subscribe to all six of the particular creeds so long as none are expressly rejected. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both understand there is much in the content of the Symbolical Books which no educated Christian of this century can accept.

B. AREAS OF TENSION

1. Ideal Canon of Symbols

As one surveys the difference in approaches it becomes clear that those who insist upon an unqualified subscription (particularly The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod), while acknowledging the Lutheranism of any who accept the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism consider subscription to all of the Lutheran Confessions the ideal toward which the Church should strive. The advocates of a quatenus approach make such of those contents which are manifestly unacceptable to the modern Christian mind and stress the historical interpretation of the symbolical books. They contend that insistence upon subscription without qualification logically leads to a "symbolatry" which is not far removed from the type of authoritarianism characteristic of the Church of Rome.

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, by contrast, has historically looked upon anything less than an un-

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qualified subscription as the equivalent of no subscription. This contention has been undergirded by the logic which holds that a quatenus loyalty can be given to any writing whatsoever and that if nothing further is required of the subscriber each teacher and preacher becomes a norm.

The mutually acknowledged factor of unacceptable material is dealt with on the one hand by the quatenus formula and, on the other, by the statement that the quia refers only to the doctrinal content of the confessions.

2. Definition of Doctrinal Content

In its desire to avoid the Scylla of a meaningless subscription The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has been led to the Charybdis of endeavoring to define just what the doctrinal contents are. To date the question "What is a doctrine?" has not been answered adequately by that synod. Thus there are some who stress the statement of the Confessions that the papacy is the Antichrist⁸⁵ and hold to this as a doctrine while others just as confidently dismiss the statement as an historical judgment not binding upon subscribers. On the one hand it is held that the semper virgo is a doctrine and on the other this

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⁸⁶ Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of The Missouri Synod, p.8 (Contained in Reports and Memorials 45th Regular Conv. of The Luth. Ch.--Missouri Synod, Cleveland, Ohio, June 20-30, 1962)

is dismissed as a pious opinion of the writers. Some hold that the subscriber must accept the view that prayers for the dead are useful⁸⁷ while others reject this as heretical.

Although logic appears to be on the side of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod in its effort to make subscriptions meaningful by recourse to the quia formula the impossibility of achieving consensus in the matter of "doctrinal content" appears to indicate that neither the Quia nor Quatenus is completely satisfactory.

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⁸⁷Theodore G. Tappert (ed.) The Book of Concord
Apology, Art. XXIV (Philadelphia, Pa, Muhlenberg Press,
1959

CONCLUSION

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While all concerned hold the Confessions in high regard and insist upon subscription to them neither of the traditional approaches is completely satisfactory and within the groups themselves there are serious differences revolving around the implications of subscription. No doubt this tension will continue for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the suggestions which follow are meant to indicate a modification of the attitude of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which could possibly make subscription to the Confessions more realistic and meaningful within that body and prove helpful toward bridging the gap between its position and that of other Lutherans.

A. THE CANON

1. Basic Symbols

It is an interesting fact of Church history and of the contemporary religious scene that Lutherans are divided as to the books which are binding. Thanks to the Reformation and its Confessions the old creeds have found a permanent place in the dogma of the evangelical churches and, since Melanchthon, have gained and retained decisive influence.⁸⁸

It is helpful to note the attitude of the
⁸⁸Werner Elert; The Structure of Lutheranism
 (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publ. House, 1962), p.207

Lutheran Reformers who obeyed Scripture but accepted
the old creeds.⁸⁹....

The highest rule and norm in the life of the Church, in its teaching and preaching order, is Holy Scripture. In order to acclaim and maintain the substantial identity of its message with the apostolic Gospel, the Lutheran Church bound itself by Confessions.

In a primary position are the symbols of the ancient Church. Recognition of these creeds implies not only obligation to the faith of the fathers but also agreement with the catholic and apostolic Church.

The fundamental Confessions of the Lutheran Church as such is the Augsburg Confession (Confessio Augustana or CA). It represents the witness made in 1530 by the evangelical estates to the true apostolic doctrine of the catholic church, in agreement with the Scriptures and the Symbols of the ancient church. The Augsburg Confession attained the rank of a confessional symbol only upon its adoption by the evangelical princes in 1539 and its elevation to the position of doctrinal basis for the constitution of the territorial churches. The adoption of the Augsburg Confession was intended to demonstrate not only the agreement of the evangelical doctrine with the faith of the ancient church, but also the legitimacy of the Reformation in accord with the right of confession hitherto in force. This adoption was therefore not only an ecclesiastical and theological act, but also a legal act. As a norm for doctrine the Augsburg Confession is found first in Hesse, 1532, and from then on in many other territorial churches.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession was written to interpret the Augsburg Confession and to defend it against the refutation (confutatio) of the Roman theologians at the Diet of Augsburg (1530). Together with the Augsburg Confession it was adopted by the princes as a doctrinal norm in 1537 and thence found its way into the church constitutions. The Smalcald Articles of 1537 elaborated more sharply the assertions of the Augsburg Confession in anticipation of the church council called by Pope Paul III. Essentially, however, these articles were designed to be

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⁸⁹Ibid., p.208

a polemical discussion with the papal church, something **deliberately** avoided in the Augsburg Confession by Melancthon, the framer of that document. They were indeed endorsed by the theologians in 1537, but but these were not adopted as a doctrinal norm by the princes...they did not become confessionally basic until they found their way into church constitutions and into large doctrinal works (corpora doctrinae). The Formula of Concord (first circulated 1576-77 is also collaterally related to the Augsburg Confession, its purpose was to settle authoritatively controversial questions which had arisen with Lutheranism and, above all, to demarcate Lutheranism more sharply from Calvinism. In doing this, it stands as an interpretation of the pertinent articles of the Augsburg Confession.

Luther's Catechism were originally not intended to be confessional symbols and doctrinal norms, but since they were greatly beloved and widely circulated, they in time became part of the doctrinal basis of the territorial churches and thus were given the rank of confessional symbols.

In 1580 all these writings were gathered in the Book of Concord, the most important Corpus doctrinae still widely in force today, and accepted by many territorial churches. The Book of Concord was intended to be the confessional basis for union within Lutheranism.⁹⁰

Professor Theodore Tappert, one of the great contemporary authorities on the Lutheran Confessions, very pertinently calls attention to the fact that historically there has been no agreement as to the canon of the Lutheran Symbols....

We need to remind ourselves at the outset that Lutheran Churches have not always included the same documents in their collections of confessions. This was not only true in the sixteenth century, it has remained true to our own time. It is common know-

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⁹⁰ Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weissgerber (ed.), The Church and The Confessions, p.112

ledge that in the churches of Norway and Denmark as well as in their North American daughter churches it has been customary to limit subscription to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism. It is not so commonly known that in some other Lutheran Churches subscription has included such additional items as Melanchthon's Loci Communes (Pomerania), Luther's Great Confession Concerning the Holy Supper (Osnabruck), the Saxon Visitation Articles (Saxony), Urbanus Rhegius' booklet, "How One Should Speak Circumspectly about the Chief Articles of Christian Doctrine" (Lauenburg), the Te Deum in addition to the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds while others have singled out only the Apostles' Creed. Historical circumstances involving political and geographical as well as ecclesiastical considerations, account for these differences. Of far more importance is the universal acknowledgement of the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism and the actual if not explicit use of the Apology, Smalcald Articles, Large Catechism, and Formula of Concord in interpreting the Augsburg Confession and Small Catechism. In so far as this is so, there is much more actual agreement as to confessional standards in world Lutheranism than in the diversity of Corpus doctrinae might at first suggest.⁹¹

It has already been stated that unlike some other religious denominations in the United States the Lutheran Church has never been pledged to any particular form of organization but has emphasized the importance of doctrinal purity and conformity with the fundamental Confessions of the church. However, even in this respect a divergence has prevailed with respect to the Symbols, except regarding the Augsburg Confession which all have accepted in whole or in part with slight modifications.⁹²

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⁹¹Essays On The Lutheran Confessions Basic To Lutheran Cooperation, p.27

⁹²Carl Mauesbagen, American Lutheranism Surrenders To Forces of Conservatism, p.6

Strangely, while C.F.W. Walther stood out as one of the most determined spokesmen for an unequivocal subscription to the Confessions it is somewhat difficult to define precisely the scope of "the symbolical books" as he envisioned it.⁹³ In the formative days of what was later to be The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, he was the proponent of the view which made it incumbent upon every congregation to declare itself for or against Missouri by making its membership in that body dependent upon acceptance of an unalterable article in the constitution which demanded subscription to the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Large Catechism of Luther, the Small Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord.⁹⁴ In his own Trinity Congregation in Saint Louis, Missouri he included even the Saxon Visitation Articles among the documents which were binding.⁹⁵

2. Other Symbols Not To Be Denied

It was this same Walther, interestingly, who acknowledged that any and every church which adheres to

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⁹³ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, Walther and The Lutheran Symbols, p. 615

⁹⁴ Carl Mauelshagen, p. 118

⁹⁵ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, Ibid., p. 615

the teachings in the Lutheran Confessions is a Lutheran Church...

All who believe and live according to the doctrine of the (Augsburg) Confession and the Apology are by virtue of this faith and doctrine our brethren, and their perils concern us as much as our own. Neither dare we forsake them, for they are members of the true Church no matter when they join us, whether they do it secretly or openly or whether they live among us or in foreign parts...The mere official declaration of a body that it acknowledges the Lutheran Confession does not, **of course**, make it Lutheran, its status is determined by what is publicly witnessed, preached and practised in its midst.⁹⁶

Just as, **at the time of the departure from** Augsburg, Luther expressed the view that all who held the Augsburg Confession, either openly or secretly, must be regarded as brothers,⁹⁷ so Walther held that anyone who could accept the Augsburg Confession could accept the other Confessions since their doctrines were implicit in the Augsburg Confession. Thus, in his view, those like the Swedish and Danish state churches which never accepted the Formula of Concord formally were nevertheless to be treated as Lutheran inasmuch as they did accept the Augsburg Confession.⁹⁸ No doubt it is for this reason also that Missouri has never insisted upon formal acceptance of the entire Book of Concord as a prerequisite for inter-

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⁹⁶Theodore Engelder (ed.) Walther and The Church (St. Louis, Mo., Concordia Publishing House, 1938), p.88

⁹⁷Erwin L. Lueker (ed.) Lutheran Cyclopedia, P. 634

⁹⁸Erwin L. Lueker, Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements, p.282

communion and fellowship.⁹⁹

What makes a Church Lutheran is its honest commitment to a significant portion of the Lutheran Symbols, that is, at the least, the Catholic Creeds, the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism.¹⁰⁰ So long as there is no explicit denial of the doctrines contained in the other Symbols such a basic canon should suffice. As a matter of fact it is probably less than realistic to suppose that any significant portion of even the professional teachers of the Church will ever be conversant to a meaningful degree with the other confessions.

Actually the confessional unity of the Lutheran Churches in the world consists in (1), a recognition of the Holy Scriptures as the highest rule and norm for all Christian teaching and life, (2), an expression of agreement with the truly catholic and apostolic church by recognition of the Symbols of the ancient church, and (3) recognition of the Augsburg Confession as the fundamental confession of the Lutheran Reformation and as a binding doctrinal norm. Thus "The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and the infallible norm of all church doctrine and practice and sees in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the Unaltered Augsburg

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⁹⁹ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, The Significance of The Lutheran Symbols for Today., p.41

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.39

Confession and Luther's Catechism a pure exposition of the Word of God."¹⁰¹

This is a realistic approach since the average lay person is seldom knowledgeable beyond the Small Catechism and the majority of the clergy, while making much of the Confessions in theory, usually are not too well informed beyond the Catechism and the Augsburg Confession.

B. THE MEANING OF SUBSCRIPTION

1. Clearly Stated Doctrines

Subscription has to do only with clearly-stated doctrinal matters. This is a statement which find ready acceptance among all Lutherans. The difficulty arises when the effort is made to define "clearly-stated doctrinal matters."¹⁰² It is precisely in this area that Lutherans who are concerned about greater unity of their churches will have to reexamine their own attitudes and will be forced to confer with those in other bodies in which the Confessions are considered normative. Since nobody can honestly accept as true every **jot and tittle of the Book of Concord** each generation must clarify anew what is "the confession within the Confessions."¹⁰³

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¹⁰¹Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weissgerber, The Church and The Confessions, p.4

¹⁰²Ibid., p.183

¹⁰³Essays on The Lutheran Confessions Basic To Lutheran Cooperation, p.32

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, for example will find it necessary to take a hard look at its oft-repeated statement that the Roman Papacy is the Anti-Christ and ask itself why this particular historical judgment has assumed the status of a doctrine while a multitude of other judgments of an historical nature have consistently been dismissed as not binding.

2. Not Historical or exegetical matter

The controversies among Lutherans have brought about unanimity of opinion regarding the place of historical, scientific, and exegetical statements. No responsible teachers of the church hold that these are binding. It is essential that not merely theologians but all interested parties acknowledge that the acceptance or rejection of such opinions, although found in the Symbols, is adiaphoristic in character.

3. Quia

a. It Alone Is Meaningful

Within the limitations set forth above the insistence of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod and of other conservative Lutheran groups and individuals would appear to be the only valid and meaningful approach. To require a less unequivocal statement of loyalty is tantamount to no declaration of faithfulness whatsoever and

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makes of the individual the judge of that which constitutes Lutheranism.

More important than any external and formal oath or promise is that the subscriber freely and willingly makes his pledge as a statement of a faith which he himself honestly holds, in other words loyalty to the Confessions must be not merely de jure but de facto. Where there is such an inner agreement with the contents of the Confessions they will, as A.T.Kantonen puts it, be regarded not as shackles that bind the subscriber but as heartbeats of the faith of the fathers. They will be viewed as coalbeds in which the light and energy of vital Christian witness have been preserved enabling the subscriber to release this energy for his own use so that his faith may be strong and positive.¹⁰⁴

According to the Australian Lutheran of October, 1952 the unity committees of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia and The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia achieved agreement with respect to the Lutheran Confessions. While failing to come to grips with the knotty problem of definition of "doctrinal content" the theses appear to avoid the extremes of symbolatry and of a lax approach to the Symbols. They follow herewith as a statement which might serve as a clear and

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¹⁰⁴Vilmos Vajta (ed.) The Unity of The Church (Rock Island, Illinois Augustana Book Concern, 1957), p.45

comprehensive guide for those who endeavor to clarify the meaning of confessional subscription.

1. With the fathers of the Lutheran Church in Australia who came to this country as confessors of the Biblical truth expressed in the Lutheran Confessions, we solemnly reaffirm as our own confession the Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as they are contained in the Book of Concord.
2. With the Book of Concord we teach that creeds and confessions are necessary for the Church as a means to...
 - a. Summarize the true doctrine of the Word of God.
 - b. Express the common consent not only with the believers of today, but also with the true church of all ages from the time of the Apostles and the ancient Creeds to the end of the world.
 - c. Reject error and heresy and thereby fight the devil, who tries to destroy the Gospel.
 - d. Confess the truth before the world.
 - e. Confess the faith "in the sight of God" and in view of the last judgement.
3. With the Book of Concord we make the fundamental distinction between the Scriptures and the Confessions. Holy Scripture is God's Word, the confession the human answer to that Word. The Scriptures are given by inspiration of God and are therefore the only source of Christian doctrine, "the only rule and standard according to which at once all dogmas and teachers should be esteemed and judged," while the Confessions, like all human writings, even if written with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, "should be altogether subordinated to them". They "are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only a testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living, and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned." Thus all doctrines of the Confessions have to be examined again and again in the light of Holy Scripture.
4. With the Formula of Concord and the Lutheran Church of all times we accept the Lutheran Confessions, including the three "Ecumenical Creeds," not only as highly important historical documents, or as necessary and correct doctrinal decisions of the church in times past, but as dogmatic statements which bind the church today on account of their pure doctrine (Scriptural). While their authority is a secondary

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one (norma normata), derived from the authority of Holy Scripture (norma normans), they nevertheless possess real authority as a correct interpretation of Scripture. As the confessors of the Formula of Concord accepted the Unaltered Augsburg Confession "not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been derived from God's Word (quia e Verbo Domini est desumpta) and is founded well and firm therein" so we accept the Lutheran Confessions as a summary and as a correct exposition of the Word of God. We hold that the acceptance of and the subscription to the Confessions in the Lutheran Church must always be made quia "because", not quatenus "as far as", the Confessions are in agreement with the Word of God.

5. In accepting the Lutheran Confessions, we accept all doctrines taught therein on the basis of God's Word, both in thesis and antithesis, whether they are solemnly proclaimed as dogma of the church (e.g. by the formula "we believe, teach, and confess") or not. As the confessors of the Formula of Concord saw in the various confessions, which they accepted, the summary of the Christian doctrine, so we find in the various writings and articles of the Book of Concord the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, that is, the doctrine of the Gospel in its various aspects. Just as Jesus Christ is the center and content of Holy Scripture, so the article on justification by faith in Jesus Christ is the soul of the Confessions. Every single article points to the "articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae" and is therefore a witness to the Christ of the Bible.
6. We do not regard as belonging to the doctrinal content of the Confessions matters that lie on the plane of human knowledge, learning, science, and philosophy; these do not touch the doctrine of Holy Writ. Nor is the confessional obligation violated when doubt is expressed whether, in the case of some Scripture passage adduced as a proof-text in support of a doctrine, the intended meaning has been adequately grasped and applied. To regard the Confessions as a correct interpretation of Holy Scripture does not imply that in every case the understanding of a Scripture passage is to be recognized as sufficient and final.
7. In interpreting the Confessions we regard as the standard text in each case the original and official text, i.e., in the case of the Augsburg Confession the German and Latin text, the Latin text of the Apology and the

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Tractatus, and the German text of all other writings. The early translations included in the Book of Concord are to be valued as important commentaries, but otherwise they have no authority.

8. Together with the positive doctrine of the Confessions we accept the "condemnations," i.e., censures and rejections of errors and heresies. According to the authoritative explanation of the Book of Concord the condemnations do not mean that true believers and therefore the Church of Jesus Christ are found only in the Lutheran Church. They mean that false doctrine is rejected and that no church fellowship can exist with those who consciously and persistently hold such doctrines. Among these doctrines the denial of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar is especially mentioned. Loyalty to the Lutheran Confessions includes the practical application of these principles in the life of the Church.
9. Although we accept the Book of Concord as the Confession of the Lutheran Church, we recognize that there are Lutheran Christians or Churches who have not officially accepted the whole Book of Concord. Churches which have never accepted the Formula of Concord are to be regarded as Lutheran as long as they faithfully subscribe to and uphold the other Lutheran Confessions, for it is possible to be a Lutheran without having accepted the Formula of Concord, but not if rejecting it. We recognize that for laymen, especially for simple Christians and children, the Small Catechism is the simplest summary of the Lutheran faith. Besides the Catechism, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, whose main articles can be understood by every adult Christian, must be the confessional basis of every congregation which claims to be Lutheran. The Young Churches on the mission fields may find it necessary to make a new formulation of the Lutheran doctrine. This is possible, provided the doctrine remains the doctrine of the Confessions of the sixteenth century, because they need the doctrine contained in the Confessions, especially in the Catechism and in the main articles of the Augsburg Confession, in whatever form this doctrine may be presented. The Lutheran Church in future may be obliged to formulate new confessional statements on subjects or about questions which may arise in the course of history. Such new confessions **will be Lutheran only if they reaffirm and presuppose** the doctrine contained in the Book of Concord, just as the Augsburg Confession confirmed the Ecumenical

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Creeds, and the Formula of Concord reaffirmed the older Lutheran Confessions.

10. In accepting the Confessions as our confession, i.e., as the expression of what "we believe, teach, and confess" today, we recognize the duty of the Church, its pastors and congregations, constantly to use the Confessions as a guide into the riches of Holy Scriptures and to be a truly confessing Church, as our Lord wants us to be. For sin and error will continue, and with them will continue the obligation of the Church to confess in living faith Christ and all His Word in the face of opposing error, until He Himself will confess before His Father in heaven those who have confessed Him on earth.¹⁰⁵

Although the many citations adduced as proofs by the Australian committees have not been included in statements themselves, particularly the fifth which makes the doctrine of justification the point of departure, should be of help in the quest for a reasonable approach to the symbols. ✓

There can be no doubt that C.F.W. Walther must be credited with having made a very real contribution toward elevating the Symbols to the high position which they enjoy in the Lutheran bodies of America today. While his logic is compelling he appears at times to contradict himself. Certainly contemporary theologians would state the case differently than did this leading spirit of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. He conceded that it was theoretically possible that an error might be found in the Symbols and in that case, he wrote, Lutherans

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¹⁰⁵ Paul M. Bretscher, Thesis On the Lutheran Confessions, Concord. Theol. Monthly, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 March 1953, pp216-220

must be the first to sound the death knell on those Symbols. To this he hastened to add that in spite of the attempts of the enemies of Lutheranism over a span of three hundred years to demonstrate error none had ever been revealed.¹⁰⁶ In *Der Lutheraner* he wrote, "We do not hereby mean to indicate that we are among those who believe that their understanding requires no development or correction. It is rather our constant serious endeavor to make progress in the recognition of truth and, with the help of God, to free ourselves more and more from the errors which still cling to us."¹⁰⁷

Regarding the completeness of the Confessions Walther decried those who said that there are no Lutheran doctrines other than those found in the Symbols. He held this attitude would make of Lutheranism a sect which placed the Confessions on the same level as the Bible.¹⁰⁸ He wrote, "No matter how dear and valuable the incomparable confessions of his Church are to every Lutheran, he does not permit them to become the Lutheran Bible in which all other Biblical doctrines are more or less irrelevant, mere subjects 'concerning which every sincere Christian

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¹⁰⁶C.F. Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p. 247

¹⁰⁷Arthur C. Repp, Scripture, Confessions, and Doctrinal Statements In a Symposium of Essays and Addresses given at the Counselors Conference, Valparaiso, Indiana, Sept. 7-14, 1960, pp111

¹⁰⁸C.F. Walther, The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions, *Concordia Theological Monthly* Volume X, No. 9, Sept. 1939, p.663

may hold his own private and individual convictions'.¹⁰⁹ He held that the Symbols are not so much the landmarks of the Church's spiritual development as the boundry-lines separating the Church from certain falsehoods.¹¹⁰ In practice, however, Walther and his followers considered the Reformation a finality as far as the Biblical teachings were concerned and its doctrines, having been fully elucidated in the Confessions and Symbols of the Lutheran Church, were no longer subjects for an historical analysis and revision.¹¹¹ On the one hand Walther stated: "you must again and yet again draw everything through the Scriptures...even the Confessions."¹¹² On the other hand Missouri held that, having tested the Symbols and found them Scriptural, one must thereafter interpret Scripture according to the Confessions.¹¹³

b. It must be De Facto as well as De Jure

The Lutheran Confessions, when interpreted not in so legalistic and formal a manner but in the light of their fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, do not hamper exegesis.¹¹⁴ Subscription to the Confessions in practice means that Lutherans hold the confessors to have been correct in view

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¹⁰⁹Ibid., p.666

¹¹⁰Ibid., p.665

¹¹¹Carl Mauelshagen, American Lutheranism Surrenders to Forces of Conservatism, p.156

¹¹²Th. Engelder (ed.) Walther and The Church, p.43

¹¹³C.F.Walther, Why Our Pastors, etc., p.246

¹¹⁴Edmund Schlunk, Theology of The Lutheran Confessions, p.XXVIII

of the issues which were at stake and the alternatives which were offered in their day.¹¹⁵ As Peter Brunner, Professor of Dogmatics at the University of Augsburg has put it, genuine loyalty to the Lutheran Confession involves addressing one's self to the contemporary situation and saying what we confess when we confess together with the fathers. It means applying the Biblical insights of the fathers to our contemporary situation.¹¹⁶

Confessions are the answer from earth to the Revelation from heaven and witnesses to the manner in which pure doctrine has been preserved. While the Confession is not itself the great cause of God about which one rallies it is the signal or standard which condenses and gathers into itself the various elements of the cause and the distinctive token by which, incidently, Lutherans know themselves from others.¹¹⁷ The more Lutherans love the cause the more readily they gather about the standard of that cause.

c. A Tempered Approach

If confessionalism is to mean anything in this day it will have to be recognized that the Book of Concord does not necessarily contain the fully developed

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¹¹⁵Essays on The Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Cooperation, p.29

¹¹⁶Vilmos Vajta, The Unity of The Church, p.99

¹¹⁷T.E.Schmauk and C.T.Benze, The Confessional Principles and The Confession of The Lutheran Church, p.10

doctrine of the evangelical Church but the doctrine developed sufficiently to meet the situations then at issue with Rome.¹¹⁸ The subscriber says, essentially, that he believes the confessors gave an adequate answer to the questions which confronted them. From this base and with the Gospel which is the heart of the Confessions he has a practical witness to the faith in his heart, a faith held not de jure but de facto as well.

Out of such a background the confessor listens to the God who speaks in the witness of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and who speaks to the Lutheran Reformers as, indeed, he speaks to and through Christians in the entire history of the Church.¹¹⁹ For him the Symbols are, first of all, Confessions in the full implications of the German word, Bekennntnis. They are Confessions of sin whereby the confessors, realistically conscious of their sinfulness, bow before God in deep repentance and acknowledge their own bankruptcy. Secondly, they are confessions of faith as the expression of total trust in God's gracious forgiveness in Christ. Thirdly, they are confessions of praise, the free, spontaneous doxology of **pardoned sinners to an unspeakably merciful God.**¹²⁰

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¹¹⁸Ibid., p.699

¹¹⁹Essays On The Lutheran Confessions Basic To Lutheran Cooperation, p.30

¹²⁰Ibid.

Perhaps it was something like this that the essayists representing the three major Lutheran bodies meant when, after their meeting in 1960, they reported that substantial agreement had been reached with reference to:

- 1) designation of the Confessions which are involved in subscription,
- 2) assertion of historical limitations in the Confessions,
- 3) allowance of distinction between the primary norm of the Scriptures and the secondary norm of the Confessions,
- 4) recognition that the heart of the Confessions is their witness to the Gospel,
- 5) acknowledgement that this understanding of the Gospel requires rejection of contradicting understandings,
- 6) affirmation of the importance of Confessional subscription for the proclamation of the church.¹²¹

With the importance of the Confessions in the life of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod thus tempered by a real understanding of their form and function there is opportunity for the Spirit of God to continue His work of leading the Church into all truth.

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¹²¹Ibid., p.25

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