

LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR



CORPUS DOCTRINAE

Book of Concord

A. HENRICUS WICLIF Bloede in't jaer 1386 overleden. **D. HULRICUS ZUINGLIUS** swijer Bloede 1530. **G. MARTINUS BUCERUS** Bloede 1550 overleden. **K. PETRUS MARTYR** Bloede 1560 overleden. **N. HENRICUS BULLINGER** Bloede 1570 overled. 1575

B. JOHANNES HUS Bloede in't jaer 1413. is tot: **E. MARTINUS LUTERUS** Bloede 1540. **H. IOANNES CALVINUS PICARD** L. IOANNES CNOXUS **O. HIERONYMUS ZANCHIUS** Bloede 1590 overleden. **P. THE ODORUS BEZA** Bloede 1590 overleden.

C. DOMINICUS BUNCK van Aelst, was Bucerus: **F. IOHANNES OECOLAMPADIUS** Bloede 1530. **I. PHILIPPUS MELANCTHON** Bloede 1560 overleden. **M. MATTHIAS FLACCIUS ILLYRICUS** Bloede 1570 overleden.

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HIS GLORY IS AT HAND

BY ELIZABETH NEUFELD

The time was close at hand for when Jesus, the spotless Lamb, would be nailed to the cross to save humanity. But before this excruciating journey began, He wanted to do something for His disciples whom He loved. His disciples were perplexed as He once again demonstrated a complete contradiction to the customs they had known all their lives: Jesus, their teacher, took the role of a servant and knelt at His disciples' feet in order to wash them after a long day of travel.

"He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' Jesus replied, 'You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand'" (John 13:6-7, NIV). When Peter resisted, Jesus countered with a hint of what was to come in the Gospel—His washing of our sins.

When the gospel path doesn't favor our life plan, our hearts struggle to comply with the goals of Jesus Christ.

"'No,' said Peter, 'you shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me'" (vs. 8).

Five years ago, I wrote this passage from John everywhere. It had become very meaningful to me in a confusing season when I thought things should have been going far differently from what they were. Things were out of my control, and it was hard to practice that coveted virtue of patience and succumb to the timeline of my Savior's gospel plan. John 13:7 gave me hope that God knew what He was doing regardless of the impractical route I thought He was taking.

Little by little, pieces of my life fell into place, and things that would have been my first choice before became lower in priority. Had I chosen my own path, there's that chance that the outcome could have been successful enough, but the means would have been self-centered. No matter how hard I'd strive for goodness and peace for my own little world, the gospel would ultimately not be the focus of my life and wellbeing.

I ponder that season with a heart full of joy now because I can see more clearly looking back that God's way was much more fulfilling and overflowing with His grace. The gospel I would not have chosen on my own terms worked itself into my life in a way only the Lord could have orchestrated.

I'm still learning about patience, but now I know something more about God's character and how I can trust in Him and His eternal glory, which is at hand while I wait.

"You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand," wrote David in Psalm 16:11. With eternity in mind, our Heavenly Father hints at the way He is preparing for us. And often, it's when we look at the view that we understand more of the bigger picture. Temporarily, it feels unsettling, but there is glory ahead that we could not fathom if it were revealed to us now.

Neufeld lives in Ewa Beach, Oahu, Hawaii.

Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let them strike off my head.

—George of Brandenburg
Signer of the Augsburg Confession

And so we shall commend our cause to Christ, who will one day judge these controversies.

—Philipp Melanchthon,
Preface to the Apology

These are the articles on which I must stand and on which I will stand, God willing, until my death.

—Martin Luther, Smalcald Articles
Preface to the Large Catechism

The distinction between law and gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly.

—Solid Declaration, Formula of Concord

It is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ concerning whom, as our unique teacher, the earnest command has been given from heaven to all men, "Listen to him."

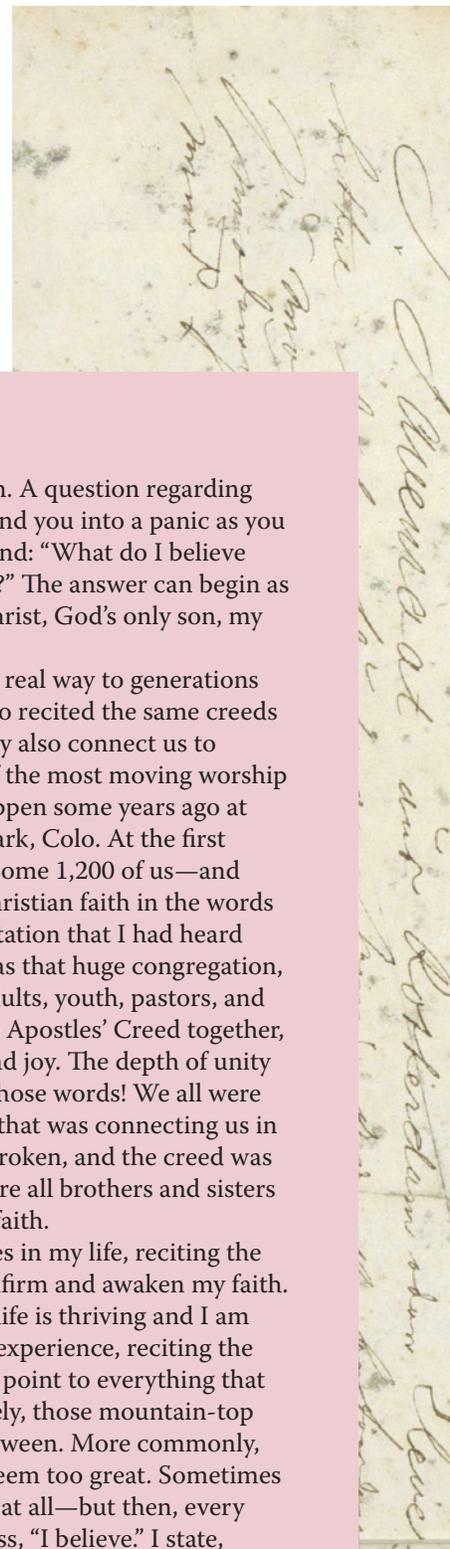
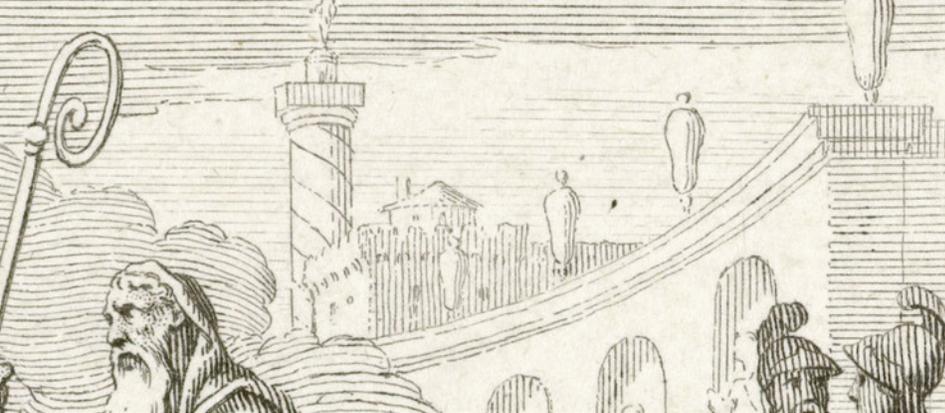
—Solid Declaration, Formula of Concord



The Creeds

BY AMY DALAGER





M

ost of us say it every Sunday: “I believe in God the Father Almighty...” Hopefully it’s not just mindless repetition for you, but we know it so well it rolls easily off our tongues. It feels like the creed has always been there, an integral part of the worship service, and in a way it always has been, almost since the very beginning of the Church.

The Apostles’ Creed first appears in the historical record late in the fourth century AD. The Nicene Creed was developed even earlier, at a council held in the city of Nicaea in 325 AD. The Athanasian Creed was written somewhat later, probably in the fifth century. However, all of them are rooted in the events and teachings that formed the very basis of the faith in the earliest days of the Christian Church. Each phrase in each creed is steeped in the Word. We can hold onto all three of them as true summaries of our faith.

The creeds were written to refute heretical doctrines influencing the early Church. Arianism—the false doctrine that Jesus Christ is not true Man and true God as Scripture declares, but an exalted being created by God the Father, unique in creation but not equal to the Father—was a common heresy in the fourth century. The Nicene Creed refutes the concept clearly in its statement that Jesus Christ is “very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.” The Athanasian Creed focuses even more clearly on the Trinity, explaining in great detail the distinct persons of the Godhead while clarifying that “nothing in this Trinity is before or after, nothing is greater or smaller; in their entirety the three persons are co-eternal and coequal with each other.”

Why do these old, short little documents still linger in our modern church service week after week, year after year? They might long ago have been relegated to the realm of history books and treatises on theology if they weren’t so very useful to us. Not only do the Creeds combat old heresies (and new ones), they distill the doctrinal complexities of our faith into a clear summary of what we believe about God.

Scripture calls us in Romans 10:9 to “confess with [our] mouth” and the creed gives us a framework for our confession that accurately expresses the true faith, without allowing us to stray into the dangerous territory of making a confession based on our own feelings or perceptions rather than the Word of God. As such, it is

an excellent tool for evangelism. A question regarding your belief in Jesus need not send you into a panic as you grope for an answer in your mind: “What do I believe about Jesus? What *do* I believe?” The answer can begin as simply as, “I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only son, my Lord,” and grow from there.

The creeds connect us in a real way to generations of believers gone before us, who recited the same creeds and trusted the same God. They also connect us to believers here and now. One of the most moving worship services I have experienced happen some years ago at the FLY Convention in Estes Park, Colo. At the first evening service we all stood—some 1,200 of us—and were invited to “confess our Christian faith in the words of the Apostles’ Creed,” an invitation that I had heard hundreds of times before. But as that huge congregation, full of friends and strangers, adults, youth, pastors, and laymen, spoke the words of the Apostles’ Creed together, I was gripped with such awe and joy. The depth of unity contained in the simplicity of those words! We all were believers together, with a faith that was connecting us in ways that wouldn’t be readily broken, and the creed was helping us remember that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ and not alone in our faith.

In the more mundane times in my life, reciting the creed helps me continually confirm and awaken my faith. When it feels like my spiritual life is thriving and I am deep into some mountain-top experience, reciting the creed gives a little exclamation point to everything that is joyful in my life. Unfortunately, those mountain-top experiences are few and far between. More commonly, doubts assail me. My failures seem too great. Sometimes I feel like I can believe nothing at all—but then, every week I say those words. I profess, “I believe.” I state, surrounded by beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, that I believe in our wholly trustworthy God. I believe in the gracious redemption of His Son Jesus, who bought me with His blood. I believe in the Holy Spirit, who pursues me and draws my heart to the mercies of our loving God.

Doubt dissipates, and my heart is consoled. I believe!

Dalager is a member of Westaker Free Lutheran, Newfolden, Minn. “Bishops of the Council of Nicaea” etching by Bernard Picart (1704). “In Honor of Martin Luther” coin by Michael Hohenauer (1533). Cover art: “The Light is Set on the Candlestick,” anonymous (1640).

BY PASTOR LUKE BERNTSON



Augsburg Confession

I

n 1530, the Margrave George of Brandenburg stood before Emperor Charles V and declared, “Before I let anyone take from me the Word of God and ask me to deny my God, I will kneel and let them strike off my head.” With the Margrave stood a group of German reformers summoned by the Emperor for a meeting, what became known as the Diet of Augsburg.

The Emperor was a staunch Catholic. He called for the meeting in Augsburg, Germany, hoping that Martin Luther and his followers would set aside their reformational teachings and agree to abide by the teachings of the Roman Church. As indicated by the words of the Margrave of Brandenburg, this was no trivial matter. These reformers took to heart Jesus’ words, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven,” and, “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:32-33, 38-39).

Commanded to appear and granted permission to speak, this group of reforming German rulers presented a document to explain what they believed. This document became known as the Augsburg Confession.

In its essence, the Augsburg Confession is evangelical; it points people to Jesus. In the heart of the confession, Article IV: of Justification says, “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for

our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight” (Romans 3:21-26, 4:5). This is the essence of faith. Churches that cease to teach that we are justified freely through faith for Christ’s sake cut themselves off from Christ. But where these truths are spoken and believed, there is forgiveness, life, and salvation.

As an evangelical document, the Confession teaches who God is, what sin is, and who Jesus is and what He accomplished. Anyone wishing to be saved must know these truths so they may believe, and by believing have eternal life.

The Augsburg Confession is biblical. Each teaching is peppered with biblical references and quotations. The Confession is written to illumine the teachings of the Bible so that we may not be led astray by false saviors and false prophets. We need God’s Word. In a world filled with liars, the Confession anchors us in that Word.

The Augsburg Confession is Christ-centered. Philipp Melancthon, the author of the Confession and its Apology, keeps the focus on Jesus as his writing leads us through the basics of true faith. We are justified on account of Christ. We love because Christ first loved us. We should not teach that human traditions merit grace because such teachings obscure the gospel message that Jesus is the Savior.

After reading the Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V on June 25, 1530, the group of reformers waited for a response. This response, the Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession, was presented on August 3. In this confutation and the meetings that followed, the Emperor threatened to exile the German princes from their territories and to seize their property and possessions if they did not submit.

AUSBORCHSCHE CONFESSIE.

DEN GEEST GOODES IS HET DIE V ONTSTEECK
H. VERI



In the face of these threats, they remembered Jesus' words, "Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." They did not deny Christ or His Word for they were too precious to give up. Instead, the princes asked Melancthon to write a response, which became known as The Apology of the Augsburg Confession. The Apology is longer than the Confession itself as disputed matters are explained more fully. More space is given to elaborate on the Word and to demonstrate that what the reformers believed is taught clearly in the Bible.

The Augsburg Confession and its Apology are biblical and Christ-centered, but they are not original. They contain nothing that has not been said before by Christ, His apostles, and many early Christians. Neither Luther nor Melancthon were innovators of doctrine, but as the name "reformer" suggests, they corrected wayward theology by the Catholic Church.

We also do well to remember these words of the Apostle Paul inspired by the Holy Spirit, "Charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (I Timothy 1:3-5). The Augsburg Confession and its Apology are old. The truths they contain are older. May we believe them always. To God be the glory. Amen.

Berntson serves Bethesda Lutheran, Mizpah, Minn., and Hope Lutheran, Northome, Minn. "Portrait of Philipp Melancthon" engraving by Albrecht Dürer (1526). "Allegory of the Augsburg Confession" engraving by unknown artist after Wenceslaus Holler (1640). "One Hundreth Anniversary of the Augsburg Creed" coin by Sebastian Dadler (1630).



N

estled somewhere between the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord is a lesser-known Reformation gem: the Smalcald (sometimes *Schmalkald*) Articles, a testimony to the life-and-death struggles accompanying the Reformation, and Martin Luther's spiritual bequest to those who had followed him.

By 1531, the Reformation was well under way. Those in Protestant territories feared that armies from Catholic territories would attack them in order to squash the Reformation. At the town of Schmalkalden, Germany, leaders from several Protestant territories met and established a mutual-protection pact, to mediate this risk. Known as the Schmalkaldic League, it had some early success as a deterrent.

In 1536, Pope Paul III called for a general council of the Roman Catholic Church in Mantua, Italy, in part to deal with the Reformation. Expecting discussions to arise at this church council, elector John Frederick I of Saxony asked a group of theologians headed by Martin Luther to write up a review of which doctrinal issues were non-negotiable and which might have room for discussion. Luther, at the time in declining health and believed to be dying, meant it also as his spiritual last will and testament for his followers. The result was a searching look at what was fundamentally most important and central to the faith: the list of things to live and die for, spearheaded by a man who felt that this was the last chance to get it right.

Luther's write-up, the Smalcald Articles, was presented to the League, but the League decided to use the Augsburg Confession in any official dealings with the church council. Several theologians personally endorsed it, though. In the succeeding decades, the Articles were used confessionally by a number of Lutheran territories and were included in the *Book of Concord*.

Structurally, the Articles break into three sections. The first briefly outlines

ASSERVIT·CHRISTO
·CULTIBVS·OPPOR
ILLIVS·ABSENTI
PRÆSENTĒ·M
MARTIN

DR. MARTINUS LUTHERUS,
Geboren te Wittenberg den 10 November A.º 1483.
en aldaar Overleden den 18 February 1546.



BY PASTOR PHILL HOOPER

Smalcald Articles

Trinitarian doctrine; its brevity is because this was something that both the Lutherans and Catholics agreed on. The second section is considerably longer, and contains what Luther believed was absolutely non-negotiable: chiefly, the doctrine of justification—people are saved by faith in the atoning death of Jesus alone. It also calls for rejecting several Roman Catholic practices and teachings because they contradicted the doctrine of justification. The second section also maintains that Jesus, not the pope, is head of the Church. Christ’s commands to the Church matter; the pope’s do not. The third section itemizes subjects that the Lutherans were willing to discuss—such as sin, the law, true repentance, the sacraments, etc.—but also spells out the Lutheran positions.

There aren’t many topics covered in the Articles that aren’t found elsewhere in the confessions—often, the other confessional documents go more in-depth. This actually is a benefit to the Smalcald Articles: some people find the longer, more technical confessional documents to be intimidating. They may find the shorter discussions in the Articles to be a good way to begin a look at the confessions. Bible studies could also benefit from looking at the Articles, as much of it is in sections that are short enough to be discussed in individual meetings. As a great entry point to the confessions, the Smalcald Articles has much to offer.

Its brevity and concise nature are not, however, what makes it most significant to the Church. The Smalcald Articles do an exceptional job of reminding us that a few core doctrines are most vital to the Church and that all other Church activities need to be weighed by how well they are in keeping with them. The Articles

uphold Jesus as head of His Church, and therefore His Word is the deciding judge as to whether Church practices should be allowed, encouraged, or insisted upon. This needs to be kept in view as the Church tries to deal with what should and should not change with the times.

More important, however, is the Smalcald Articles’ insistence that redemption from sin happens entirely by the work of Jesus Christ dying for our sins. This forgiveness is received by faith and cannot be “obtained or grasped” with any additional “work, law, or merit.” This is the gospel, which the world needs but often doesn’t want to hear, and the church often gets tempted to downplay it or change the subject. The Smalcald Articles provides a reminder and a warning: “On this article stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubt about it. Otherwise everything is lost, and the pope and the devil and whatever opposes us will gain victory and be proved right.”

The authority of the Word and the exclusive truth of the gospel are indeed non-negotiable, and the Smalcald Articles are a brief, direct, shining reminder of this critical, timeless truth. Apart from these, all religious activity, meetings, or topical studies ultimately end in ruin.

Hooper, who serves St. John Free Lutheran, Duluth, Minn., is part-time faculty at the Free Lutheran Bible College, Plymouth, Minn. “Portrait of Martin Luther” engraving by Heinrich Aldegrever (1540). “Death of Martin Luther” coin (1700).



E

ven though the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope is not an official confessional document of the AFLC (we traditionally subscribe to *Luther's Small Catechism* and the unaltered Augsburg Confession), the Treatise should be on our radar as Free Lutherans. Why? Because it takes up the biblical case of church polity, something that is near and dear to the heart of our small, congregational denomination.

Who gets to ordain pastors? What should the structure of the Church look like, and who has the authority to govern in the Church? For the Roman Catholic Church, the answer to these questions always—in some way, shape, and form—ends up with the pope. For the early Lutherans writing in the sixteenth century (and for Lutherans today, for that matter), this does not flow from the teaching of Scripture.

The Treatise was published by Philipp Melanchthon in 1540, and was the product of the same meeting at Smalcald, Germany, which took up what came to be known as Martin Luther's Smalcald Articles. Many of those same theologians and lay leaders desired a separate document that delineated the Lutheran position on the papacy. For this reason, many view the Treatise as an extension of the Smalcald Articles. Melanchthon, however, intended the Treatise to flow from the Augsburg Confession and Apology. Revealing his notoriously timid personality, there is some evidence that Melanchthon believed the Treatise was too strongly worded.

The content of the Treatise begins by establishing three primary claims of the Roman Catholic church about the papacy: 1) The pope claims for himself supreme authority over all bishops and pastors by divine right; 2) The pope claims the power of "both swords," also by divine right—the first sword is authority over the church, the second is authority over secular kingdoms; and 3) Acknowledgment of papal authority is necessary for salvation.

With the Roman Catholic claims identified, Melanchthon gets to work. He first starts dismantling these claims by pointing out inconsistencies they have with Scripture. He points out that Christ banned lordship among the apostles in Luke 22:24-27, he identifies that Christ commissioned the disciples into ministry on equal footing in John 20, and he puts forth Paul's own argument from Galatians 2 that his ministry was neither ordained nor confirmed by Peter. Melanchthon also provides examples from history, citing the Council of Nicaea as well as church fathers like Jerome and Pope Gregory (ironically

as examples against papal domination of the church.

Central to the Roman Catholic understanding of the papacy is the person of St. Peter. The Roman Catholic Church, throughout the ages, has held up Peter as the first pope, basing this teaching on both Matthew 16:18-19 and John 21:15-19. Melanchthon does an excellent job of exegeting both passages.

In Matthew 16, Melanchthon explains that when Christ addresses Peter in verses 17 and 18, he does so not as if Peter is a uniquely qualified individual, but rather because Peter stands as the representative of the group of disciples as a whole. Furthermore, and perhaps even more crucially, Melanchthon writes in the Treatise that the Church is built on Peter's confession, not on Peter himself. "Rather, it has been built upon the ministry of the confession Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (paragraph 25). Turning his attention to John 21, Melanchthon rightly notes that when Christ commissions Peter to "feed my lambs," it does not follow that this is synonymous with "rule my church."

Perhaps the most controversial subject matter in the Treatise (and in the entire *Book of Concord*, for that matter) is Melanchthon's treatment of the concept of "antichrist." Much has been made, especially in the realm of politics (Michele Bachmann's presidential candidacy in 2012, for example) of the Lutheran understanding of "antichrist" from the Treatise.

Melanchthon's identification of the papacy with antichrist falls into three main areas. First, "the pope rules in the Church and has established this kingdom for himself by the claim of churchly authority and of the ministry" (40). Second, much of papal doctrine conflicts with the gospel (including, but not limited to, meritorious works). Finally, the pope claims divine authority for his words (the doctrine of *ex cathedra*) and his office.

No matter what one's eschatology is, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope is worth reading and discussing. Considering the rise of celebrity pastors and abusive, dominant leadership culture in the American Church today, these words are just as relevant now as they were when they were written nearly 500 years ago.

Gudim serves Faith Lutheran, Minneapolis. "Apostle Peter Attacks the Pope" letterpress printing, anonymous, after Tobias Stimmer (1549-1577). Much of the historical information in this article comes from "Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord," Concordia Publishing House (2006).



Power & Primacy



BY PASTOR JASON GUDIM

BY KEVIN OLSON



*Hic est Martinus? Quoniam? Chemnitz? Ille,
Tridentinum dogmata distulit;
Tunc haec Sepherdi? Simoni Regula? Vobis;
Haec protestant and Romanis Regula exiit.*

The Formula

T

he little pronoun “we” occurs hundreds of times within the Formula of Concord. The weight it carries is easily overlooked. Its presence implies an appeal for unity. It implies boundaries. It implies that thoughtful readers will have to consider if they are part of the “we” when they encounter the oft-repeated phrase, “We believe, teach, and confess ...”

Such was the case for thousands of theologians, pastors, and civic leaders who read the final draft in 1577. Among those, 8,188 signed their names in agreement. That “concord” ultimately led to the Formula taking its place among the other Lutheran confessional documents within the *Book of Concord* (1580).

Achieving this agreement was difficult. During the first few decades after the death of Martin Luther in 1546, there was an attempt to establish some level of unity among Lutheran churches in Germany. It wasn’t just a project for the theologians. Princes and other political leaders also longed for peace, for a variety of reasons, and offered both financial and diplomatic support to the effort. By 1552 Lutheranism had divided into roughly two camps. Despite the split both sides hoped a common doctrinal confession could emerge. The teachings found in the Augsburg Confession were the basis for that hope.

The Formula covers twelve areas of teaching

(“articles”) where differences had developed among some of the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.

The first part is called the Epitome, or summary. It begins with a brief but significant section describing the “rule and norm” by which all doctrines are judged. Holy Scripture is set apart as the only “judge, rule, and norm.” All other writings are merely witnesses of scriptural truths. The authors then list the writings they considered to be “faithful witnesses.” These documents, including the Formula, make up the *Book of Concord* and today we simply refer to them as the Lutheran confessions.

The Epitome then addresses each article by providing three things: an overview, a list of affirmative theses, and a list of antitheses. The overview consists of a few paragraphs laying out the issue at hand, typically in the form of a question. The affirmative theses are statements declaring what Lutherans “believe, teach, and confess” regarding the issue. The antitheses are statements declaring what Lutherans reject regarding the issue.

It is important to note here that, without exception, the affirmative theses for each article contain Scripture references. You do get the sense that the authors took seriously their role as faithful biblical witnesses.

The second part of the Formula is called the Solid Declaration. Here the various rationale underlying the



theses are bolstered by a longer, more in-depth analysis. Among the tools they used are scriptural interpretation, the testimony of the ancient creeds, and the writings of the church fathers. There are also a number of cross references to various Reformation-era writings, especially ones that enjoyed broad acceptance like Luther's sermons and the Apology to the Augsburg Confession.

I suppose one could argue that the Formula enjoyed the height of its relevance in the latter part of the 16th century. It was, after all, a specific treatment of controversial teachings in the decades following the Augsburg Confession. However, when you read the Formula today you can't help but think it is more than just a dusty remnant of German Lutheran history. It would be enough to say that the Formula remains relevant because it is merely a witness to what God teaches us in His Word. But let me offer three additional examples of its ongoing relevancy:

First, the Formula's very existence highlights the importance of coming to some shared understanding of how fundamental doctrines are taught. Even a brief introduction to the effort involved in crafting a document like this is helpful. As you read it you gain a deeper appreciation for the hard work involved in getting flawed people to arrive at a common confession.

Second, the format of the Formula, with its theses and

solid declarations, can serve as a model for adjudicating theological differences among Christians. Granted, most of us aren't on the front lines of today's theological controversies, but insight into past doctrinal differences can prove invaluable as innovative teachings cross our paths.

Last, the Epitome in particular can serve as a handy quick-reference guide. The next time someone mentions something like free will or election in the last five minutes of a Bible study you don't have to suffer through the awkward silence that usually follows. You can just yell out, "Consult the Epitome!" and presto, awkward silence averted.

"We believe, teach, and confess"—thankfully those first few thousand signers were not the last to agree to be included in the "we." Personally, I am grateful that God has allowed these confessions to be translated, taught, and shared through generations of faithful Lutheran Christians. I remain hopeful He will continue to do so. We give the glory to Him.

Olson is a member of St. Paul's Free Lutheran, Fargo, N.D. "The Bible On the Scales" etching, anonymous (1675-1726). On the side of the Bible is the group of reformers including Jan Hus, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Philipp Melancthon coin by Friedrich Hagenauer (1543).

Rembrandt. 1634.



W

hat does it mean to be a Lutheran? For years I couldn't even begin to answer that question. "I just know we're not Baptist!" is usually the best answer I could find.

What about being a Christian? That should be something for which we have some good answers. Still, I mostly just encountered a cricket chorus.

At the age of 4, I taught myself to read so I could start to learn the answers for myself. However, I quickly encountered the problem in which all who take a just-me-and-my-Bible approach find themselves bogged down: I am just one person—and a severely flawed one at that. Never mind that I was 4; the problem continues still to this day. I simply cannot rightly interpret Scripture as a lone ranger, as much as my analytical, introverted self would love to be able to. We were never made to be lone wolves, rather, to both mentor and be mentors of other believers as the wisdom of the communion of the saints is distilled from one generation to the next.

Except—at least for me—this isn't what happened. Why? Like many, I lived under an anti-creedal philosophy in which I feared the tradition of man infiltrating doctrine. And so, I was left with neither tradition nor doctrine. The first time I encountered the Apostles' Creed taped to my step-cousin's refrigerator, I thought, "Wow! This is awesome! Every Christian should know this!"

At that moment I stumbled upon what has been an invaluable way of carrying the faith across the generations, namely: confessions of faith. As much as many seek to destroy them entirely, ultimately a belief in life without

BY LEEANNA LUNN



Catechisms

creeds is a creed—a belief; a confession of faith. The question then becomes to which confession of faith will I cling? One that I came up with all by myself? Or, that which has preserved the saints for hundreds of years?

This is the power of the Lutheran confessions and, in particular, *Luther's Large Catechism* and *Luther's Small Catechism*, which take the doctrines of Christian faith and present them in an easily accessible and highly practical way, specifically to children but ultimately to us all. The Catechisms address not only the questions of what it means to be Lutheran and Christian, but also who God is and what it means to be human. Every aspect of life is addressed and transformed by the power of the Word.

It is common for people my age to find themselves floundering as they challenge what they have been raised to believe and decide whether to adopt these beliefs as their own. Scripture speaks to young adults in the Old Testament with the word *na'ar* (also translated “child”), indicating the need to be set on the right path. “Train up a *na'ar* in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” is a proverb that speaks to placing the feet of the young adult on the path of righteousness (Proverbs 22:6). This is the very reason the Lutheran Church practices confirmation: to teach our young adults the way of truth—via *Luther's Small Catechism*—and dedicate them to that path of righteousness.

We may mistakenly see in this verse an inevitable outcome and therefore believe that the one-time act of setting young people in the right direction will guarantee

their safe passage to the Celestial City. But we are not riding a conveyor belt; we are walking a straight and narrow path. There are many tempting rest stops and detours, and we all, young and old alike, need to be taught to look straight ahead as we take this journey one step at a time. The only way to do this is by remaining in the Word and learning true doctrine through the Catechisms, which are trustworthy explanations of God's Word. We are called to walk pious and holy lives of good works, but it is impossible to do so without a solid confession of faith coursing through our lives like the very blood in our veins.

Thus, the confessions and piety stand not in opposition, but in essential dependence on one another. We know we are Christians by our love; we know our love is true by the Word. Therefore, just as the Word is a light upon that path, so the Catechisms are the wisdom of the Church distilled into the map in our hands. Just as we ought to write the Word of God upon our hearts, so ought we to inscribe the truth of the Catechisms upon our souls. For although the Word stands alone as the truth, our flesh is weak, and we ought to praise the Lord for the blessing of the Catechisms, and indeed, all the Lutheran confessions.

Lunn is a member of Word of Life Lutheran, Upsala, Minn. “Woman Reading” etching by Rembrandt van Rijn (1634). “Design for a medal with Martin Luther” drawing by anonymous (1533).

b'elig sind die,
so Gottes wort hören
und behalten.
Martinus Luther
Luthers eigne Handschrift.

Leipzig u. Merseburg

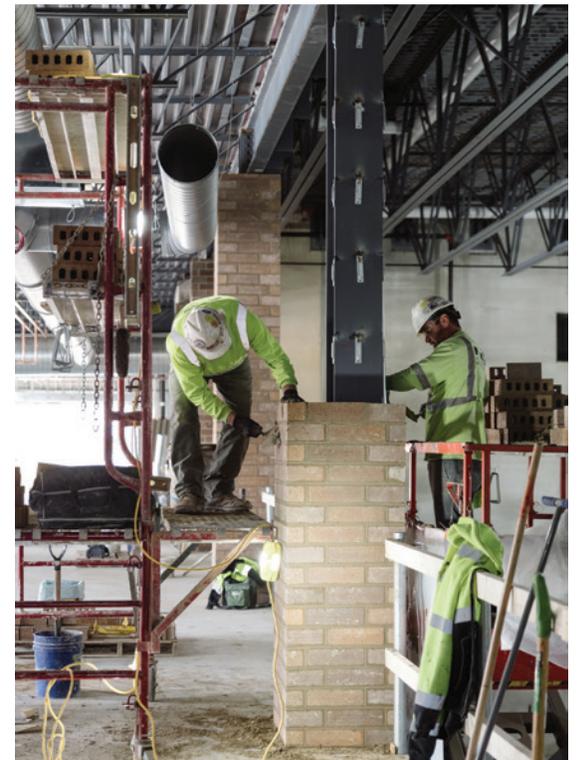
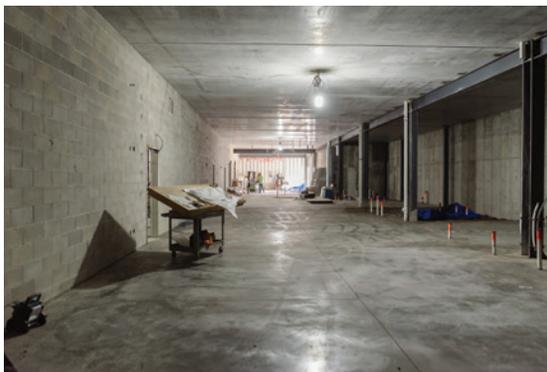
in Ernst Kleins Comtoir.



Student Center work continues

Construction progress on the new Student Life Center at the Free Lutheran Bible College included pouring of concrete sidewalks, southern terrace (above), and first level flooring (below left, future locker rooms). Outside brick work (near right) began in late September and continued into mid-October while indoor brick work (middle right) began taking shape. The southern terraced walls were given a concrete stairway down to the parking area (below right).

FLBCS will host a grand opening for the Student Life Center on April 16-17, with guest speaker Sean McDowell. The event will include an alumni basketball tournament on Saturday. For more information, visit flbc.edu.



INTRODUCING TWO BOARD MEMBERS

Margie Lee, treasurer

I was born in Minot, N.D., and moved to Grand Forks, N.D., when I was 10. My dad was a school teacher and my mom a school cook. I graduated with a nursing degree from the University of North Dakota. My husband, Kevin, and I then moved to St. Paul, Minn., while he attended dental school and I worked as a nurse in a hospital. We moved to Beulah, N.D., in 1982 and my husband practiced dentistry there for 38 years and I was a homemaker and helped out with dental office bookkeeping. Kevin and I have been married for 42 years. Kevin is the current FLAPS (Free Lutheran Association of Pilot Supporters) director. We have two grown married children and five grandchildren, between the ages of 2 and 9.



I was raised in a Presbyterian church. In high school a good friend shared the “four spiritual laws” with me. The light came on and I recognized that I was a sinner and needed a relationship with my living Savior, Jesus. John 14:6 is where Jesus clearly explains, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

I was active in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship during my college years. My husband and I were members of an ELCA church in Beulah. In 2003, we joined the AFLC church Prince of Peace, where Kevin serves as a deacon and I am on my 17th year of serving as church treasurer. I have also served as either secretary or treasurer in our local and district WMF. A favorite verse of mine is John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Jesus is the Word. During the challenges of life, including the challenges of 2020, we need to cling to the truth of God’s Word.

Liz McCarlson, second vice president

I was born and raised in Webster, S.D., attended the Free Lutheran Bible College (FLBC, formerly AFLBS) from 2001-2003, and received a bachelor’s degree in K-12 music education in December 2008.



After doing some substitute teaching during the spring semester of 2009, I moved back onto the AFLC campus as a dorm assistant at FLBC for the 2009-10 school year. The following year I was hired as women’s resident head of FLBC and remained in that position until 2017. I am currently a part-time receptionist, administrative assistant, and *The Lutheran Ambassador* subscription manager at the AFLC administrative offices, Plymouth, Minn. I am also a member at Faith Free Lutheran, south Minneapolis, where I volunteer as Christian education director and youth leader.

I have been a Christian my entire life. Although I didn’t come to understand it for many years, I believe and confess that God forgave my sins, gave me saving faith, and made me His child when I was brought to the waters of baptism as an infant. Throughout my life there have certainly been times of questioning and doubt as to my salvation, but through hearing and reading God’s Word, I have always been reassured of my salvation. I am thankful to God for His faithfulness to me.

Psalm 90:14 has been especially encouraging to me throughout most of my adult life: “Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.” All of my needs, especially the need of redemption, and the promise of eternity are provided for me in Christ Jesus, whose sacrifice in my place was the greatest display of love. Because I find satisfaction in Christ, there is an outward response: I can live my life with joy, even in the midst of suffering, performing my daily tasks and interacting with the people around me for the glory of God.

AFLC Schools plan online Christmas concerts

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary announced plans to suspend its in person annual Christmas concerts in favor of an online event. The concert, titled “The Light in the Darkness,” will debut at 7 p.m. Dec. 11, Central Standard Time.

The online concert will be pre-recorded with excellent production quality and music from a variety of groups on campus, including all three

choirs from the college and seminary. A link will be provided for those who wish to view the concert together during the premier, and the program itself will be archived at flbc.edu.

The annual parents’ weekend, of which the Christmas concert is a part, will be delayed until FLBC hosts basketball games in the new Student Life Center. The first games are still scheduled for mid-January.



Spotlight puts focus on God’s Word

Speaker Keith Ferrin challenges students to enjoy Scripture

The Free Lutheran Bible College hosted author and speaker Keith Ferrin, from BibleLife, in its fall Spotlight conference Oct. 4-5 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Ferrin shared his methods for internalizing Scripture by memorization and shared sessions on Philippians, Jonah, and Ephesians as well as a session on how to enjoy reading your Bible.



Keith Ferrin (top) spoke at the Free Lutheran Bible College’s fall Spotlight conference on Oct. 4-5. A group of Bible college students (above) including Blake Martin, Christopher Hooper, Ethan Hickle, and Mark Thonsgaard, quizzed Ferrin between sessions.



Moan installed in Williston

Pastor Seth Moan (center) was installed Aug. 30 at Emmanuel Free Lutheran, Williston, N.D., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (left), AFLC president, officiating. Moan is a 2020 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. Pictured at right is Pastor Jerry Moan, Seth’s father and faculty member at the Free Lutheran Schools. (Submitted photo)

2021 Annual Conference plans

Members of the Conference Committee have announced plans for the 2021 Annual Conference. Following an abbreviated schedule for the 2020 conference, which was delayed to August, the committee is following the new format and has scheduled the 2021 conference for June 16-19.

The conference will be hosted by the AFLC Schools on its Plymouth, Minn., campus. Conference committees will meet Wednesday morning and afternoon (if needed), and the conference will open on Wednesday evening with an ordination service. The conference will close late Saturday afternoon. Details and registration information are forthcoming.



Pastor Marvin Haara

Pastor Marvin J. Haara, 76, died Aug. 26 at his home in Hutchinson, Minn.

He was born near L’Anse, Mich., to Einar and Saimi (Keranen) Haara. He studied at Suomi College, Augsburg College, and the Free Lutheran Seminary, and was ordained at the AFLC Annual Conference in 1969. He served parishes in Virginia and Broton, Minn., and Pukwana, S.D., and preached at churches in Sacred Heart and Granite Falls, Minn. During his years at Virginia, he preached in both Finnish and English. After leaving parish ministry, he was active in prison and jail ministry. Surviving are his wife Sandra (Ellis) and one son, John. Blessed be his memory.



I

have a cork board on the wall in my office that's full of note cards and Post-it Notes.

There's no other way to describe it: it's two-dimensional chaos. A closer look will reveal that the cards actually are a sort of map for our parish's youth ministry. What seems like chaos to others helps me stay organized and balance different elements of our ministry. Planning and hosting events is a lot of work and is rewarding in its own way, but I have a tendency to get caught up in the details of planning, moving from one event to the next as the year progresses. Looking at my cork board helps me remember that there's more to ministry than office work and administration.

The relational side of ministry is a complicated, meaningful, long-term investment. It's a necessary element of the disciple-making process, uniting both old and young in the mission and ministry of the church. Working in full-time ministry often sends me in different directions than I

WHAT TODAY LOOKS LIKE

BY PASTOR DANIEL HURNER

anticipated. I often catch myself thinking, "Today, ministry looks like this."

We can plan and prepare all we want, but it's almost comical how quickly our plans tend to diverge from what we had in mind. I've been working in ministry for 13 years and have enough experience under my belt to know the value of prayerfully planning and preparation for sermons and mid-week student ministry. As valuable as that time is, the amount of feedback I receive on certain points I make in a sermon or in a Bible study is dwarfed by what comes out of the ministry of presence. What happens when things go wrong has more staying power than we may care to admit.

This is especially true when things really fall apart and you're left with a whole lot of nothing. People remember when you wrote them an encouraging letter. They remember that you gave them a bag of Skittles on their birthday. They remember that you prayed with them before they went into surgery. They remember when what was supposed to be a quick time tubing down a river turned into a more of a "three-hour tour"

They remember when a bonfire turned into a movie night at your home. They remember that you have taken time for them.

We can spend a lot of time trying to figure out what's next or what sort of thing will really draw students—and hopefully their families—into our ministries, but we need to ask ourselves two questions. First, how does what I'm doing guide people into fulfilling the mission of the church? And second, what does it look like to be successful in ministry? This question should be discussed and answered by more than just one person. Personally, I answer the second question with two other questions: Is the gospel being preached? And are people being disciplined? If it's "yes," then it's not the end of the world if plans get derailed. Why? Because God is still at work and, "Today, ministry looks like this."

Hurner serves the Dalton Free Lutheran Parish, Dalton, Minn., as pastor of youth and family ministry.



District hosts Youth Ministries and Parish Ed workshops

Event offers training and encouragement for ministry leaders

The Eastern Montana/Western North Dakota AFLC District hosted a children and youth ministry training workshop Oct. 9-10 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Beulah, N.D. The purpose of the event was to provide education and encouragement for ministry leaders. Pastor Jason Holt, AFLC

Youth Ministries director, and Marian Christopherson, AFLC Parish Education director, opened the conference Friday evening with complementary presentations on “Why Youth Ministry Matters” and “Why Children’s Ministry Matters,” followed by an open question and answer session. Saturday workshops provided education on various ministry-related topics. Representatives from several congregations in the district attended the event. Participants were reminded that children and youth are longing for connection with real people. Ministry leaders have opportunity to develop relationships that model the love of Christ. They can also provide tools to help children and youth continue to grow in Christian faith. Workshop attendees were encouraged to persevere in faithfully teaching the Word of God, trusting not in ourselves or in our own efforts, but in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of children and youth.



Pastor Jason Holt (top), director of AFLC Youth Ministries, led a workshop during a training event in Beulah, N.D. Marian Christopherson (above), director of AFLC Parish Education, led a session during the weekend event. (Submitted photos)

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 /s/ Ruth Gunderson, Managing Editor

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.”

~Isaiah 9:2

The darkness around us is heavy and tangible. News came that a young man in our community, a brother of one of the men whom Nate disciples, had drowned in the Nile River. Witnesses talked of seeing him struggle in the water with a snake after slipping in while washing. Members of his family believe he had been cursed and that the powers of darkness were sent to kill him.

I often find it tempting to want to shut out the darkness instead of to confront it—to dismiss it, to not acknowledge it, or to mislabel it. The work of the enemy is repulsive and ugly. I don’t want it to take up my precious head space or to disrupt my comfortable, ordered life. And yet, I am a follower of Christ, the One who can pierce through the darkness with His light, the One who makes His home in me. He calls me to be His hands and His feet and to engage in the battle with

A GREAT LIGHT HAS DAWNED

BY RHODA JORE

Him: to proclaim the truth which shatters the lies, to speak words of peace into the chaos and confusion, to see as He sees, to love the broken, and to extend His compassion. He also calls me to confront my own depravity—to acknowledge the ways that I seek to remove myself from all that is uncomfortable, and to expose the pride in me that looks down on those caught up in darkness rather than to look on them with the merciful and beckoning eyes of Christ.

Our 12-year-old daughter Hannah has a friend named Rehma who has been growing in her faith and in her belief that she does not need to fear the work of the enemy. She recently visited Nate’s discipleship group to share a testimony of God’s healing power in her life. She shared that for some time she had been getting severe headaches every time she tried to read her Bible. Finally realizing their source, she prayed in Jesus’ name that they would stop disturbing her, and praise God, they did! Her smile was wide

as she spoke of the joy of reading God’s Word free of pain. The light of Christ not only exposes and convicts, but heals and transforms. It is a beautiful thing to see.

Please pray for the men whom Nate disciples here in Nabukosi. They are agents of light and of God’s grace to this community, and the enemy is actively working to stop them. Please pray for increased opportunities as they seek to administer the love of Christ and to share the truth of God’s Word. Pray that they would persevere and that they would grow in their belief and conviction that it is a blessing to suffer for His name. And finally, please pray with us that the light of Christ would do its wonderful, healing work here in Nabukosi, in neighboring Bubugo, and in your part of the world, too.

Jore is an AFLC missionary serving in Nabukosi, Uganda, with her husband, Nate, and children.

PEOPLE & PLACES

Heather Hanson is serving as a church planting assistant with AFLC Home Missions at the Alaska Mission in Naknek. Her main role is working with children's ministry.

An installation for **Pastor John Brennan** was planned for Oct. 25 at First Lutheran, Oklahoma City, with Pastor Gary Jorgenson, AFLC assistant to the president, officiating.

Licensed Pastor Kevin Borg has accepted a call to serve Victory Free Lutheran and Grace Free Lutheran congregations in Park River, N.D. He previously served Grace Free Lutheran and Zion Free Lutheran of Green Township in Valley City, N.D.

An installation for **Pastor Andrew Kneeland** was planned for Oct 18 at Gloria Dei Lutheran, St. Louis, Mo., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen officiating.

Caitlin Curtice, a 2017 graduate of the Free Lutheran Bible College and current women's dorm assistant, has been hired as the administrative assistant to the dean of the Free Lutheran Seminary. She replaces **Marilee Johnson**, who stepped down in June after serving for 14 years in the role.

SEPTEMBER MEMORIALS

Bible College

Larry Myhrer, Sr.
Ruth Claus
John Keinanen
Sherman McCarlson
Dennis Winkelmann
David Salvhus
Cliff Holm
Irving Strand
Amanda Breden
Joel Schram
Mona Rudebusch

General Fund

CoCo Erickson
Harland Haugen

Home Missions

Bud & Doris
Anderson
George Lautner, Sr.
Marjorie Jergensen

Journey Missions

Vernon & Dorothy
Russum

Parish Education

Dorothy Russum

Seminary

Rhoda Huglen
David Salvhus

World Missions

Pastor Thomas Baker
Rhoda Huglen
LuVerne Hagen
Cully Arneson

WMF

Tim Westby
Bruce Kjelvik
Corrine Kjelvik

... in honor of

AED

AED Board

Bible College

Pastor Wade Mobley

Home Missions

Marsha Johnson

World Missions

Pastor Samuel Flores



AFLC pastors attend annual event

AFLC pastors and their wives gathered Oct. 6-8 at the Association Retreat Center, near Osceola, Wis., for the annual pastors conference under the theme, "Balancing Family and Ministry." Speaking at the conference were Gene Vukonich (right) during the evening banquet, and Pastor Brent

Olson, Pastor Gideon Johnson, Pastor Earl Korhonen and Pastor Kirk Thorson during sessions. Electives were presented by Tom Johnston and Pastor Lee and Carol Hoops. Attendees also took part in outdoor activities, including softball (left) and pickle ball and a Frisbee golf tournament. (Submitted photos)



Cole installed in Millertown church

Pastor Will Cole (front left) was installed Sept. 20 at St. Matthew Lutheran, Millertown, Pa., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen (front right with wife Linda), AFLC president, officiating. Also pictured are Cole's wife, Nicole, (front left), Pastor David and Carmen Lusk (back left) and friends of Pastor Cole (back right).

AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-September 30, 2020

FUND	REC'D IN SEPTEMBER	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$21,308	\$287,061	\$303,402
Evangelism	17,613	80,411	94,955
Youth Ministries	16,869	96,339	99,942
Parish Education	10,484	110,490	112,896
Seminary	21,910	207,680	192,238
Bible College	25,850	285,178	392,245
Home Missions	17,269	269,904	275,811
World Missions	26,123	267,950	305,409
Personal Support	114,304	621,815	452,043
TOTALS	\$114,304	\$2,226,829	\$2,228,959

For additional financial information for each department, go to www.aflc.org/giving

CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS

What does it mean to be a confessional Lutheran? It depends on whom you ask. This issue of our church magazine seeks to introduce our readers (or hopefully re-introducing them) to the historic statements of faith, called the confessions or symbols, that define what it means theologically to be Lutheran. Three of them—the two catechisms and the Smalcald Articles—were written by Martin Luther himself, but all reflect his



Pastor Robert Lee

Reformation teachings. Lutherans in Germany, especially after the death of Luther, suffered through a season of theological warfare as the movement was threatened by enemies from without and weakened by controversies from within. Efforts to reach an agreement were eventually successful, and more than eight thousand theologians, pastors, and teachers signed what we know today as the last of the confessions, the Formula of Concord.

All of the Lutheran confessions were included in what we know as the *Book of Concord* (concord = agreement), which went on sale in Germany on June 25, 1580, the golden anniversary of the Augsburg Confession.

The AFLC and the Church of the Lutheran Brethren may be the only U.S. church bodies that limit their official subscription to the creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and *Luther's Small Catechism*. It is these, incidentally, that are included in the old *Lutheran Hymnal* and our *Ambassador Hymnal*.

Lutherans in Scandinavia, where the two have their historic roots, did not face the same post-Reformation struggles as those in Germany, having more recently broken with Roman Catholicism. Thus, the German theological battles seemed less relevant and perhaps even dangerous and divisive to introduce. When the king of Denmark and Norway received copies

of the *Book of Concord* from his sister in Germany, and discovered that the Formula of Concord was included in them, he allegedly threw them into the fire and exclaimed, "This book will do nothing but bring strife." He then declared it a capital offense to even own a copy!

It is important to note, however, that though neither church body subscribes to it in its entirety, the whole *Book of Concord* is a required text in the seminaries of both the AFLC and the CLB, and neither takes issue with any of the additional confessions.

Why do our constitutions usually say "unaltered" Augsburg Confession? Ask your pastor to learn the answer.

The American Lutheran Church (1960) brought together Lutherans of both German and Scandinavian backgrounds for the first time in recent years, and it is instructive to see how the ALC constitution's confession of faith carefully and respectfully recognizes both confessional heritages:

"As brief and true statements of the doctrines 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:

"(1) The ancient ecumenical Creeds: the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian;

"(2) The unaltered Augsburg Confession and *Luther's Small Catechism*.

"As further elaboration of and in accord 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."

Note that the creeds, the Augsburg Confession, and the *Small Catechism* are accepted and confessed, while the others are received and recognized as an elaboration

of the primary ones.

This distinction between the symbols in the *Book of Concord* is apparently not unusual. According to a recent source, the Augsburg Confession remains the basic definition of what it means to be a Lutheran, with the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, and the Formula of Concord explaining, defending or serving as addenda.*

Someone once asked if the AFLC was a confessional Lutheran church body. My reply was yes; the AFLC accepts and teaches all of the Lutheran confessions. If our congregations have a German heritage, a subscription to the whole *Book of Concord* will likely be in their constitutions; if their heritage is Scandinavian, then it may be only the early ones listed above, and we would cordially disagree with those

... it is more likely that we will point you to the Holy Scriptures instead of to any human-made statements.

who insist that only the former are truly confessional Lutherans.

But if you ask us a reason for what we believe, it is more likely that we will point you to the Holy Scriptures instead of to any human-made statements. And that's good, isn't it? Luther would have approved. P.S. The confessions make good devotional reading, too. Try it.

*Robert Kolb and Charles P. Arand, *The Genius of Luther's Theology*, p. 6.

building the base

FINDING GOD'S WILL: THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY PASTOR DAVID JOHNSON

When I began this series on identifying God's will, I shared about a port city that used three lights attached to buoys to aid ships into and out of the harbor. To make it safely into the harbor, you had to keep your ship in line with those three lights. Similarly, God uses three lights to guide Christians safely on their way: His Word, godly counsel, and the inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. We've looked at the first two, and in this column, we will address the third.

Proverbs 3:5-6 offers this wisdom, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

Now some—especially in today's culture—have taken this passage woefully out of context and have made it say something God never intended. They would like you to think that the right path to take is not found in using your head, but in relying on your heart—your feelings. You will hear this application in statements like, "I have to be true to myself and follow my

heart." Or maybe this one, "God wouldn't make me do something, or be someone, that didn't feel right." Or would He?

Years ago, Dr. James Dobson wrote a wonderful little book called *Emotions, Can You Trust Them?* In it, he pointed out that our feelings or emotions are actually fickle things. They can twist the truth and motivate us into all kinds of unwanted and godless directions. That's why following their lead can be such a dangerous thing.

But when guided by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, our inner promptings can be a rich source of unity with Christ, and a valuable tool in following His purposes. As the Scriptures explain:

"I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone," says Numbers 11:17 (read on your own for context).

"Do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say," says Luke 12:11-12.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come," says John 16:13.

Repeatedly, God encourages us that we won't face the challenges of life alone. He has given us His Holy Spirit to speak in and through us, guiding us to both understand and obey what He has commanded. In and of ourselves, our emotions are a weak and fallible guide and not to be trusted. But when we walk with Christ, keeping grounded in His Word, and submit ourselves routinely to the direction of the Holy Spirit, then our hearts can be a source of great comfort and direction. After all, Jesus promised it Himself: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper (the Holy Spirit), that He may be with you forever" (John 14:16).

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