

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 61: Number 4

October 1997

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Melanchthons Briefwechsel. Band T2. Texte 255-520 (1523-1526). Bearbeitet von Richard Wetzels unter Mitwirkung von Helga Scheible. Lowell C. Green

Augustine Confessions: Books I-IV.

Edited by Gillian Clark John G. Nordling

Book Reviews

TESTING THE BOUNDARIES: WINDOWS TO LUTHERAN IDENTITY. By Charles P. Arand. Concordia Scholarship Today. Saint Louis: CPH, 1995. Paper.

Dr. Arand of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has provided a significant resource for the history and theology of the Lutheran Church in the United States in this volume. Well-conceived and broadly sweeping in scope, it describes the variegated manner in which the Lutheran Confessions have—and have not—shaped the doctrine and practice of American Lutheranism. For that reason this volume should grace every Lutheran pastor and student's library, and should also find its way on to the shelves of serious students of the history of Christianity in America. Yet the volume is marred by a problematic methodology that keeps it from being a great book.

After a brief introduction, which considers the nature, characteristics, function and role of the Confessions for the Church, Arand divides the work into two parts, roughly treating the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the first are chapters devoted to the General Synod ("Confessions as Protestant Consensus"), the General Council ("Confessions as Catechesis and Teaching"), the Missouri Synod/Synodical Conference ("Confessions as Doctrinal Norms"), and the Iowa Synod ("Confessions as Historical Decisions"). In the second part he examines the confessional theology of Hamma Divinity School in Wittenberg, Ohio ("Confessions as *Dogmengeschichte*"), the United Lutheran Church in America ("Confessions as Ancient Heirlooms"), and the Missouri Synod ("Confessions as Catholic and Evangelical Witnesses"). Finally, under the broader heading "Confessions as Ecumenical Proposals," he brings the narrative very nearly up to date.

Throughout the volume Arand gives evidence of wide reading on the topic at hand, and the presentations of the material are engaging. The basic question, again, is identity formation, and the extent to which the Confessions have played a formative role in the cultivation of Lutheran confessional identity. To that end, while the chapters are mainly set apart under the various denominational/synodical labels, it is individual theologians who receive the main consideration. This is not a work of "Church History" per se. Nor is it even technically a work of "historical theology." Rather, it lies in that difficult middle realm, the nether region between systematic theology and historical theology. Arand himself argues that the book is "more systematic than historical" (page 19). The questions raised belong properly to

the realm of dogmatic/systematic thought. Methodologically, though, Arand tends simply to describe the process in and through which the ideas were generated, lived, died, and even lived again in new form. At the same time, though, there is the playing out of these questions in the day to day life of the Church – certainly a “Church History” sort of issue (for example, Missouri’s criticism of the General Council’s failure to put its theology into practice, pages 100-102). Which is all to say that Arand has taken upon himself a very difficult task at which to succeed.

Still, succeed he does – at least in part. The strongest chapter of the book is the one on nineteenth-century Missouri (pages 87-118). This careful and very satisfying treatment of Walther weaves primary and secondary sources together seamlessly, while offering an engaging vista of what unconditional confessional subscription has to offer in defining and maintaining true Lutheran identity. For Walther there was no mere abstract theology divorced from the life of the Church. Arand appropriately notes, “what mattered most is not the official position of a synod, but the practice, the sermons, and the teaching at the congregational level” (page 102). This point should be noted by all members of the LCMS, particularly its ministerium, for, I am convinced, the Synod at present occupies a place similar to that of the General Council of a century ago – solidly confessional on paper, yet wildly varying in congregational practice. It was only a matter of time before the rigorous confessional theology of the General Council was overcome by laxity in practice. Will Missouri learn a lesson from this past?

One of the reasons this chapter succeeds so well is that this is one of the few places where Arand actually makes some interpretive claims. One of the least appealing characteristics about this volume is its primarily descriptive character. Certainly it is the task of the historian to describe his subject matter and to examine and present the evidence. Yet good historical writing also assesses that evidence. Historical theology in particular offers the opportunity to make interpretive claims. So, while his subjects “tested the boundaries” of what it meant to be Lutheran, Arand consistently fails to appraise whether or not his subjects passed that test. In many ways the subtitle says it all, “Windows to Lutheran Identity.” Arand is on the outside looking in, merely describing the contours of confessional adherence. He unfortunately misses the opportunity for a more comprehensive evaluation of the lessons of history for the future of Lutheranism in America.

Arand rightly notes that “the question of Lutheran identity has always been tied to its confessional writings, perhaps more so than any theological tradition that emerged from the 16th-century Reformation” (page 264). He continues, “people need to find their roots in order to have a mooring or an internal compass to find their way through an increasingly confusing, ambiguous, and pluralistic world. The same is all the more true within the church” (page 265). Yet, when one finishes this volume, one is left hanging, wondering what it is that distinguishes true Lutheranism, on the one hand, and, on the other, at what point one ceases to be Lutheran. We are offered a pluralism of positions on confessional subscription, a panorama of options as to what it means to be a Lutheran. Does Arand have an answer? In the end he merely encourages “taking the Confessions along on our journey through Scripture” (page 266). Surely the Confessions can serve more concretely and edifyingly than that in the midst of the late twentieth-century American religious smorgasbord!

Aside from this methodological criticism, one must also note the failure of the editors to purge the several typographical (pages 212, 214, 248), grammatical (pages 128, 175), and factual problems (pages 54, 68, 198), as well as errors and inconsistencies in footnotes (page 82, note 71; page 132, notes 49 and 50). At one point Arand cites the same passage twice within a few pages, certainly an odd thing to do (pages 188, 195). Further, at times Arand’s arguments seem to contradict one another. For example, at one point he states that “Eastern Lutherans had haltingly, but gradually moved away from the American Lutheranism of S. S. Schmucker toward a more rigorous confessionalism . . .” (page 151). Yet, what he gives with one hand he quickly takes back with another. In assessing the Hamma type of confessionalism he writes, “Upon closer inspection, it can be seen that, despite moving farther than Schmucker towards a greater appreciation and acknowledgment of the entire corpus of confessional writings, the confessionalism they adopted reveals much in common with that of Schmucker” (page 179). Which option shall we adopt?

In spite of these criticisms — and they are *substantive* — it remains this reviewer’s opinion that Arand has provided an asset to the Church. It is the mark of good scholarship that it raises serious points of discussion — *Testing the Boundaries* does just that. Hopefully this book will find its way on to the reading lists of many

of America's Lutheran pastors, so that Arand's desire can be achieved and "the Confessions can guide theological thought in a way that does not result in the church being tossed 'to and fro' by every theological or ideological wind of the day" (page 266).

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MELANCHTHONS BRIEFWECHSEL. Band T2. Texte 255-520 (1523-1526). Bearbeitet von Richard Wetzel unter Mitwirkung von Helga Scheible. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995.

MELANCHTHONS BRIEFWECHSEL. Band 8. Regesten 8072-9301 (1557-1560). Bearbeitet von Heinz Scheible and Walter Thüringer. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1995.

The first section of *Melanchthons Briefwechsel* has now been finished, consisting in eight volumes of the *Regesten*, or critical introductory comments. These volumes were published before the texts of the letters themselves in order to deal with the problems of names, dates, and places in the letters. The findings in these volumes are indispensable to the serious Melanchthon scholar, but also shed much light on Luther and other reformers, as well as humanism generally in northern Europe.

Why was it important to provide a new edition of Melanchthon's letters? The reason is that the correspondence of Philip Melanchthon, as edited by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider and published in the *Corpus Reformatorum*, volumes 1-10 (Halle: C. A. Schwetschke & Son, 1834-1842), had preceded the advent of modern historical criticism and the material was often unreliable and in need of a thorough revision. Many important letters had been overlooked or omitted altogether, many items were wrongly dated or incorrectly named, and much of the material suffered from inadequate description.

Within a few years *Corpus Reformatorum's* appearance, many letters that had been excluded appeared in books and journal articles, as well as in the volumes of the *Supplementa Melanchthoniana*. Although several volumes of letters were planned for *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* (edited by Robert Stupperich, 1952 and following), only volume seven appeared (in two parts), and the edition was not completed.

This is not to say, however, that the material in *MBW* is exhaustive. For example, if one compares the very first letter offered, *MBWT2:27*

with the edition of the same letter in *Melanchthons Werke, Studienausgabe* (edited by Hans Volz [Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971], 183-185), one finds that Volz provides thirty-six lines of very important commentary, compared to a meager ten lines in *MBW*. A similar comparison with the same letter in *Corpus Reformatorum* 1:597 shows that Bretschneider only provided two lines with a total of nine words.

Volume T2 presents the correspondence of Melanchthon in the crucial Reformational years of 1523-1526. Letters from others to Melanchthon include the names Camerarium, Erasmus, Öcolampadius, Paracelsus, Pirckheimer, Schenkfeld, and Spalatin, just to provide a sampling. Letters by Melanchthon are addressed to such notables as Johannes Agricola, Billicanus, Thomas Blarer, Simon Grynäus, Lang, Link, Moibanus, Schleupner, and Speratus, among many more.

In volume eight, Heinz Scheible and his associates have brought a wealth of knowledge to their projects. Scheible himself is a better historian than theologian. Confessional Lutherans should be aware that he is a member of the Union Church and that he shows little interest in Confessional Lutheran issues. His allegiance is to the liberal theology of Karl Holl, with its interpretation of Luther's doctrine of justification as inner renewal rather than forensic declaration. His theological reviews are, of course, reflected in his comments. Regarding the Lord's Supper, he represents the position of the Leuenberg Concord, which established pulpit and altar fellowship among the Luther, Reformed, and United Churches of Germany. This becomes noticeable in the treatment of the controversial correspondence of Melanchthon with Elector Friedrich III of the Palatinate on November 1, 1559, consisting of a letter to Friedrich and an "Opinion" on how to deal with the sacramental controversy between the Gnesio Lutheran, Heshusen, and his Reformed opponent, Kebitz. The treatment of this episode (*MBW* 8:408) is sketchy and disappointing. The matter is crucial for the history of the Confessions, however, because Melanchthon in his "Opinion" did not support Heshusen, who represented the strict Lutheran position, but suggested expelling both Heshusen and Klebitz from Heidelberg. Elector Frederick III followed Melanchthon's advice. Later he officially converted to Calvinism and banned the Lutheran Church in his territory.

The editors provide some very fine indices: a listing of the writers of the letters, of the recipients, and also of correspondence exchanged between others than Melanchthon, an index of biblical references, a register of names, authors, and works prior to 1500, and a similar listing after 1500. These indices are exceedingly useful and very much enhance the value of the edition.

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AUGUSTINE CONFESSIONS: BOOKS I-IV. Edited by Gillian Clark. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995. x and 198 pages.

I have a *confession* to make: I had read only small amounts of ecclesiastical Latin before this review, and virtually nothing by St. Augustine himself. This is reprehensible, though not surprising: many classicists remain unfamiliar with "late" Latin. Clark prepared this edition to help just such people (vii). Augustine's Latin fluctuates considerably, resembling now the Psalms of Jerome's Vulgate, now the highly-wrought prose of Cicero, now Virgil's *Aeneid*, now a snatch of Plotinus' philosophy. What binds everything together is a narrative in which Augustine looks back upon his earlier life of forty-three years and begs God's forgiveness. This personal, self-reflective tone (which Clark calls a "one-sided conversation with God," page 8) marks a departure from earlier, more detached styles of classical discourse.

Any Christian can identify with Augustine's life experiences, which he pours forth freely before God and the rest of humankind. He seems to have experienced a completely wretched childhood, crying too fiercely at the pap (*uberibus inhiabam plorans*, 1.7.11), and uttered his first prayers to God in hopes of avoiding beatings from violent teachers at school (*ne in schola vapularem*, I.9.14). The path to worldly success lay through acquiring a classical education and an ability to sway audiences through public oratory. Augustine excelled at these endeavors, and even enjoyed them, yet complained that he learned vice through the classics (1.16.26). He wept at Dido and Aeneas' love affair (1.13.21), yet came to despise the Holy Scriptures as inferior to Cicero (3.5.9). During a boisterous boyhood Augustine once joined young friends in pillaging a pear tree-only to throw its fruit to pigs, rather than eat and enjoy the fruits of their sin

(2.4.9). By age sixteen Augustine was "in exile from the delights of Thy [God's] house" (*exulabam a deliciis domus tuae*, 2.2.4). Instead, he was "on fire to be satiated with hell" (*exarsi . . . satiari inferis*, 2.1.1) – that is, he had come of age sexually. Now he competed with his fellows not only in actual sexual conquests but in boasting about them (2.3.7). Theatrical performances (3.2.2) so greatly inflamed Augustine's lusts that he once tried to consummate a love affair within the very walls of a church (3.3.5). An encounter with Cicero's *Hortensius* when he was eighteen pushed Augustine off in a different direction: toward the pursuit of wisdom (3.4.7). This infatuation, however, appears to have made Augustine ripe for Manichaeism, which entrapped him for nine years (4.1.1). The full story of Augustine's loss of enthusiasm for that sect, the impact of Ambrose's preaching at Milan, and the eventual return of Augustine to Christianity does not occur until the fifth book; book four concludes with Augustine's grief at the death of an unnamed friend (4.4.7-9). Manichaean beliefs brought Augustine no consolation at the time, yet he learned from this death to fix his soul on God (4.11.16), not on beauty, friendship, or any created thing.

Thus, Clark's edition covers Augustine's childhood, student days, and the beginning of his teaching career. The editors hope that readers will "find it impossible to stop [here]," but go on and read all thirteen books of the *Confessions* (vii). Clark has prepared a twenty-five page introduction which explains Augustine's life history, the genre and style of the *Confessions*, the philosophical and theological concerns of late antiquity (Manichaeism, Platonism, Christianity), and the manuscript tradition. The Latin text appears (pages 29 and following), along with a commentary (pages 84-189), which follows text divisions into book, chapter, and paragraph. Clark proceeds by paragraph, providing first an overview of the whole, then explicates those Latin phrases that are most deserving of comment. In this way he brings together the parallel texts (biblical and otherwise) with which Augustine was engaged, and includes the insights of modern scholars whose literature he compiles in the bibliography (pages 190-193). Two brief indices (Latin words and general) conclude the volume.

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