

For the

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Confessions in a Non-Confessional World - p.4

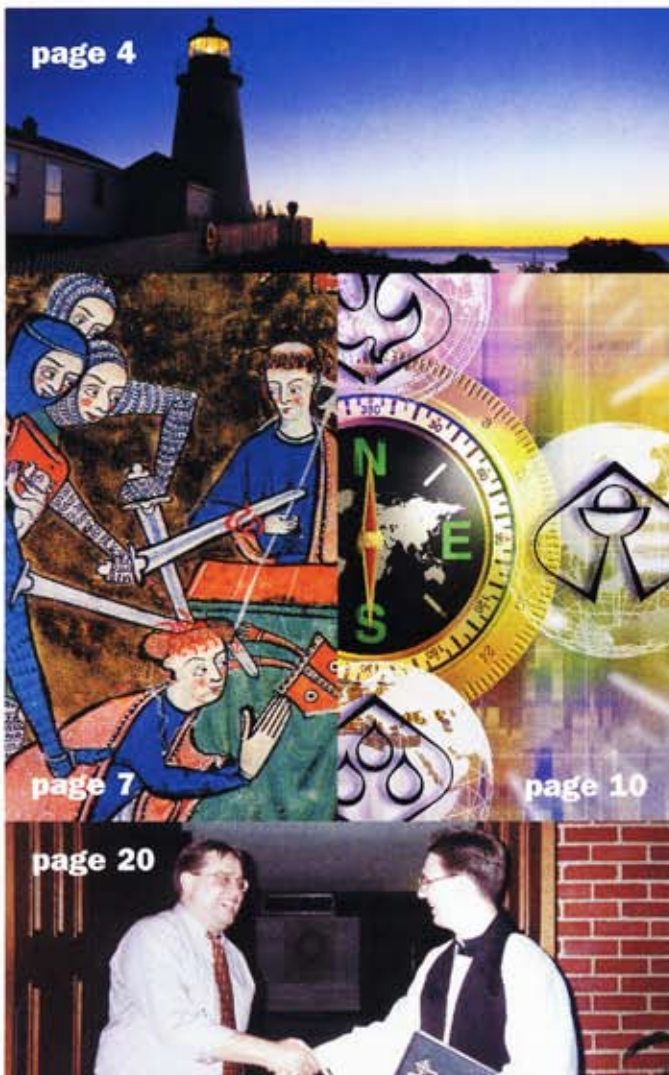
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By Dr. Max Kiesling, Member of Crown of Life Lutheran Church, San Antonio, Tex.

We are living in an increasingly “non-confessional” world. It is a reality that has a strong hold on society at large, and is increasingly afflicting the Christian church. As Christians, our foundational beliefs should be defined and understood first, followed by the proclamation of those beliefs in the world around us. To reverse this process by letting our daily contact with the world influence our foundational beliefs would be dangerous, if not fatal.

7 **On the Councils and the Church: Luther on Reform, Government, and Institutions of the Church**

By the Rev. Prof. Roland F. Ziegler, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

There was never an age where the church was unanimous, where there was no strife and struggle, where everybody lived in peace and harmony. Reading the New Testament shows us congregations loaded with problems. Any study of church history gives us a picture of a church in distress. And how else could it be in this world, in this age, where sin is still here, where the devil still tries to destroy God’s holy Church through false doctrine and temptation to a sinful life?

10 **The “Marks” of the Church**

By the Rev. Dr. Kurt E. Marquart, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

The marks of the Church mean that we are to be guided by faith, not by sight, in dealing with the church. In the church, it is above all truth and truth alone that counts—not numbers or prestige or pleasant relations. Where the Gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are rightly administered, there Christ’s Church is rightly and properly represented.

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Confession in a Non-Confessional

Over recent decades, countless hours have been spent by talk-show hosts, sociologists, religious leaders, and the like discussing a variety of trends that have shaped, and continue to shape, the world in which we live: relativism, secularism, revisionism, antitheism, humanism, pragmatism . . . just to name a few. Despite the energy that has been spent over the years, there is no agreement about the nature or magnitude of the impact that the trends have on the fabric of our communities, our religious practices, or our basic ideologies.

One thing that is clear, however, is that there is a strong correlation between the prevalence of these trends and the underlying desire of people to attain a level of individualism sufficient to insulate themselves from the moral compass of others. The unwritten rule that seems to drive this quest for autonomy is that one individual's values should not be influenced by the values of another person or organization. The only time that violation of this rule is allowed is when one person selects

fragments of other ideological systems that are pleasing to oneself, assembles and cements them together like a mosaic, and adopts the new creation as one's own personal morality. The unavoidable result of this hyper-individualism is an increasing resistance to be attached to an organized body, particularly one that has a strongly defined set of beliefs or moral code. And it follows that individuals are decreasingly vocal about their own moral code or personal beliefs, opting instead for the comfort of simply keeping one's ideas and opinions to oneself.

In short, we are living in an increasingly "non-confessional" world. It is a reality that has a stronghold on society-at-large, and is increasingly afflicting the Christian church.

SSIONS

ssional World

By Max Kiesling

My family and I recently worshipped at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas. Architectural aspects of the church, among other things, were remarkable. There—centered in an otherwise nondescript section of the city—towered a church that clearly and boldly proclaimed “this is a house of God.” As recorded in their dedication ceremony booklet, the congregation adopted a resolution at the inception of the planning process that the sanctuary be one “whose external appearance and internal arrangement distinctively express our firm commitment to the doctrinal heritage of the Lutheran Church and are consistent with architectural expressions of that theology in historic Lutheran Church buildings in the United States and Europe.” The building was to be “an embodiment of that which we believe about God, His people, and their interaction in the Divine Service.” The resulting eight-sided sanctuary that was completed last year has multiple balconies that allow the entire congregation to be intimately involved in the worship service. The pulpit/altar is centrally located in the sanctuary, just as the Word and Sacrament should be the means of grace around which a congregation gathers. The baptismal font, equipped with constantly flowing water,

is located in the center aisle, near the entrance of the sanctuary. In this way, it serves as a constant reminder of the way in which we were all brought into God’s family. Clearly, this was a church that, very intentionally, wanted its beliefs and theology clearly proclaimed through its architecture. In this way, it was a “confessional” church in an increasingly non-confessional world.

As a facility planner, I was particularly impressed with how the congregation formed such a clear vision first and then fulfilled the vision through the design and construction process. As a Christian, I was reminded and challenged that the same order should be followed in my own spiritual life, that is, my foundational beliefs should be defined and understood first, followed by the proclamation of those beliefs in the world around me. To reverse this process by letting my daily contact with the world influence my foundational beliefs would be dangerous, if not fatal. Ravi Zacharias, a brilliant modern-day Christian apologist, illustrates this point with an amusing story of touring a new deconstructionist arts building at Ohio State University. According to Zacharias:

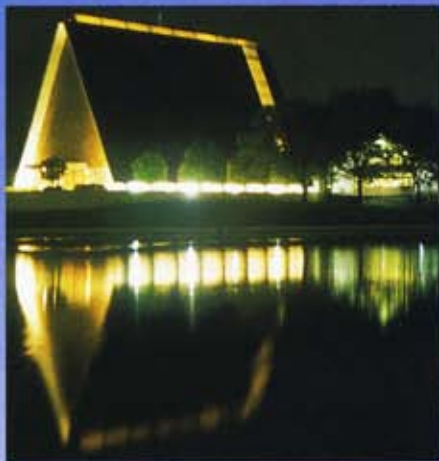
Its white scaffolding, red brick turrets, and Colorado grass pods

evoke a double take. But puzzlement only intensifies when you enter the building, for inside you encounter stairways that go nowhere, pillars that hang from the ceiling without purpose, and angled surfaces configured to create a sense of vertigo. The architect, we are duly informed, designed this building to reflect life itself—senseless and incoherent—and the “capriciousness of the rules that organize the built world.” When the rationale was explained to me, I had just one question: Did he do the same thing with the foundation?!

Zacharias’ question makes a simple but poignant point: that the foundation must be designed and constructed properly in order to support the structure, regardless of the message that the structure itself ultimately proclaims. With respect to our spiritual lives, his point begs an additional question: On what foundation have we built our spiritual lives? In other words, what do we confess as Lutherans? A brief answer to these questions follow:

The confessional article of the constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states

that “the Synod and every member of the Synod accepts without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice,” and all the writings in the *Book of Concord* as “a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God.”²



By repeatedly studying our confessional beliefs, and more importantly God's Word upon which the Confessions themselves are based, we will always know that it is God's action that saves us, not our actions, as the world may teach. We will not be driven into despair when we see our sin, but rather rest in the assurance of His grace and, in so doing, gain strength to perform good works out of thankfulness for His gift. We will not trivialize the Sacrament by being led to a belief that God Himself is not truly present in, with, and under the elements.

Robert Preus describes confessionalism as “a solemn act . . . in which I willingly and in the fear of God confess my faith and declare to the world what is my belief, teaching, and confession.”³ Thus, being confessional means that we must stand in stark contrast to the prevailing winds of society by voluntarily and without reservation pledging ourselves to something that clearly defines what we believe, teach, and confess to be accurate and timelessly true. It means that we must have the boldness to state—whether privately to a friend or publicly to society as a whole—exactly what it is that we believe, even when the beliefs are politically incorrect or unpopular. It means that we must prominently set stakes that not only define what our beliefs are, but the principles that underpin the beliefs themselves. It doesn't mean that we attempt to force it upon other Christians or non-Christians and alienate those who disagree, but rather that we hold fast to what we believe and lovingly share it with those around us.

For confessionalism to become more than just an academic exercise, we must become so firmly rooted in our confes-

sional beliefs that we cannot be swayed by the tides of popular culture. We do this by repeatedly studying our confessional beliefs, and more importantly God's Word upon which the Confessions themselves are based. We will then be better able to test the spirits, resist the false teachings of the world, and “fix our

eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). In so doing, we will always know that it is God's action that saves us, not our actions, as the world may teach. We will not be driven into despair when we see our sin, but rather rest in the assurance of His grace and, in so doing, gain strength to perform good works out of thankfulness for His gift. We will not trivialize the Sacrament by being led to a belief that God Himself is not truly present in, with, and under the elements.

I am reminded of the fatal flight of John F. Kennedy, Jr. in 1999. After investigating the accident, the National Transportation Safety Board concluded that the cause of the accident was “spatial disorientation” caused by Kennedy's inexperience in flying during low visibility conditions. Under such conditions, a pilot must rely almost exclusively on the instruments in the cockpit for guidance. Without being trained to fly with eyes fixed on the instrument panel rather than the environment outside the aircraft, a pilot can easily become disoriented and lose control of an aircraft with tragic results. Similarly, if we are captured in unfamiliar territory or tempted by the world without having a navigational system upon which to fix our eyes, then we, too, can become disoriented and led astray.

There remains one very important challenge for each of us. Simply put, we must be certain that every member of the LCMS is educated about the documents that are included in the Lutheran Confessions and, more importantly, that we all understand theological issues that are summarized in the Confessions. Then, and only then, will we each be able to honestly pledge ourselves to the Confessions as “true and correct expositions of Scripture.” Then, and only then, will we be able to make a bold confession in the midst of a non-confessional world. May God grant us the guidance and the strength to do exactly that!

¹ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Word Publishing, 1994), p. 21.

² Taken from the LCMS Constitution, Article II, as reported on the LCMS website, <http://www.lcms.org/intro/lcms.html>

³ Robert Preus, “Confessional Subscription” from the Lutheran Congress, August 31-September 2, 1970.

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