

CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
QUARTERLY

CTQ

Volume 57: Number 3

JULY 1993

Hymnody as Teacher of the Faith
Richard C. Resch 161

The Origin and Meaning of Εὐαγγέλιον
in the Pauline Corpus
Andrew J. Spallek 177

A Review of "A Common Calling"
The Department of Systematic Theology of
Concordia Theological Seminary 191

Books Received 214

Book Reviews 215



A Review of "A Common Calling"

Editorial Note: In March of 1992 the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations produced a report entitled "A Common Calling: The Witness of Our Reformation Churches in North America Today." In a letter of 15 October 1992 Dr. Alvin L. Barry, President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod requested the departments of systematic theology of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne and Concordia Seminary in St. Louis to evaluate this report and its ecclesiastical significance. The Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary adopted such an evaluation on 29 January 1993, and on 13 March its members met in Terre Haute with the corresponding department of its sister-seminary, which had by then also formulated an evaluation. In the course of the joint meeting the two departments discussed and endorsed both of the aforesaid evaluations and adopted a common summarizing response addressed to the president of the synod. Two days later, on 15 March, the secretary of the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary dispatched, then, to the synodical president its individual evaluation of "A Common Calling" in conjunction with an appropriate covering letter. In accordance with subsequently agreed arrangements as to publication, the following four documents are hereby presented to the readers of the *Concordia Theological Quarterly*: (1.) the presidential letter of 15 October 1992, (2.) the common summarizing response of 13 March 1993, (3.) the departmental covering letter of 15 March 1993, and (4.) the review of "A Common Calling" officially adopted on 29 January 1993 by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary. [The Editors.]

I. The Presidential Letter of 15 October 1992

The Office of the President
The International Center
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
St. Louis, Missouri
October 15, 1992

Dr. John F. Johnson
Dr. Robert D. Preus
Dr. Michael Stelmachowicz

Dear Brothers in Christ:

As you are aware, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has accepted a report from the Lutheran-Reformed Committee in regard to full communion between the ELCA and three other Reformed church bodies in America. No doubt you are also aware of the very serious consequences such proposed full communion will have for our relationship with the ELCA.

Since the Commission on Theology and Church Relations is busily engaged in a host of other important activities, I would like to request that you gentlemen assign the task of responding to this statement to your respective departments of systematic theology. I would very much appreciate it if each of your systematics departments prepares a formal response. I would like to receive a response no later than February 1993. I would respectfully suggest that the following points be considered:

- (1.) In light of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, is this document a faithful application of our historic Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper? Provide full documentation from Scripture, confessions, and our church history to demonstrate any conclusion reached in this regard.
- (2.) If accepted by the ELCA, what would this proposal mean in regard to the identity of the ELCA as a "Lutheran" church body? To what extent is Lutheran identity normed and formed by the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, particularly in light of the Formula of Concord?
- (3.) What consequences would this proposal have, if accepted, in regard to the relationship between the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America? What consequences would the proposal, if accepted, have for issues such as closed communion and other related pastoral concerns?

Alvin L. Barry

II. The Common Response of 13 March 1993

The systematics departments of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, have reviewed

each other's documents and agree to the theological substance of the other's. In addition, in our meeting of 13 March 1993 at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Terre Haute, Indiana, we discussed large matters which lie behind the document ["A Common Calling"].

The ACC approaches the church mainly as a socio-historical community. The means of grace are not primary in defining the church as in Augsburg Confession VII. The historic confessions appear to be the transient expressions of the faith of the respective communities and not a summary and exposition of the divinely-given Scriptures. The ACC assumes the Reformation faith as a socio-religious phenomenon of which the Lutheran and Reformed confessions were complementary expressions.

In summary, we wish to point out that the ACC uses the Lutheran Confessions in a way that is in conflict with their self-understanding. Thus, the Book of Concord as a faithful witness to the life-giving truth of God's word is lost. What is finally important about this is not merely that the truth is lost, but that in losing the truth salvation is lost.

III. The Departmental Letter of 15 March 1993

Department of Systematic Theology
Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana
March 15, 1993

President A. L. Barry
The International Center
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear President Barry:

Your letter of 15 October 1992 asked the systematics departments of both seminaries to offer written reviews of "A Common Calling" for your use. Enclosed please find the review which was produced by our systematics department. This review document was adopted by our own department on 29 January 1993.

On 13 March 1993 the systematics departments of both seminaries

met for a joint evaluation of "A Common Calling," and we are in agreement regarding it. We studied both reviews and we support each review's observations and conclusions. A summary cover letter was composed at the March 13 meeting, and this will be submitted on behalf of both departments by the St. Louis systematics department.

We deeply appreciate the opportunity to participate in the theological labors undertaken by our synod, and we will gladly respond to any similar requests you may wish to forward to us. May the Lord continue to bless your work and give you wisdom as you counsel with the dialogue participants.

Sincerely,
Alan Borcharding,
Secretary

IV. The Opinion of the Department of Systematic Theology

As a matter of our scriptural and confessional principles, we commend the efforts of Christians to reach consensus and unity among themselves. At the same time the results of inter-Christian dialogue require close examination.¹ This is especially true when two church traditions, such as the Lutheran and the Reformed, have for more than four centuries defined their respective positions in distinction to the other. Their positions on christology, baptism, the Lord's Supper, sanctification, and election have not only been noticeably different, but each has used the other as antithesis in explaining its own position. As official representatives of their churches, the framers of ACC ["A Common Calling"] offer the "unanimous recommendation" that on the basis of this document "full communion" be established between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ (63). With a stroke of the pen the obstacles which each denominational tradition saw in the other are removed.

As striking as this proposal is to Lutherans in the United States, this is not a new phenomenon for either tradition. Lutherans and the Reformed were by governmental decree joined into what is common-

ly known as the Prussian Union in 1817. Many Lutherans left Germany for America and Australia to escape this union and to maintain their Lutheran identity. As this is part of the heritage of both the ELCA and the LCMS, this matter is not to be lightly considered, as it, in effect, passes a judgment on our fathers. More recently the remaining Lutheran churches in Germany were brought together with this Prussian Union by the Leuenberg Concord. The explicitly Reformed churches also were part of the agreement. The Leuenberg Concord is favorably cited by the ACC, and much of the ACC argumentation depends on it. We offer these historical references not to excuse ourselves from seriously considering the ACC proposal, but to obligate ourselves to a careful review of the arguments offered for fellowship between Lutheran and Reformed church bodies in the United States. We cannot escape the significance of our history and our fathers who shaped it. To do otherwise would be to trivialize the personal sacrifices upon which our Lutheran church in America is built.

Several approaches are open to us in reviewing this kind of document. So that our review can be as accessible as possible, we are posing three analytical questions to determine whether these actions bringing American Lutheran and Reformed churches together are justified. (1.) Are the ELCA and the Reformed bodies as close to one another as the ACC claims? That will be determined by each church body according to their established procedures for ratifying such actions. Each church without interference from any other church determines its own procedures in resolving this or any matter. The LCMS honors this principle, as others do in regard to us. (2.) Is the conclusion reached by the ACC supported by the theological explanations offered in the document itself? Are the theological reasons for fellowship between the Lutherans and the Reformed really convincing? Every theological document invites this scrutiny. (3.) Does the theology of ACC agree with the theology of Scripture and the Lutheran symbols when it recommends fellowship between these churches? As mentioned, we cannot involve ourselves in the decisions of others churches, but we must make a decision for ourselves. If necessary, we shall raise a confessional witness. Nothing less can be expected of a confessional church. For what other reasons do we have confessions at all? As stated, questions 2

and 3 will provide the outline for our response.

Confessional Commitment and Ecclesial Diversity (II)

The fundamental understanding of ACC that the confessions are not regarded as doctrinal statements is quite striking, since we have traditionally understood them to be doctrinal statements. This is presupposed by the oath to the confessions required in the constitutions of our congregations and the ordination vows of our pastors. We have insisted that this vow be made *quia*; that is, the confessions are binding because they are a correct exposition of the word of God.

The Authority of the "Story"

The confessions are seen by the ACC as the stories of their respective communities. They are a history of what our respective communities have believed and not definitive doctrinal statements correctly reflecting the Scriptures. The idea that the Lutheran Confessions are authoritative doctrinal documents with authority derived and dependent (*norma normata*) on the Holy Scriptures (*norma normans*) is simply not an item. Considering the confessions as "our story" can be described as a kind of narrative theology. Confessions are understood not in relation to the Scriptures, but the community. This approach in handling confessions as stories of each religious community is not explicitly stated in the ACC, but characterizes the entire document.² It is self-evident that the ancient creeds as well as the sixteenth-century confessions were produced by the church. The problem is that ACC sees their value as a derivative of the community's life of faith. This approach allows and assumes that the confessions are adjustable as the community changes. Allowing doctrines to change according to the circumstances of the community makes them, in effect, what we have called *adiaphora* (Formula of Concord-Solid Declaration X:9).³ Under the ACC view, changing circumstances permit and even demand that we change our confessions.

Complementary Correctives

In the Lutheran-Reformed proposals we are dealing now with a theory of "complementary correctives"; that is, each community

offers a feature which the other lacks or has kept undeveloped. Presuming that confessions are texts of religious communities reflecting what each community believes at a given time and place, Lutherans and Reformed have something to offer each other. This idea of complementary correctives applies especially to how Lutherans and the Reformed understand their official doctrinal documents. Thus we are dealing with a root and not a peripheral problem. How we understand doctrine, doctrinal statements, and confessions determines the framework for all that we believe.

ACC acknowledges the different approaches taken by the Lutheran and Reformed to their confessional documents. Whereas Lutherans emphasize the permanent nature of their confessions, the Reformed are more likely to emphasize the "shaping role" of the community (23). Each religious community, in the judgment of ACC, requires the corrective activity of the other.⁴ Our preliminary judgment is that the ACC favors the Reformed approach. These documents may have historical value to tell us what people once believed, but they do not state permanent truths. Thus, from the start ACC regards both the Lutheran and Reformed communities and their confessional documents as substandard, requiring the complementary correctives of the other for a fuller expression of the truth. By acceding to this assumption, the Lutherans have, in effect, surrendered not only their understanding of their confessions as permanent statements of the truth, but also the claims which these confessions make for themselves as authoritative doctrine derived from the Scriptures as the word of God. This idea of authoritative doctrine simply does not come into play in ACC.

The ACC approach presupposes that doctrines are constantly developed by the church in its context as it reengages its historic texts. This is precisely Schleiermacher's understanding of church confessions, as he was able to develop his dogmatics from citations from Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican confessions in the way similar to the one suggested by the ACC. Thus, when we call the ACC approach new, we mean that it is new to us, but not to the vast Protestant world which, with Schleiermacher, sees theology as a community product. By contrast, the LCMS requires that our churches conform their teaching and practice to the Scriptures and

the fixed doctrinal content of the historic texts of the Lutheran Confessions. For the LCMS these confessional texts have more than sociological value because they are statements of divine truth. Clearly this is not the approach of the ACC.

In its theory of complementary correctives ACC relies on a philosophical theory of interpretation. It assumes that texts, including religious documents, are the language of a specific historical community. Basing the ACC upon a current epistemological theory of text and community is problematic, since it mandates sweeping and probably irreversible changes on the mere authority of today's theory. Thus, the fundamental basis from which the ACC operates is open to question, since it arbitrarily picks one of several possible theories for understanding religious documents and provides no theological justification for this procedure.

It is again apparent that the flexibility of local custom operative under the principle of *adiaphora* has been presumed by ACC to apply to doctrine. This model is probably rooted in the "cultural-linguistic" theory of doctrine launched by George Lindbeck.⁵ It would have been helpful if the authors of ACC had clarified their relationship to the originators of such theological and philosophical theories. The ACC authors could hardly suggest that a particular philosophy be raised to the level of dogma, for others would have the right to offer other theories for understanding religious documents. The end result is that we could be left at sea with any number of competing philosophical theories and any idea of confessional subscription is lost. The ACC approach to interpreting the confessions supposes that the meaning and not merely the application of the historic confessional texts is contained in how the reader's religious consciousness interacts with the text.⁶ Quite bluntly, each person's reaction to the confessions and not their original historical settings determines their meaning. To be fair, the ACC limits the acceptable reactions to the Lutheran and Reformed communities, but this is arbitrary. Given the ACC principles, why not open the discussion first to Roman Catholicism and then to non-Christian religions for their reactions? With this approach confessions become merely what certain people believe at a given time without any absolute claims to the truth. Applying this theory to the

Apostles' or Nicene Creeds would be devastating.

Satis Est

Ordinarily it would be important to fine-tune the concept of *satis est* beyond what is hinted at (26-28). This is especially so in defining what is meant by "gospel." For a long time in Lutheran circles debate has centered in whether *satis est* of Augustana VII ("it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the gospel is preached") refers to the totality of Christian doctrine or only to the Second Article, *id est*, the "simple" news that Christ died for sins. An analysis of ACC shows the most fundamental step, genuine agreement on the definition of the gospel in the narrow sense, has simply not been reached. When the definition of the gospel in the narrow sense has been agreed upon, clearly and in print, then it will be time to discuss the scope of agreement needed for union.⁷

The Condemnations (III.1)

ACC repeatedly declares that the historic condemnations between the Lutherans and the Reformed no longer divide their church bodies. Indeed, the representatives of those four denominations certainly have the right and perhaps the duty to come to this conclusion and make it publicly known, if they find that the evidence warrants it. Likewise the LCMS has a similar obligation in stating its conclusions after its theologians have examined the evidence brought together in the ACC. We can say now that the LCMS cannot agree that evidence put forth by the ELCA authors warrants the conclusion that the condemnations should be withdrawn.

Sixteenth-Century Lutheran Condemnations

ACC repeatedly makes the point that Protestant churches, since they lack a counterpart to Roman Catholic canon law, have no formal procedure for anathematizing false doctrine and similarly Protestant churches lack a clear procedure for lifting condemnations (29, 31, 32).⁸ If our procedures are compared to the Roman and Orthodox churches with their popes, patriarchs, and councils, this is obviously true. But theologians with once unacceptable opinions have changed their opinions and been accepted by Lutherans. The

impression cannot be given that some churches because of previous opinions are thereby permanently condemned. For example, the alliance of the earliest Wisconsin Synod with a non-Lutheran church in Germany was changed and it entered into the Synodical Conference. The purpose of LCMS participation in dialogues is to come to agreement on as many issues as possible with other churches, even where total agreement is not reached. Certainly in this sense condemnations can be removed.

In addition, ACC makes too much of the point that the early (1529-1537) Lutheran confessional documents preceding the Formula of Concord do not often condemn non-Lutheran groups by name. The catechisms were to instruct the unlearned in the rudiments of Lutheran theology, and thus one could hardly expect that the names of adversaries would be listed and their positions refuted. Luther's Large Catechism was originally a series of sermons, and the Small Catechism had devotional as well as doctrinal purposes. The Augsburg Confession and its Apology were intended to show points of agreement and disagreement with respect to the papal church, while the Smalcald Articles were to define the Lutheran position with respect to an anticipated council, and the Treatise was to clarify the Lutheran stance regarding the papacy and its bishops. Nonetheless, matters concerning other churches are addressed.

Unless the Roman Catholic party understood themselves as addressed in these confessions, they would not have responded formally with the Confutation of the Augsburg Confession. In turn Melancthon would not have further responded with the Apology and Treatise. Each party knew it was being addressed. This was the very reason for these confessional documents.

It is small wonder the ACC authors could find few formal anathemas against Reformed theological positions in the pre-1577 Lutheran Confessions. But this point should not be conceded too soon. Note should be made of this phrase in Augustana X: "The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected." This was specifically directed against the Reformed position on the Lord's Supper, because the Lutherans were interested in not antagonizing the Roman Catholics on the Lord's Supper (Apology X) and distanced themselves as far as possible from the Reformed. The importance of this

anonymous condemnation in Augustana X is seen in that Melancthon removed it from the infamous *Variata*, so not to offend the Reformed. Subsequent history demonstrates that the *Variata* served this purpose well. The *Variata*, without a condemnation of the Reformed, was favored by the Reformed and the Lutherans looking for accommodation with each other. The Reformed knew very well that they were singled out in Augustana X, even if their name was not spelled out.

The ACC engages in the questionable and annoying procedure of counting anathemas to ascertain the permissibility of union. This procedure has no more validity than expounding biblical theology by counting words. It can be called a kind of "confessional fundamentalism."

ACC's treatment of the condemnations in the Formula of Concord is similarly troublesome. It implies that the anathemas of the Council of Trent precipitated the condemnations found in the Formula of Concord (31). Also it claims that such condemnations were related to the need of territorial laws (presumably under *cuius regio eius religio*) to define religious boundaries (32). To put it kindly, the former assertion is unprovable and the latter is demonstrably false. It is well known that the political aspect of the Formula came from the rulers' desire for peace among their subjects by settling numerous theological controversies. No serious scholar of the history leading up to the Formula of Concord would assert that the desire of the states and princes to define their territories was the cause for rejecting Reformed theology. Later, when the Prussian and Saxon princes embraced the Reformed or Roman Catholic faiths, often for political purposes, the Lutheran Confessions remained in force in their lands. Reformed princes schemed and finally succeeded in getting Lutherans to recognize the Reformed faith, but it took over two centuries before they officially succeeded.

ACC is profoundly disturbing when it emphasizes that the sixteenth-century condemnations of the Formula, for example, were not intended to divide the church (29) or to attack the Reformed (31). At first glance this may seem to be true. But on closer inspection it becomes apparent that they were intended to divide. The Lutherans knew that their faith and doctrine required that the

Reformed positions be condemned and rejected. Without the Reformed positions, the Lutherans would have been under no compulsion to defend or even state their doctrines. The insinuation is simply not true that the Lutherans were less than firm in rejecting Reformed theology (30). The ACC arrives at this untenable position by pointing to the comparatively few explicit anathemas against the Reformed. To do this it has to overlook that Articles VII-VIII in the Formula, on the Lord's Supper and Christ, are thorough and clear repudiations of the Reformed position. To its credit, ACC takes note of the strong unofficial mutual condemnations of Lutherans and Reformed as found in writings of theologians (30, top), but it quickly dismisses these as ultimately inconsequential as these are not formal confessional documents. They were not strictly unofficial, however, because these theologians were writing for their churches as much as for themselves.

Without discounting the value of what these Lutheran and Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have written about the positions of the others, we do not have to base our arguments on their mutual condemnations. Formula VII-VIII serves our purposes well, as it was intended to define and describe the Crypto-Calvinist theology in its various forms. It then demonstrated that Crypto-Calvinism was blatantly false and was destroying the Lutheran faith and churches. Both hidden and public forms of Calvinism were equally repugnant to the Lutherans. Thus, we do not have to go beyond our confessional documents to make our case, although we would happily bring in the writings of our Lutheran theologians to show that substantive differences separated them from the Reformed.

The sentence preceding the list of rejected "Sacramentarian" ideas in Formula VII states the case well (Solid Declaration VII:112):

Therefore we reject [*verwerfen, reiicimus*] and condemn [*verdammen, damnamus*] with heart and mouth as false, erroneous, and deceiving all Sacramentarian opinions and doctrines which are inconsistent with [*ungemäss*], opposed to [*zuwider*], or contrary to [*entgegen*] the doctrine set forth above, based as it is on the word of God.⁹

ACC (32) badly misconstrues the historical context for this statement. As is often the case in ACC, this statement is interpreted in a purely formal way by emphasizing the purpose of the Formula to defend Lutherans rather than attack Calvinists. This is untenable, since the Lutheran defense was accomplished precisely by attacking Calvinistic theology. This is quite obvious to everyone reading Formula VII-VIII. The Lutheran positions on the Lord's Supper and Christ are set forth only by demonstrating that Calvinism is contrary to the Scriptures and hence must be regarded as false doctrine. The Lutherans had no choice but to defend themselves by showing that Lutheran pulpits were being taken over by Calvinists whom Lutherans regarded as false teachers. Subscription to the Formula was required of all pastors and teachers to compel these Calvinists posing as Lutherans to conform to the Lutheran doctrine or be removed as false teachers.

This was a matter of life and death for the Lutheran faith and not merely a matter of formal condemnation. Humanly speaking, Lutheranism was on the verge of extinction, because of the threat of Calvinistic infiltration into the Lutheran ranks. Without knowledge of this history, one simply does not understand the Formula. It simply cannot be proven that the Formula fails to condemn Reformed sacramentology formally. It does. The only way around this problem is to show that the Reformed churches today no longer believe what the Formula says about their theology. We would welcome this, but the ACC certainly gives no indication that this has happened. In fact, its insistence on complementarity seems to discourage it, as without the Reformed view the Reformation faith would be judged to be incomplete.

Status of the Historic Condemnations Today

"Under the same gospel there will still be different emphases, even different modes of thought, in which the whole of the gospel message will find its expression" (33).¹⁰ It is apparently assumed that each tradition contributes to "the whole of the gospel message." There is an unresolved tension between the principle of "complementary correctives" and historic condemnations.

ACC repeatedly asserts that the historic condemnations no longer

divide Lutheran and Reformed churches.¹¹ To the document's credit, it concedes that differences remain significant, and accordingly the authors do not advocate erasure of the differences. But the reasons for letting differences remain under one umbrella, so to speak, remain problematic.

The ACC proposes two tests for the removal of condemnations: (1.) if a position is no longer perceived as excluding the other side, or (2.) if the other side does not recognize itself as under condemnation from the position, the condemnations no longer apply (33). These are indeed helpful considerations, but insufficiently specific for resolving the problem of condemnations. Are there levels of condemnation? Do some condemnations intrinsically prevent union? Might some condemnations be allowed to remain while union is enacted? More basically, this approach allows for each denominational family by its own decision to remove itself from the condemnation of the other. In a sense each church, Lutheran and Reformed, is a defendant pleading its case before the other. Now, with ACC, each church becomes its own prosecutor, jury, and judge. Taken to its logical extreme, there would be no need for interdenominational dialogue. It is only necessary that a church consider itself accepted by the other.

Lord's Supper and Christology (III.2)

The methodology employed in this section by the authors of ACC is noticeably different from previous procedures. Previously the discussion depended on counting and tabulating the anathemas in the official confessional documents, a somewhat simplistic approach as we intimated above. Now suddenly the significant confessional condemnations hardly play a role. Counting condemnations is no longer in vogue. The focus now shifts to generalizations about tendencies in the history of theology.

Assertions of Historic Commonality

The ACC begins its discussion with the Marburg Colloquy of 1529 (35), when, in fact, enormous differences had been established in the early 1520's. Marburg only brought matters to a head. It did not create them. In discussing Marburg, the ACC authors bypass the

well-documented impasse there having to do with very basic theological and methodological assumptions. It was not that disagreement was limited to only one article. Rather, the other articles were not even discussed and then only hastily subscribed. Luther noted that the Sacramentarians were of a "different spirit," and later history confirmed that the rift was deeper than a minor disagreement over the Lord's Supper. Likewise, the numerous and extensive works of Luther, not to mention his opponents, are ignored. The antithetical methodologies, which result in real differences (37, top), are dismissed with almost a slight of hand with the comment that "most of these pairs may look complementary to us rather than mutually exclusive" (37). This approach in dismissing significant evidence can only be done when doctrinal truth is viewed as a dialectical process of continuously emerging and subsuming viewpoints. This is what is identified throughout our response as "complementary correctives."

What the Lutherans and Reformed are said to have historically held in common is plainly and obviously mistaken (37). They did not agree upon the fourfold *sola*. For example, how could the Reformed hold to *sola scriptura* if they openly claimed that biblical doctrines could be judged by the canons of reason? Lutherans and Reformed again obviously did not concur in the importance of word and sacrament. The Reformed designated them to be means of grace in a sense different from the Lutheran view. Both words, "means" and "grace," had different meanings for each. Putting them together as the "means of grace" only compounded the confusion.

The Unresolved Tension

The ACC assertions on what Lutherans and the Reformed agreed as to the theology of the Lord's Supper conveniently ignores their profound differences, which for over four centuries both sides have recognized. The ACC conclusion that today there is a diminished awareness of the historic theological concerns regarding the Lord's Supper (38) should be a call for renewed study of these differences and not for fellowship. Can ignorance ever be used as a basis for church fellowship? But this is exactly what the ACC suggests.

Once again, ACC asserts that the Lutheran and Reformed

positions are complementary (39). Moreover, ACC asserts that these differing theologies are mutually required to forge a complete theology of the Lord's Supper. Here again the principle of "complementary correctives" in which each side contributes to a full understanding is introduced as principle of theology. This assertion that the Lutheran and Reformed churches are merely different appearances of a basic Reformation theology is only asserted and never demonstrated. Such an assertion cannot be a basis of theology.

Predestination (III.3)

The ACC condenses the treatment of predestination to the simple sentence that "God's will is to save" and then declares that Lutherans and Reformed agree that God wants to save fallen humanity. Undoubtedly this is true. It overlooks the point of difference on teaching a predestination to perdition. The ACC rightly states that Lutherans maintain a genuine and efficacious election in eternity and that in Formula of Concord XI they condemn the teaching of predestination to perdition (48).¹² This statement is of historic importance to the LCMS and it certainly receives our approval.

The status of the Calvinist teaching of double predestination is another matter. ACC tries to isolate the sixteenth-century instances of double predestination to the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes* and to Beza and Zanchi. Yet the position in the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes* cannot be waved aside so quickly, because it is rejected by the Lutherans in Formula XI. ACC locates the solidification of the double predestination doctrine in seventeenth-century Calvinism and not in Calvin. Then it proceeds to argue rather persuasively that double predestination has nearly disappeared from the Reformed theological commitment (48-49). We applaud any Calvinistic de-emphasis on an election to perdition, if it is a studied and deliberate opinion.

In the ACC treatment of predestination, the method of attempting to locate specific condemnations is conveniently reintroduced as a yardstick to determine if agreement and fellowship are allowed between two groups. Unless their names are specifically mentioned, they are not included in the condemnations. We have addressed this

principle above and simply cannot agree to it. By using this principle ACC asserts (49) that the Reformed and Lutheran confessional polemics were not aimed at each other. But whom else does ACC suppose they were addressing? Each knew that the other was addressing it and responded with appropriate polemic. We do not want to get bogged down in the question of who was addressing whom, even though it is silly even to suggest that people were shooting salvos hoping to find a distant target. Regardless of the condemnations' historic targets, these confessional and theological assertions are directed to those who disagree.¹³ That is good enough. Current trends among the Reformed in de-emphasizing an election to perdition are reassuring, but these changes must be formalized. Since the ACC is intent on establishing theology by its unique approach of "anathema counting," a method which excludes "trends" as a standard of measurement, a formal removal of the anathema is required. Consistency demands no less of ACC.

The ACC participants come to this summary: "Rather than being divided over the doctrine, both sides seem to be united in an equally lukewarm endorsement and an equal embarrassment over any form of predestinarian teaching as part of their theological commitment" (50). From our perspective, it is well for the Reformed to backpedal from the claim of predestination to reprobation taught by Calvin in his final *Institutes* and such confessional documents as the Westminster Confession. The ACC description of the ELCA representatives' "lukewarm endorsement" and "embarrassment" is unsettling. ELCA "embarrassment" over a Lutheran teaching could be seen as embarrassment to the LCMS.

Conclusions

1. The new confessional hermeneutic or method of studying the confessions whereby doctrinal systems are treated as world-views pointing to the same primal theological root has no basis in Scripture.

2. Until the crucial terms are defined, we are unable to ascertain whether even the most elementary agreement has been reached. These terms include "law" and "gospel" (to draw the distinction

between them), "grace," "salvation," "real presence," and "confession of faith."¹⁴

3. Completely contrary to the Formula of Concord is any idea that Lutheran and Reformed theologies are two centers or foci within the totality of "Reformation theology." This is a presumption of the ACC authors without any support from the Formula, any of the other Lutheran Confessions, or of the confessors themselves. Of course, the inevitable conclusion of making Lutheran and Reformed theologies two centers or foci in the theology of the Reformation is that both are regarded as necessary to present a complete "Reformation theology," a point we have made above and which needs repetition, as it is so basic to the formulation of ACC. Not only is this contrary to the Formula, but such thinking was foreign to the confessors. In addition, it must be rejected for reasons of history. The ACC reads an approach into the sixteenth-century documents which was not only foreign to the authors, but unknown to them. The LCMS simply cannot accept the presumption of the ELCA participants that Lutheran and Reformed confessions are complementary nor the reasoning leading to this conclusion. Thus, the very basis for these discussions is as invalid as their conclusions.

4. The approach used in ACC of seeing Lutheran and Reformed positions as complementary theologies within the totality of Reformation theology is nothing else than "begging the question," with the conclusions already present by implication in the purpose. This new kind of confessional hermeneutic which makes two opposing positions complementary assumes the conclusions before examining the evidence. Even before the discussions began, this approach to the confessions of both churches determined the conclusion that both churches had positions which could complete the other. Agreement between the Lutheran and Reformed churches was established even before the participants began their conversations, and the true function of the participants was to draft an agreement to expedite fellowship. Methodologically the conclusions were inevitable, and perhaps in a sense they were predestined.

Appendix: Summary of Issues Regarding ACC

The subservience of theology to church-politics is evident in major

fallacies like the following:

1. *Invitation to Action* is endorsed despite its claim that "those churches that have subscribed to the Reformed Confessions have always taught and still teach the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist" and that the difference between Lutherans and Reformed is only about the "mode" of this presence, which difference should not be divisive (114-115).¹⁵ This flatly contradicts Formula VII (Solid Declaration VII:1-8);¹⁶ it is, in fact, the position of John Calvin: "Everyone with a sound and correct judgment, who possesses also a calm and well-ordered mind, will admit that the only dispute concerns the mode of eating."¹⁷

2. Therefore ACC (33) expressly contradicts and disavows the understanding of the Formula of Concord regarding Augustana X.

3. As for the "biblical and historical studies [having] established new parameters for the appreciation of each other's heritage and contribution" (45), the real import may be gauged from *Invitation to Action*: "There has arisen the historical-critical approach to the Bible with negative effects on the way Lutherans have traditionally argued their position on the Lord's Supper."¹⁸ "In most contemporary exegesis the words 'body' and 'blood' are interpreted increasingly not as substances but as saving event (*Heilsereignis*)."¹⁹

4. The Roman and Anglican problem of the "validity" of "ministries"—apart from the pure gospel and sacraments—is a pseudo-problem (see Augustana VII).

5. ACC misunderstands Augustana VII's "gospel" as "the doctrine of justification" (p. 26), as though it were only one of several articles. The gospel is all articles of the faith (with the exception of law [Formula V]) with justification as the *central* rather than the *sole* article.

6. ACC seems totally innocent of any serious critique of the *Leuenberg Concord*. The latter's most basic and calamitous flaw may well be the opposition between "justifying faith" (*fides justificans*) and "dogmatic faith" (*fides dogmatica*).²⁰

7. Slippery assertions about the symbols' "language" not being "the exclusive expression" of the truth seem to have the intent of

disarming the "in content or in formulation" (*rebus et phrasibus*) obligation stated in the Preface to the Book of Concord.²¹

8. The notion of the historic differences not really being "divisive" in the Lutheran intent expressly contradicts a number of deliberate assertions of the "Rule and Norm" of the Formula of Concord. For example, the Augsburg Confession (as properly understood in the Formula of Concord) is our symbol which "distinguishes our reformed churches from the papacy and from other condemned sects and heresies."²²

9. The attempt to accommodate the dogmatic and confessional differences under the umbrella of the "full range" of the biblical witness (44ff.) assumes a historical-critical view of Holy Scripture which fundamentally undercuts all the sacred mysteries of faith and renders all creeds and confessions meaningless.²³

10. It is an axiom that two or more churches entering upon church (altar and pulpit) fellowship thereby become *one communion, one church*. It follows that by full communion with Zwinglian-Calvinist churches (Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.], U.C.C.), as proposed by ACC, the ELCA would formally and officially become part of a union church.

Endnotes

1. The following pages are a review of "A Common Calling: The Witness of our Reformation Churches in North America Today," The Report of the Lutheran-Reformed Committee for Theological Conversations, March 1992, hereafter referred to as ACC; references to pages will be put in parentheses. Throughout this review the pronoun "we" refers to the members of the Systematics Department of Concordia Theological Seminary (Fort Wayne) and others who have provided valuable contributions.
2. ACC states regarding the printed text of a confession: "But the text can serve such a [regulative] function only insofar as the community 'construes' the text in a particular manner, i.e., identifies some pattern(s) which will serve as the regulative or formative paradigms. There is a complex dialectic at work in the interaction between authoritative text and believing community.

The text provides the authoritative shaping patterns, but the community must construe those patterns into an effective regulative whole" (22-23).

3. Our assumption that the scope of these considerations includes doctrine is based upon the list of differences noted on page 14 (top), where "fundamental theological differences" leads the list.
4. "When Lutherans finalize and re-pristiniate the theology of the sixteenth century they need the corrective witness of the Reformed tradition concerning the continuing need for reformation and a fresh appropriation of the church's faith. When Reformed Christians overemphasize the primacy of the contemporary situation they need the corrective witness of the Lutheran focus on the authority of the ecumenical creeds and Reformation confessions" (23). If the scope of this assertion were confined to genuine adiaphora and modes of implementation, a measure of validity might be granted. However, no such qualification is attached to their claim.
5. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).
6. *Ibid.*, especially chapter 6.
7. See number 4 in the appendix attached to this review. Also see Eugene F. A. Klug, "A Critique: Leuenberg Concord, Section IV" in *Von der Wahren Einheit der Kirche*, ed. by U. Asendorf and F. W. Künneth (Verlag Die Spur, 1973), pp. 197-204. Klug highlights the problems raised by hiding behind "a common understanding of the Gospel" (201) and the abuse of *satis est* perpetrated by the Leuenberg Concord (203).
8. In the following discussion the term "anathema" will be utilized to indicate the tendency of ACC to reduce a "condemnation" to that which would be found in formal canon law.
9. Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 589.
10. Nowhere in the entire document is the term "gospel" defined. Since it recognizes that Lutherans require agreement in the gospel, how can the definition of the gospel be omitted? The approbation given to the statement from the Leuenberg Concord ("in the gospel we have the promise of God's unconditional ac-

ceptance of sinful man" [52]) is most unsettling.

11. The ACC approach probably originates in the notion that competing systems of doctrine are entirely compatible, since they merely arise from different life contexts. Note Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1928), pp. 107-108 (Prop. 24, Postscript); and Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, chapters 2-3.
12. Though it does not materially change the argument, it should be noted that the ACC portrayal of Luther's *Bondage of the Will* is especially careless. Dating from 1525 (not 1523), it can hardly be called the work of a "young Luther." He was over forty years old and well past the turmoil surrounding his "discovery of the gospel." In later years he exalted it as one of his best works.
13. Mormons were not named in the Heidelberg Catechism. Does the document then permit union with Mormons?
14. We have to ask where the ACC stands concerning these claims by Calvin in his *Institutes* of 1559: God's grace restrains open wickedness (II.III.3). The gospel is not a different way of salvation than the law, but a confirmation of the law (II.IX.4). Justification is the seal of election (III.XXI.7. Summary). God predestined Adam to fall as an act of providence (III.XXIII.7). The physical elements in the Lord's Supper provide an analogy of nutrition which directs us to reflect on Christ's life-giving benefits (IV.XVII.3). The doctrine of ubiquity is a "monstrous notion," it is "madness" "to mingle heaven and earth," and "the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness" (IV.XVII.30).
15. *An Invitation to Action: A Study of Ministry, Sacraments, and Recognition*, ed. James E. Andrews and Joseph A. Burgess (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
16. Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord*, pp. 568-570.
17. John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, trans. J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, XXII (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), p. 326.
18. *An Invitation to Action*, p. 122, citing Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 95.

-
19. *An Invitation to Action*, p. 123, citing *Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue: Report and Recommendations* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Forward Movement Publications, 1981), p. 17.
 20. See Tuomo Mannerman, *Von Preussen nach Leuenberg* (Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1981), p. 48.
 21. Tappert, p. 13.
 22. Tappert, p. 504.
 23. See the following items: (1.) E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Naperville, Illinois: Allenson, 1964), pp. 95-107; (2.) the discussion in the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., *The Function of Doctrine and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church* (New York: Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., 1978), pp. 76-93; (3.) Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, *Convention Proceedings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), p. 160, Resolution 3-20.

The preceding opinion and appendix were submitted to and accepted by the Department of Systematic Theology of Concordia Theological Seminary on January 29, 1993.

David Scaer
Robert Preus
Kurt Marquart
Richard Muller
Alan Borchertding
Eugene Klug (Professor Emeritus)
Ulrich Asendorf (Guest Professor)