

CONCORDIA  
THEOLOGICAL  
QUARTERLY

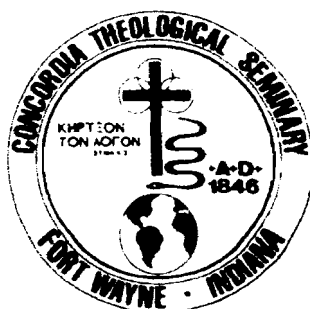
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# Theological Observer

## “CONCORDIA” — WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

The term “concordia” has become synonymous with The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod where it is used as the frequent designation of its colleges, seminaries, high schools, publishing company, retirement facilities, some of its congregations, and many of its auxiliary institutions. Tracing the use of the word would be a statistician’s dream. The word touches the four winds. “Concordia” on the east coast clearly means Bronxville, on the west coast Portland, in the south Austin, and in the north St. Paul. In the Fort Wayne telephone directory appear the following: Concordia Village, Concordia Cemetery Association, Concordia Gardens, Concordia Church, Concordia High School, and Concordia Seminary, a cradle to grave situation. In between there is a Ralph Concordia, presumably not an LCMS-related institution. The term “concordia” has been used in addressing college student bodies to urge them to live harmoniously, but beyond that the frequently used verbal sign “concordia” is just that — a sign. It can refer to any number of institutions but for nearly all those who use it, it has no clearly agreed significance. To the untrained ear, Concordia Cemetery could easily be confused with Concordia Seminary and anyone can draw his or her own conclusions from that.

The four-hundredth anniversaries of the Formula of Concord (1977) and the Book of Concord, the *Concordia*, (1980) at least gave our church opportunity to review the historical meaning of the term. The church of the *Concordia* is the church that accepts all of the sixteenth-century Lutheran confessions as they have been preserved in the Book of Concord. Now that five years have passed since the celebration, the term is again lost, if it was indeed ever recovered, for the LCMS rank and file. The *Small Catechism* was intended by Luther to be the people’s “Bible” and it serves well as an abridgement of all the Lutheran Confessions for them. Pastors pledge themselves to the *Concordia* at ordination and it is the basis for the constitution of our congregations. But why was the name chosen by the authors of the Formula of Concord and then the Book of Concord?

Dr. Otto Stahlke, seminary professor emeritus, has called attention to “Luthers Ekklesiologie,” an essay by Michael Beyer, published in *Leben und Werk Martin Luthers von 1526-1546* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1983), pages 108-9, for an answer to the question of origin. The term or concept originated with the January 21, 1530 decree of Charles V calling for a convocation of the imperial states (i.e., a diet) to bring about reconciliation in matters of faith and church order by seeking “for one united Christian truth” (“zu eyner eynigen cristlichen warhey”), i.e., agreement on what the truth was. This phrase was taken over into both the Lutheran Augsburg Confession and the Roman Confutation of the Augsburg Confession as “concordia christiana.” Nearly half a century later it became the title of all the confessions as the *Concordia*, the Book of Concord, sometimes called the *Concordia Christiana*, the Christian Book of Concord. In the same article Beyer also points out that since the purpose of the imperial convocation was doctrinal agreement, i.e., “concordia,” it was foredetermined that the Lutheran document, later known as the Augsburg Confession, could not have an article on the pope as the Antichrist. This slack was taken up in the *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope*, which was an appendix to the Augsburg Confession. The concept of “concordia” as agreement in Christian truth comes, so far as can be determined, not from a Lutheran, but from the imperial defender of the Church of Rome, Charles V.

David P. Scaer

## ALTERNATIVES TO ABORTION

Opposition to abortion is not enough, said Surgeon General C. Everett Koop at a White House briefing on November 15, 1984. Alternatives must also be provided, he said, which offer support to unwed pregnant teenagers who choose not to have abortions. This was the general thrust of the "White House Briefing on Alternatives to Abortion and Help for Unwed Mothers." According to Koop, the only chance which the pro-life forces in the nation have of reversing Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade* in the next four years will be the President's appointment of new Supreme Court justices to replace those who retire. Hopes for a constitutional amendment reversing *Roe v. Wade* were dimmed when Congress killed the proposal in 1981. Pro-life forces were then "in disarray," said Koop.

In the meantime, he said, individuals and churches can do much to help save the lives of the unborn. The unwed teenager who finds that she is pregnant is likely to be asked to leave her home when her parents learn of the pregnancy. Unless she knows that there is a place she can turn for support and has a place to stay, she is likely to see abortion as her only alternative. When a group of concerned people offers support and a place to stay, the unwed mother will often accept this life-line and reject the abortion which she usually did not want in the first place.

What these women need, said Koop, is encouragement, support, and often a catalyst to aid in family reconciliation. Often when parents force their daughter out of the home, a reconciliation later results when the parents see the care and support which others will give her. Until such reconciliation comes about, the unwed mother needs the haven best provided in a Christian home where surrogate parents are willing to support her, to be her advocate, to give her advice on how to handle the cost of childbirth, and to present to her the advantages of adoption. Koop said he felt adoption was a better alternative than single parenting in view of recent research. There are no adoption problems for newborn babies, since the demand has grown so high in the last ten years. Adoption therefore "not only saves babies, but also provides a blessing for a childless couple."

Koop's keynote speech was followed by a day-long series of lectures, panels, and workshops dealing with the "how-to's" of providing support for unwed mothers who wish to choose life for their babies. Presenters gave materials and suggestions to anyone wishing to work toward the establishment of a so-called Crisis Pregnancy Center in his community. It would provide the necessary home and support for unwed mothers for the duration of the pregnancy and in many cases for a time after the birth of the child. In general, according to workshop presenter Curtis Young of the Christian Action Council, a board of directors consisting of seven to nine devoted people can learn how to raise the necessary funds and establish such a center manned by volunteer workers and perhaps one full-time salaried director. Young suggested that the best way to raise needed funds is to hold a well-publicized banquet at which donations and pledges are received. Anyone desiring information on how to start and operate a Crisis Pregnancy Center may request the information from the Pearson Foundation (3663 Lindell Blvd., Suite 290, St. Louis, Missouri 63108).

It was refreshing to see that the present administration is not only opposing abortion, but taking positive steps to make it unnecessary. It was readily apparent to those attending the briefing that the American president's firm stance against abortion is more than mere rhetoric. Several observers commented during the recess periods that it appeared clear to them that these issues remain a chief concern of the Reagan White House. That should come as a welcome observation to anyone agreeing with the Missouri Synod's pro-life position.

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## PROVIDING A BASIS FOR A CIVIL RELIGION IN AMERICA

Since its founding the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) has operated with definitive boundaries of church fellowship. Though they have been flexible in certain periods of the Synod's history and remain so in some parts of the church today, both clergy and people have not participated in the general religious movements of the nation. Its comparative isolationism may be traced to several causes, some historical and others doctrinal. But whatever the causes for its fellowship practices may be, the LCMS has not felt an *ecumenical* obligation either to other church bodies or the nation in the same sense that other large denominations have. Of course, exceptions may be cited, but LCMS members are less likely to be found in the halls of power. The removal of prayer from the public schools was not as traumatic for the LCMS as it was for other Christian groups. Our church body had a proportionately larger percentage of its children in parochial schools than other similar-sized churches and our understanding of fellowship which did not allow for joint services with other Christians would hardly permit religious services to serve the secular purposes of the state. Even where this has been done in the last generation or so, as with military chaplains, it hardly established a pattern. Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms, as it was commonly understood, divided church and state into two separate realms. If the *secular* state (for Lutherans this would be tautology) wanted to become even more secular by prohibiting prayers and other religious exercises in state supported and controlled schools, the state would only be acting according to its inherently secular nature. The necessity and benefit of a civil religion are hardly of paramount importance. In fact, the prohibition against a school prayer might even remove the possibility of embarrassing "unionism" for LCMS children who might otherwise be tempted to say the Lord's Prayer outside of the ordinary fellowship of the Lutheran church. Regardless of LCMS scruples about prayer in public schools, such prohibition of religious activities is seen by many observers of the public scene as a growing secularism and hardly as concern for the fellowship principles of any one Christian group. Secularism does not mean the existence of a plurality of religions, all with an equal right to carry out their activities, but the elimination of religious principles from the political scene. Religion is at best tolerated, but not protected and fostered. With the growth of secularism, defined as the absence of religion from public life, there has been in America paradoxically growth in religious interest, including, surprisingly enough, among college students. Declining church attendance figures have reversed themselves. While religious influence in the government can be seen as a goal of such groups as the Roman Catholics and Evangelicals (i.e., the conservative Protestants), it also became a concern of some who are hardly recognized as belonging to these groups. Harvey Cox, who earned for himself a reputation as a radical in the 1960's, says that without some sort of articulated religious principles, the citizens are left to the mercy of the brute power of the state. Erstwhile LCMS pastor Richard Neuhaus has been further catapulted into prominence by criticizing the absence of religion in public life with his *The Naked Public Square* (Eerdmans, 1984).

In European countries, including the Soviet-dominated ones, the involvement of religion in the public sphere is less problematical, as the state provides channels for church involvement. In certain cases ecclesiastics are appointed by the government and in other cases direct financial aid is provided. Ironically the salaries of theological faculties are paid from the public coffers in the officially atheistic govern-

ment in East Germany (DDR). In the western European countries the ecclesiastical establishment may serve as a conscience for the state. The situation in our country is a bit more problematical. In Europe the church remains as a permanent fixture in the cultural-political life, even when theology loses a clear Christian orientation. The church structure can be "re-Christianized." This has frequently happened. This cannot happen in America since the churches have no explicitly defined role and function toward the government. At least until the 1960's it was an implicit relationship and no need for anything more explicit was seen. A secular interpretation of the church-state relationship has argued that such a relationship in fact has no basis in law. The amendment prohibiting religious establishment has been interpreted to mean that each must work independently of the other. A number of court cases, several proposed prayer amendments to the constitution, and proposed bills for tax credits for church supported or related schools are in one way or another attempts to establish church-state relations in some areas more clearly. The search for a once and for all determination may be a long way off, as in our system it is being carried out on various levels of government.

What might not be clear to the American people is the Reagan administration's commitment to the restoration of religion as an influencing factor in the public life. This is a bit different from the Carter administration where this was done through the personal force of an avowed "born-again Christian" president. President Reagan is less candid about his religious commitment than President Carter, who made personal witness an agenda item in his talks with heads of other states. President Reagan seems to support a more formal role for religion. The current administration is on record as supporting some sort of benefits for the parents of children in religious schools and a prayer amendment. What might not be known is that the administration has been meeting with several religious groupings: Roman Catholics, the Jewish community, Evangelicals, mainline denominations associated with the National Council of Churches, and others.

Selected church leaders have been meeting with White House officials for briefings on administration policies and, in turn, to offer their opinions. The impression that this is limited to Jerry Falwell is erroneous. Perhaps Roman Catholic bishops have had an equal amount of access. For the first time leaders representative of the religiously plural American culture are being invited to participate in public policy-making. This culture is identified as Judaeo-Christian without providing a precise definition for this concept. In European countries such involvement is made possible in most cases through the ministry of culture which may make recommendations concerning bishops and theological faculties and may provide and maintain houses of worship. While such direct support of religion is not possible in the American structure, a silhouette or shadow of such a system may be reflected in the current administration.

President Reagan has appointed personal liaison representatives to some of the major religious groupings. Note that these liaisons are not official contacts with official church officers. The government's purpose is not involvement in church structures, but to determine a commonly agreed religious basis for political-governmental actions. This is a delicate task, since previously the relationship between the state and church has been implicit, without formal structure, in America. The problem facing both the government and the churches is providing a structure for restoring a religious basis for political actions, which was self-understood up until the 1960's. The liaison officers for religious matters have been assigned to the Department of Health and Welfare. Such an assignment is at first slightly startling, but one can draw his own conclusions. This department is probably closest to what

the Europeans call the ministry for culture. It does recognize in a way that man does not live by bread alone. A real concern might be raised if such activities were more closely aligned with the Department of Education. It may be that no philosophical thought went into the decision to place the liaison officers in the Department of Health and Welfare and that this was the easiest option. It was perhaps just a payroll matter. Clearly it is an attempt for the current administration to recognize religion as an intricate and vital part of American cultural life and to reintroduce its voice into the political arena.

The question remains of how will the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with its doctrinal stance and history involve itself in reintroducing religion into the public life. It is not a question to which an answer will be attempted here, at least not in a definitive way. We could evoke our tradition and stay out of it. But in a way we have already involved ourselves in it. In the abortion issue we have already been drawn into the question. The rank and file of the Missouri Synod are probably more opposed to abortion than any other major Christian denomination, including the Roman Catholics. Our low public profile, resulting from fellowship principles and history, has failed to reveal to the public just how much we are opposed to abortion. Our anthropology, derived both from the Bible and the Lutheran Confessions, equates abortion with downright premeditated murder of the worst kind. Man may be conceived in sin, but he is still man, whose life is not only sacred to God but redeemed by the Son of God. The Son of God was once a fetus (to use the abhorrent clinical terminology often used to mask the personhood of the unborn child) and made the womb holy.

Lutherans may have a difficult time participating in reinstatement of a public religious consensus in America, simply because we do not have the kind of history that easily involves us in this sort of thing. The Church of Rome has understood itself as being as much a political institution as a church. Lutherans interpret this as belonging to its identification as the kingdom of Antichrist. We do not, however, deny that it is still church. Non-Lutheran Protestants, whether they are of the more conservative Evangelical stripe or the more politically active NCC stripe, attribute some sort of redemptive significance to the state and society. Lutherans recognize the state as having divine functions and even as God's surrogate on earth, but clearly deny it any ultimate or even mediating salvific significance. The final manifestation of God's kingdom will not be associated in any way with any government, state, or human rule, including the modern state of Israel. The existence of the "Christian" state does not guarantee more or better Christians. The big question is what, if any, role will Lutherans play in bringing back religion into the public sphere.

For the three centuries that Lutherans have lived in the colonies and the United States, they have clearly benefited from the pluralistically religious American society. We have exploited this situation as much as any other group has. What might have been an exclusively German immigrant group in the 1830's has grown in the 1980's into an American church for which German is just as foreign as any other European language. The Missouri Synod has enjoyed not only governmental protection, but certain benefits, e.g., freedom from property taxes and parsonage allowances. Someone from outside could possibly ask: If your church has benefited from the favorable religious climate in America, does it have some sort of obligation to make a contribution to it? To say that we pray for the president, governors, courts, and legislative bodies hardly qualifies as a fully adequate response. Would it not be strange if we left to those church bodies with whom we do not find ourselves in fellowship the task of determining the religious and cultural life from which we would ultimately benefit?

Civil religion is a given of all cultural life, whether that be pagan Rome, Christian

Europe, or even atheistic Russia. Is there a role for our church to play as government officials wrestle with the problem of determining a *religious consensus*? The question does take on crucial significance when some are saying that such a consensus is not allowed by the constitution. Is it possible to oppose state-sponsored secularism and not involve ourselves in reaching a common religious consensus for governmental action? We cannot have it both ways.

David P. Scaer

#### POLITIKGESCHICHTE UND URGESCHICHTE

While rejecting critical claims of an evolution of theology within the Old Testament, we are prepared to speak of an evolution of Old Testament theology itself during the course of the past two centuries (so long as one understands that we invest the word "evolution" with no connotation of progress). Indeed, higher criticism has undergone a process of metamorphic variation of constantly accelerating rate. First to emerge from the primordial ooze of rationalism was historical criticism; which bore within it the germs of literary criticism; which, in turn, gave birth to form criticism; which, in its turn, spawned redaction criticism and tradition criticism. In recent years, however, the mutations of modernism have multiplied so rapidly as to make it rather difficult to disentangle the branches of the evolutionary tree. One approach to the Old Testament which has gradually emerged as a distinct species of higher criticism is "political criticism." This approach assumes the validity of its ancestors previously mentioned and, of course, the basic presupposition of all forms of higher criticism—the fallibility of Scripture. Yet some critics are predisposed to find a political background to the words of the Old Testament as opposed to the mythological or sociological or etiological explanations which may occupy the minds of other critics.

Walter Wifall provides an example of political criticism in an article entitled "Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh—The Politics of the Yahwist" (*Currents in Theology and Mission*, X, pp. 176-183). There he builds upon previous proposals made by himself and Walter Brueggemann concerning the interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3. Both work, of course, from the usual source-critical assumption that these chapters basically consist in preliterate Israelite folklore crafted into a literary unit by the theological genius called the Yahwist (by adherents of the documentary hypothesis of the origin of the Pentateuch). Broadly speaking, Brueggemann has argued ("David and His Theologian," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXX [1968], pp. 156-181) that the Yahwist shaped both primeval (Gen. 2-11) and patriarchal accounts (Gen. 12-50) "for the political purpose of lending legitimacy to the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem and warning the House of David against unwarranted political and religious ambitions." The Yahwist supposedly "discerned the path of all history through the specifics of the history of the Davidic royal family."

Wifall differs from Brueggemann, however, in two respects. In the first place, he is more inclined to ascribe a mythological background *as well as* a political background to the various figures of the Yahwistic narrative, asserting that "both the actual history of the Davidic monarchy and the mythology of ancient Near Eastern kingship seem to be reflected in the Yahwist's description of 'Adam.'" At another point Wifall describes his approach in a picturesque trope: "Behind the figure of 'Adam' as the 'man' lurks the 'king' as a member of the 'ruling class,' just as behind

the figures of the 'man' as 'husband' and the 'woman' as 'wife' there lurk royal figures. . ." In this respect, Wifall seems to remove himself even further than Brueggemann from the hermeneutics of the Reformation by ascribing (at least) two meanings to a statement and so renouncing the cardinal principle of Lutheran exegesis ("sensus literalis unus est").

Wifall's second divergence from Brueggemann is his identification of the exact point in the political history of the Davidic monarchy to which one must assign the work of the Yahwist. Brueggemann sees the four stories of Genesis 2-11 as reflections of four episodes in the life of David himself—with David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12) appearing as Adam and Eve; Amnon and Absalom (2 Sam. 13-14) appearing as Cain and Abel; the account of Noah's flood reflecting the relationship between David and Absalom (2 Sam. 15-20); and the problems of Solomon's succession (1 Kings 1-2) featuring in the story of the Tower of Babel.

Wifall, on the other hand, considers these parallels insufficiently exact and so argues for a political background of Genesis somewhat later in the history of Judah, namely, the time of Athaliah. Thus, the "man" of Genesis 2 is Jehoram and the "woman" is Athaliah, whose marriage cemented the alliance between the Southern and Northern Kingdoms forged by Jehoram's father, Jehoshaphat, and Athaliah's father, Ahab (2 Kings 8:16; 2 Chron. 18:18). The description of the woman as a "helper suitable" for the man (Gen. 2:18) Wifall takes to mean that Athaliah was an "ally" who was the "social equal" of Jehoram. Wifall understands the man's depiction of the woman as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23) as a formula reflecting a political alliance based on consanguinity, while the term "this woman" indicates the Yahwist's contempt for Athaliah, the alliance, and the associated marriage. This hostility likewise manifests itself, according to Wifall, in the following verse (24); the leaving of father and mother refers to Jehoram's abandonment of the godly ways of his father Jehoshaphat through his devotion to Athaliah—as a result of the marriage alliance which made the royal houses of Judah and Israel "one flesh." This same revulsion emerges in the next verse (25), says Wifall, who understands the nakedness without shame as domestic immorality in which Jehoram and Athaliah engaged. The interpretation, therefore, which Wifall puts upon these three verses of Genesis 2 provides a signal example of the way in which the application of the critical method to Scripture yields results which are the exact contrary of those flowing from the historical-grammatical hermeneutic of the Reformation. For in each case the critic sees odium in the precise place where the Reformers saw divine benediction.

The doctrinal implications of this political approach to Genesis are, of course, sweeping. For one thing, such an interpretation of Genesis razes the foundations of the divine origin of the orders of creation in general and of marriage in particular. Suffice it to say here that confessional Lutheranism, contrariwise, takes its cue from our Lord and the Apostle Paul in seeing Genesis 2 as the primary locus of its doctrine of divinely ordained natural orders, including the institution of marriage (Matt. 19:3-8; 1 Tim. 2:12-14; 1 Cor. 11:8-9). The political approach, however—like the critical method generally—erodes the Biblical basis not only of the law but, more importantly, of the gospel as well. Wifall propounds this explanation of Genesis 3:15: "The lone remaining true 'seed' of David, Jehoash (Gen. 3:15; 2 Kgs. 12-13), would soon crush Baal and his devotees (the serpent and his seed)." This exposition at least identifies the woman's seed in this verse as an individual. In this respect, the interpretation is superior to Calvin's collective understanding of the "seed" as the human race generally (and so referring to Christ only in an indirect manner). An exegesis, on the other hand, which follows the hermeneutical rules of the Lutheran Confessions immediately recognizes the woman's seed as the God-man who was



to achieve the salvation of sinners. Joash and his destruction of sinners do not come into the picture. The promise that the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head was a proclamation not of the law, but of the gospel without adulteration; it was the *protoevangelium* (F.C.S.D. VI:23).

Douglas MacCallum Lindsay Judisch