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# Christian Apologetics in the Light of the Lutheran Confessions

John Warwick Montgomery

"What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" queried the church father Tertullian,<sup>1</sup> expecting a negative as the only possible answer. In the same vein one might ask, "What indeed has apologetics to do with the Lutheran Confessions?" A confession is, after all, a public declaration of belief, not an argument. The very title given in 1580 to the official collection of Lutheran confessional writings was *Concordia: Book of Concord*—suggesting the peace and unity of common belief, not the disputatious refutation of other viewpoints.

And even if the controversial nature of material in the *Concordia* is recognized, must one not also admit that the controversies leading up to it occurred strictly within Christendom—between the Lutherans, on the one hand, and the Roman Catholics, the Sacramentarians, etc., on the other—not between Christians and unbelievers?<sup>2</sup> Aside from a few passing references to the "Turks," the Lutheran Confessions seem largely unaware of the existence, beyond the confines of internal Christian doctrinal discussion, of a world of unbelief to which apologetic argument ought to be addressed. Could one not apply to the Confessions with even greater force the tongue-in-cheek remark made concerning Thomas Aquinas, that when he wrote his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (his apologetic against the pagans) he had never met a pagan? In short, is not the *Book of Concord* simply a compendium of Christian belief-statements, written for an audience of believers, and is not its range of controversy limited to the correction of false doctrine within the narrow sphere of Christian profession? If so, the apologetic significance of the *Concordia* would seem, *ipso facto*, to be minimal at best.

There is another side to the matter, however. It is widely agreed that even the Ecumenical Creeds of the Patristic age, which are incorporated into the *Book of Concord* and form its first section, arose in a context of disputation and set forth orthodox doctrine in specific contradistinction to such heresies as Arianism and non-Christian belief-systems as Gnosticism.<sup>3</sup> Could not one go so far as to say that a true confession is always at the same time an apologia?

The very title of one of the chief Lutheran confessional writings, the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, displays a

concern that goes well beyond the mere proclamation of a theological position. Professor Allbeck does not exaggerate when he declares:

Looking back from our time to the sixteenth century, we see the Apology as an outstanding example of the theological writing of the Reformation age. Those who would sample the literary style and the patterns of thinking of that day would do well to read the Apology. . . . The purpose of the Apology to defend the Confession, and with it the gospel doctrine, against a specific opponent was accompanied by a vigorous mood.

For the Apology is a piece of polemical writing.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the tone of the Reformation Lutheran Confessions in general, with their constant stress on refuting "antitheses" as well as setting forth "theses," reveals a veritable preoccupation with the defense of sound teaching over against falsehood. Leonhard Hutter's great work, *Concordia Concors: De Origine et Progressu Formulae Concordiae*, appropriately begins with a book-length "Praefatio Apologetica," refuting views such as those of the Calvinist Hospinian.<sup>5</sup>

And if such considerations are regarded merely as further proof that the Lutherans, even when engaged in controversy, never went beyond intra-Christian disputation, it must not be forgotten that in those days doctrinal dispute was taken so seriously that particularly offensive views, even though maintained by professing Christians, were refuted as non-Christian. At Marburg Luther did not shrink from declaring that the sacramentarian views of Zwingli manifested another Christ from his own, and the Confessions retain this same perspective.<sup>6</sup> The *Book of Concord*, holding that justification by grace through faith is the "article by which the church stands or falls," classes Roman Catholic doctrinal works-righteousness as nothing short of Antichristic. When the Lutheran Confessions engage in apologetic controversy, they speak not primarily to minor internal differences within Christendom but more especially to fundamental issues dividing the true church from varieties of pseudo-Christian religiosity. The Lutheran Confessions do not tilt against windmills; they endeavor to storm the bastions of serious religious aberration.

And is this not what one would expect, after all? In my essay, "Lutheran Theology and the Defense of Biblical Faith," I have shown that both Luther himself and the Lutheran theologians of the Age of Orthodoxy maintained vigorous apologetic principles.<sup>7</sup> It would be strange indeed if the Lutheran Confessions—which historically link Luther and the Orthodox theologians together and whose authors include students of Luther and Melanchthon (such as David Chytraeus)

and Orthodox fathers in their own right (e.g., Martin Chemnitz)—were not to display the apologetic perspective and concerns of those who preceded and followed them in the same theological tradition.<sup>8</sup>

But deduction from "historical necessity" is a notoriously unreliable way to answer factual questions. We must turn from general speculation to the Lutheran Confessions themselves to see what degree of apologetic insight they manifest.

### How Apologetic Are the Lutheran Confessions?

The task of the Christian apologist may be said to embrace three major activities: (1) clarification (he defends the faith by disabusing the unbeliever of misconceptions concerning its nature), (2) refutation (he defends the faith by showing the fallacies and unworthiness of opposing positions), and (3) positive argumentation (he defends the faith by offering positive reasons to accept the Christian world-view in preference to other philosophical or religious options).<sup>9</sup> To what extent, if any, does the *Book of Concord* engage in apologetic activity along these lines?

Undeniably present throughout the Lutheran Confessions are arguments of a clarifying and refutatory nature in defense of biblical religion. Among innumerable examples of attempts to defend the orthodox position by clarifying its true nature is the following:

We herewith condemn without any qualification the Capernaitic eating of the body of Christ as though one rent Christ's flesh with one's teeth and digested it like other food. The Sacramentarians deliberately insist on crediting us with this doctrine, against the witness of their own consciences over our many protests, in order to make our teaching obnoxious to their hearers. On the contrary, in accord with the simple words of Christ's testament, we hold and believe in a true, though supernatural, eating of Christ's body and drinking of his blood, which we cannot comprehend with our human sense or reason.<sup>10</sup>

Negative, refutatory arguments are even more frequent. We have already noted the standard inclusion of "antitheses" throughout the *Concordia*. In the Preface written both for the *Formula of Concord* and for the whole *Book of Concord*, Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz spend considerable time expressly justifying such material. "Condemnations," they declare, "cannot by any means be avoided," for (as Andreae noted in a marginal revision to the printed draft) "the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the

danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another." Typical of the refutatory argumentation of the Confessions is the *Formula of Concord's* direct citation of Luther (WA, XXVI, pp. 321-22):

If Zwingli's *alloeosis* stands, then Christ will have to be two persons, one a divine and the other a human person, since Zwingli applies all the texts concerning the passion only to the human nature and completely excludes them from the divine nature. But if the works are divided and separated, the person will also have to be separated, since all the doing and suffering are not ascribed to the natures but to the person. It is the person who does and suffers everything, the one thing according to this nature and the other thing according to the other nature, all of which scholars know right well. Therefore we regard our Lord Christ as God and man in one person, neither confounding the natures nor dividing the person.<sup>11</sup>

To be sure, those who question the apologetic character of the Lutheran Confessions will not be especially disturbed by the presence of clarifying or refutatory arguments in these documents—even when such arguments appear there with great frequency (as they do). The real issue will be said to lie with the third type of apologetic reasoning as set forth above, viz., the presence or absence of *positive proofs*, consciously designed to convince an unbelieving opponent through the marshalling of facts and evidence in behalf of orthodox religious truth. Proofs of this kind are held by many to be not only absent but in fact utterly foreign to the teaching of the Confessions. "Proving the faith," we are told, contradicts confessional Lutheranism in the following respects: (1) it gives reason a place in man's salvation and therefore constitutes a return of the dog to the vomit of works-righteousness; (2) it elevates "historical knowledge" (*fides historica*) to the level of saving faith and ignores the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit in salvation; (3) it disregards the total depravity produced by the fall and the noetic effects of original sin; and (4) it is oblivious of the fact that Scripture does not make sense to the unbeliever through argumentation but solely through illumination of the Spirit and the influence of justification by grace through faith.

If this is indeed the viewpoint of the Confessions, a positive Lutheran apologetic would admittedly be excluded on principle: at best the confessional Lutheran could only defend his position by attempting to remove misconceptions concerning it or by endeavoring to point out fallacies in his opponents' reasoning. (Indeed, as I have maintained elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> the problem for the witnessing Christian would be far more acute, for the just-

stated understanding of total depravity as precluding meaningful positive argument to the sinner would *also* make any clarifications or refutations correspondingly ineffective when presented to him!) But we shall quickly see that the Confessions do not at all require us to avoid positive apologetic argument. Let us analyze confessionally each of the four points raised.

(1) *The problem of reason.* Every Lutheran is familiar with Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed in his *Small Catechism*: "I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him."<sup>13</sup> Does this mean that a rational defense of the faith—any positive apologetic for Christian truth—turns out to be superfluous at best and highly dangerous at worst? Edmund Schlink comments:

The opinion that man can arrive at a true knowledge of divine matters on the basis of human thought and emotion is again and again traced in the most diverse doctrines of the opponents, refuted, and finally made ridiculous. All this is only "*multa fingere*," to "invent many things in one's own brain," which leads only to such opinions as are "totally unfounded in Scripture and touch neither above nor below" (Ap. XII, 178). Reason cannot even come to a knowledge of original sin, but this "must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures" (S.A. III, i, 3).<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, the Confessions seem to exclude reason from even a preparatory role in the evangelistic task: "There is no power or ability, no cleverness or reason, with which we can prepare ourselves for righteousness and life or seek after it."<sup>15</sup>

But a closer look at the Confessional passages just cited will show that they do not condemn reason (in the sense of the rational process) as such: they condemn a particular *misuse* of man's rational faculty. What this misuse is will become plainer from other references in the *Concordia*.

The *Apology* roundly criticizes those "scholastics, Pharisees, philosophers, and Mohammedans" who "reason" that justification can be attained through the law. Such "reasoning" is just another name for "human wisdom," and is the exact opposite of "the foolishness of the Gospel": "We know how repulsive this teaching is to the judgment of reason and law and that the teaching of the law about love is more plausible; for this is human wisdom."<sup>16</sup> What is being condemned here is a non-Christian value system which passes itself off as "rational" but which in reality is one hundred and eighty degrees removed from true wisdom. As would later occur in the eighteenth century "Age of Reason" (the misnamed

"Enlightenment"), the idea of rationality was being elevated to the status of a philosophy of life, and a anti-Scriptural philosophy at that. The Lutheran Confessions are simply declaring that they will tolerate no such competition with God's saving message.

What did the scholastics' pseudo-rational value system entail? In a word, works-righteousness. When the Confessions set the Gospel over against "reason," they are employing the word "reason" as a synonym for works-righteousness. "Blind reason," says Luther in the *Smalcald Articles*, "seeks consolation in its own works."<sup>17</sup> Throughout the long article on Justification in the *Apology* the same emphasis is to be found: "The scholastics have followed the philosophers. Thus they teach only the righteousness of reason—that is, civil works—and maintain that without the Holy Spirit reason can love God above all things."<sup>18</sup> "It is false that by its own strength reason can love God. . . . Reason cannot free us from our sins or merit for us the forgiveness of sins."<sup>19</sup> "Being blind to the uncleanness of the heart, reason thinks that it pleases God if it does good."<sup>20</sup> Here, reason is not being rejected *per se*; it is being rejected only when it evinces the irrational pretention to self-salvation.

Since man is incapable of saving himself, his only hope lies in a revelation from God. God's thoughts are higher than man's thoughts (Is. 55:9), so God's Word will necessarily contain truths that go beyond man's comprehension. The *Book of Concord*, while never suggesting that Christian revelation contradicts good reasoning, emphasizes that when Scripture does transcend man's rational categories it must be accepted anyway. Thus human reason needs to bow to God's transcendent truth in such areas as the depth and extent of original sin,<sup>21</sup> predestination,<sup>22</sup> our Lord's descent into hell,<sup>23</sup> and his real presence in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>24</sup>

In technical theological parlance, the *Concordia* rejects not the *ministerial*, but the *magisterial* use of reason. "We take our intellect captive in obedience to Christ," declare the authors of the *Formula*.<sup>25</sup> As long as reason is brought into genuine captivity to Christ, and is not allowed to usurp a self-justifying role in the salvatory operation, the Confessions in no way exclude its apologetic use. Indeed, major confessional authors such as David Chytraeus were so emphatic in marshalling proofs for biblical revelation that they have made orthodox Lutherans of our own day a bit uncomfortable.<sup>26</sup>

(2) *The problem of "historical knowledge."* Nonetheless, it is argued that the depreciation of *fides historica* by the Lutheran Confessions renders apologetic argument of little or no consequence. If the Holy Spirit and not factual knowledge does the

saving, what possible good can apologetics serve?

One must note first of all that the *Concordia* does not reject historical knowledge as such, any more than it rejects reason as such. In virtually every instance where the *Book of Concord* speaks negatively of the *fides historica*, it carefully qualifies the condemnation (generally by the words "merely" or "only"), as in the following typical examples from the *Apology*: "Our opponents imagine that faith is *only* historical knowledge"; "The faith of which the apostles speak is not *idle* knowledge, but a thing that receives the Holy Spirit and justifies us"; "As we have often said, faith is not *merely* knowledge but rather a desire to accept and grasp what is offered in the promise of Christ"; "We are not talking about *idle* knowledge, such as even the demons have"; "Faith is not *merely* knowledge in the intellect but also trust in the will"; "The scholastics . . . interpret faith as *merely* a knowledge of history or of dogmas, not as the power that grasps the promise of grace and righteousness, quickening the heart amid the terrors of sin and death."<sup>27</sup>

What is here being taught becomes particularly plain in the Latin text of the *Augsburg Confession*, where we read: "The term 'faith' does not signify *merely* knowledge of the history (such as is in the ungodly and the devil), but it signifies faith which believes not only the history but also the effect of the history."<sup>28</sup> The Roman Catholic opposition had restricted the meaning of "faith" to factual, historical knowledge of saving truth so as to be able to argue that works were also essential to salvation; therefore the Confessional writers had to point out that the proper biblical understanding of faith, as set forth by Saint Paul, embraced "not only the history but also the effect of the history."<sup>29</sup> This did not mean, however, that the Confessions were denigrating historical knowledge! The Lutheran fathers were anything but *Schwaermer* or modern existential mystics. They believed thoroughly that the assent (*assensus*) and trust (*fiducia*) elements of faith had to be grounded in objective knowledge (*notitia*).<sup>30</sup>

Such knowledge could go only so far: it could not justify or save; only the Holy Spirit imparting faith to the heart could do that. But since the Spirit works through the Word, and since the Word sets forth accurate historical knowledge of Christ's life and saving work, the Confessions hardly preclude the apologetic use of such evidence. Historical knowledge, like reason, can be misused by sinful man; but it—again like reason—can be brought into obedience to Christ and employed ministerially to persuade men to accept the historical Christ as Lord of their personal history.

(3) *The problem of original sin.* But what value can



apologetic arguments have—even if based upon sound logic and historical fact—when the sinner is incapable of appreciating them and is actively engaged in twisting them to justify himself? Schlink understands the Confessions to paint such a picture; his discussion is worth quoting in extenso:

God is hidden from the empirical observation of human reality. He is completely hidden behind the *simul* of creatureliness and corruption. Neither God the Creator nor God the exacting Lawgiver, neither God's love nor God's wrath can be recognized in this fallen world. . . .

At first glance this seems to be contradicted when it is occasionally said of "man's reason or natural intellect" in a subordinate clause, ". . . although man's reason or natural intellect still has a dim spark of the knowledge that there is a God, as well as of the teaching of the law (Rom. 1:19 ff.)" (S.D. II, 9; cf. V, 22). A similar thought is hidden in the expressions concerning the loss of the "*notitia Dei certior*" of paradise (Ap. II, 17), where already the German text, however, passes over the problem of the comparative. How do the Confessions arrive at equating this "spark" of the knowledge of God with ignorance of God?

This question occupied the Confessions surprisingly little. They give no direct answer. The problem involved in the natural knowledge of God is treated in the Confessions as so unimportant and insignificant that apparently no need of harmonizing the opposing formulations was felt. Only indirectly can we seek to attain clarity in the matter. . . .

By analogy, then, we may say of the natural knowledge of God in general:

a) Man has a "dim spark of the *knowledge that there is a God*" (S.D. II, 9).

b) This knowledge, however, is only "a dim spark," an indefinite and general knowing.

c) As soon as man tries to take this vague knowing seriously and to put it into practice concretely by calling God by name and devising a ritual for him, he only falls more deeply into sin with his natural obedience to the law and does not come to God but to idols. . . .

Thus natural man knows that there is a God but not who God is, and so he does not know God the Creator. He knows in part what is demanded but not who demands it, and therefore he does not recognize God's wrath. He knows neither God nor his own reality; the

innate internal uncleanness of human nature is not seen by him, and "this cannot be adjudged except from the Word of God" (Ap. II, 13; cf. 34). "This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures" (S.A. III, i, 3; cf. also Ep. I, 9; S.D. I, 8). Original sin is "ultimately the worst damage . . . , that we shall not only endure God's eternal wrath and death but that we do not even realize what we are suffering" (S.D. I, 62). Thereby our creatureliness too is hidden from the natural knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

Schlink's catena of passages from the *Book of Concord* showing the effect of man's fall upon his natural knowledge of God is a fair and accurate one, but the general interpretation he places upon these passages is too extreme. The Confessions deal with this issue to make clear beyond all doubt that no natural knowledge on the part of fallen man is capable of bringing him to salvation. Natural knowledge has precisely the same limitations as reason or historical knowledge: not one of them or all of them in combination can form a ladder reaching to heaven. The *Smalcald Articles* declare it to be "nothing but error and stupidity" to hold "that after the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that man by nature possesses a right understanding and a good will, as the philosophers teach."<sup>32</sup> Salvation is a gift, and is brought home to the heart only by the sovereign work of God the Holy Spirit.

But it by no means follows that in the *Concordia* "God is hidden from the empirical observation of human reality." As Schlink admits (grudgingly), the authors of the Confessions allow the natural man knowledge that there is a God; and their overwhelming emphasis on the reality of the incarnation—the personal union of the divine and human natures—makes them the strongest possible supporters of the biblical affirmation that God submitted to the "empirical observation of human reality" by becoming true Man in Jesus Christ.

Thus there is nothing in the Confessions which would in principle militate against the use of apologetic arguments for God's existence from nature, or for the deity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from empirical observation of His resurrection appearances, or for the inspiration of Scripture from fulfilled prophecy and other external proofs—as long as such arguments do not purport to substitute for the Spirit's converting work in the heart. As already noted, the orthodox Lutheran theologians of the post-Reformation time—including authors of the confessional documents—feel comfortable with

apologetic arguments of this kind; indeed they seem driven to use them because of their great concern to employ every legitimate means to bring men to the Savior and to His revealed truth (cf. I Cor. 9:22; I Pet. 3:15).

(4) *The problem of spiritual illumination.* Yet does not the *Book of Concord* teach that the very scriptural revelation God gives to a fallen race remains a closed book until the sinner's eyes have been opened—not by argument, but by God's Spirit who teaches him to read it from the vantage point of justification by grace through faith? Again let us hear Schlink:

Without the knowledge of the Gospel the Bible remains unintelligible and useless. Only from the Gospel do all individual statements of Scripture receive their proper place and meaning. Erasmus, Zwingli, the peasants, and the Enthusiasts had also waged their battle with Bible quotations, as did also the Roman adversaries. By means of Scripture texts employed "in either a philosophical or a Jewish manner" it is possible to abolish the certainty of faith and to exclude Christ as mediator (Ap. IV, 376). Only in the light of the Gospel can we determine which words of Scripture are commands and promises, which words serve to terrify or to comfort, which words are valid for us as God's commandments, and which commandments of the Old Testament have been abolished by Christ. Only by faith in the Gospel can Scripture be interpreted correctly, that is, by receiving the benefits secured for us by the crucified Christ.<sup>33</sup>

What we have said repeatedly earlier in this paper applies here with equal force: the Confessions will not allow a man to save himself by any work, rational, cognitive—or even biblical! The sinner cannot pull himself up to heaven by the bootstraps of his own ability to interpret the Scriptures. God alone can give fallen man the illumination necessary to comprehend the Bible in a salvatory way.

However, the *Book of Concord* never suggests—as Schlink does—the modern Neo-Orthodox teaching that the Bible possesses no inherent clarity, but somehow waits for the Spirit's work on the heart to acquire the meaning God intended for it. After discussing a number of biblical passages and their relationship to justification by grace through faith, the *Apology* bluntly says: "No sane man can judge otherwise."<sup>34</sup> Then Melancthon goes on to quote Romans 10:10 and states: "Here we think that our opponents will grant that the mere act of confessing does not save, but that it saves only because of faith in the heart."<sup>35</sup> Later the same confessional writing utters the following imprecation: "May God destroy these wicked sophists

who so sinfully twist the Word of God to suit their vain dreams!"<sup>36</sup>

Such passages from the *Concordia* show beyond question that the confessional authors believed that Scripture is inherently perspicuous—that it speaks clearly and ought to say exactly the same thing to their opponents as it did to them. If it did not, the reason was simply that the opposition twisted it by sinful sophistry. Indeed, it should be obvious that had the confessional writers not been convinced that the Bible could speak clearly and persuasively to their opponents, they would not have gone to the trouble of continually presenting and arguing from Scriptural texts!

And since their opponents were particularly of the Roman Catholic camp and therefore did not believe in justification by grace through faith, the confessional authors could not have cited Scripture against them and at the same time have held the Bible to be a closed book to those who had not already accepted the Scriptural teaching on justification. They believed that the Bible itself was capable of convincing their opponents as to the proper view of justification, and they quoted it to that end.

Likewise with the Sacramentarians. In arguing for Christ's real presence in the Holy Eucharist, the *Formula of Concord* stresses that the words of Scripture are clear and plain and that the only reasonable course for any Bible reader to take is to accept Jesus' own understanding and interpretation of Scripture:

There is, of course, no more faithful or trustworthy interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ than the Lord Christ himself, who best understands his words and heart and intention and is best qualified from the standpoint of wisdom and intelligence to explain them. In the institution of his last will and testament and of his abiding covenant and union, he uses no flowery language but the most appropriate, simple, indubitable, and clear words, just as he does in all the articles of faith and in the institution of other covenant-signs and signs of grace or sacraments, such as circumcision, the many kinds of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and holy Baptism. And so that no misunderstanding could creep in, he explained things more clearly by adding the words, "given for you, shed for you."

In sum, though only the Holy Spirit can apply Biblical texts in a salvatory way to human hearts, believers can and should employ Scripture to convince unbelievers of the nature and truth of God's message. Good interpretation can be distinguished from bad interpretation in such a way as to lead

opponents to discover the meaning of the Biblical texts. Both an apologetic for Scripture and an apologetic through Scripture must be seen as compatible with the *Book of Concord*.

### Fundamental Apologetic Axioms in the Lutheran Confessions and Their Contemporary Application

Admittedly, we have done no more than to show that the *Concordia* opens the door to apologetic operations. Can we go beyond this point (which, *nota bene*, should not be minimized, considering the number of anti-apologetic Lutherans who have tried to eliminate all apologetics on the basis of supposed confessional teaching!), and find positive apologetic substance in the *Book of Concord*? To be sure, we should not expect to discover any general programmatic against unbelief in confessional documents composed before the rise of modern secularism in the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup> But we can derive from the *Concordia* a fundamental apologetic axiom-set which will serve as a kind of template outlining the characteristics which a truly confessional apologetic would need to display. Wittgenstein observed that though the propositions of logic do not describe the world they do serve as a "scaffolding" to show the shape of the world;<sup>39</sup> the Lutheran Confessions, *mutatis mutandis*, do not provide an apologetic for an age of unbelief, but they can display the shape such an apologetic ought to have to be Scripturally meaningful and doctrinally sound. We shall list the fundamental apologetic axioms derivable from the *Book of Concord*, and then, on the basis of them, say a few words as to the apologetic challenge facing confessional Lutheranism today.

(i) *Fallen man retains the ability to reason deductively—to employ logic.* Note how, throughout the Confessions, when bad reasoning is condemned, proper logic is offered as a substitute and opponents are expected to respond to its force:

If the old witch, Dame Reason, the grandmother of the *alloeosis*, would say that the deity surely cannot suffer and die, then you must answer and say: That is true, but since the divinity and humanity are one person in Christ, the Scriptures ascribe to the deity, because of this personal union, all that happens to the humanity, and vice versa. And this is likewise within the bounds of truth, for you must say that the person (pointing to Christ) suffers, dies. But this person is truly God, and therefore it is correct to say: the Son of God suffers. Although, so to speak, the one part (namely, the deity) does not suffer, nevertheless the person who is true God suffers in the other part (namely, in the humanity). For the Son of God truly is crucified for us—that is, this

person who is God, for that is what he is—this person, I say, is crucified according to the humanity.<sup>40</sup>

(ii) *Fallen man also retains the ability to reason inductively—to draw correct factual inferences from empirical data.* The Augsburg Confession quotes approvingly from the pseudo-Augustinian *Hypognosticon*: “We concede that all men have a free will which enables them to make judgments according to reason,”<sup>41</sup> and the *Apology* comments: “Human nature still has reason and judgment about the things that the senses can grasp.”<sup>42</sup> The Confessions evidently regard the inferential functioning of man’s mind, in regard both to logic and to facts, as an aspect of the human essence. Man did not lose this essence when he fell, for had he done so he would have ceased to be human. The *Concordia* guards itself carefully from the Flacian error—the gross doctrinal mistake of Matthew Flacius, who in attempting definitively to answer the semi-Pelagians and synergists, toppled into the opposite error of holding that Adam’s fall resulted in a different essence in man.<sup>43</sup>

(iii) *A common ground of logic and fact unites believer and unbeliever, so that the believer can persuasively employ the unbeliever’s own reasoning against him.* Note how the *Apology* engages in just such an argumentative process in the following passage:

Where is the “divinely instituted order that we should take refuge in the help of the saints”? . . . Perhaps they derive this “order” from the usage at royal courts, where friends must be used as intercessors. But if a king has appointed a certain intercessor, he does not want appeals to be addressed to him through others. Since Christ has been appointed as our intercessor and high priest, why seek others?<sup>44</sup>

(iv) *The common ground of logic and fact uniting believer and unbeliever permits the effective use of analogy-reasoning to convince the unbeliever.* In the same section of the *Apology* from which the preceding illustration is taken, Melancthon offers this persuasive analogy-argument for the biblical doctrine of propitiation, as against the invocation of saints:

If one pays a debt for one’s friend, the debtor is freed by the merit of another as though it were his own. Thus the merits of Christ are bestowed on us so that when we believe in him we are accounted righteous by our trust in Christ’s merits as though we had merits of our own.<sup>45</sup>

(v) As demonstrated in detail in the previous section of this paper, the Confessions hold that *fallen man is capable of acquiring natural knowledge of God’s existence, historical knowledge (“fides historica”) of Biblical events, and un-*

derstanding as to the meaning of the perspicuous Scriptural text.

(vi) However, the Confessions are even more concerned to emphasize, as we have seen, that *none of the above capacities of the unregenerate man* (or any other abilities he may possess, for that matter) *are such as to permit him to mend his broken God-relationship: the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit alone, converts men to Christ.* "To be born anew, to receive inwardly a new heart, mind, and spirit, is solely the work of the Holy Spirit."<sup>46</sup>

Now what kind of apologetic approach ought today's confessional Lutheran to build on this axiomatic foundation? Let us be very clear, first of all, as to what approach he must *not* take. He must not fall into the trap of *presuppositionalism* or *apriorism* so attractive to orthodox Calvinists of the Dutch school (Van Til, Dooyeweerd, *et al.*). Even the ostensibly milder, revisionist presuppositionalism advocated in Reymond's provocative little work, *The Justification of Knowledge*, cannot be accepted by a confessional Lutheran. Reymond correctly sees that Van Til's epistemology destroys the divinely created common ground between believer and unbeliever: "The solution to all of Van Til's difficulties is to affirm, as Scripture teaches, that both God and man share the same concept of truth and the same theory of language."<sup>47</sup> But Reymond still rejects any positive apologetic to the unbeliever on the theory that the universe of facts and possible interpretations is so vast that the unbeliever can consistently interpret all evidence in line with his sinful presuppositions.

The *Book of Concord* much more wisely perceived that the unbeliever, living in the same universe with the Christian and using the same inferential faculties of mind, should respond to reasoning that proceeds by analogy from ordinary decision-making in secular affairs to the meaning and significance of biblical evidence. If the unbeliever refuses to do so, he acts irrationally by analogy with his ordinary experience and displays his *real* reason for rejecting the truth; not intellectual dissatisfaction but willful egocentricity.

Here, on the basis of the apologetic axioms of the *Concordia*, the contemporary Lutheran apologist begins to discover his battle plan. What will be its characteristics?

The Lutheran apologist will not be afraid to "become all things to all men that by all means some may be saved": convinced of the common ground of logic and fact between believer and unbeliever, he will argue by analogy that bad reasoning leads to religious heresy just as it produces catastrophe in the secular realm, and that the same good reasoning as is essential to survival in ordinary life, if applied

to religious issues, will vindicate the Holy Scriptures and their Christ.

The contemporary confessional apologist will not be afraid of developing effective modern arguments for God's existence (such as is afforded by the application of the classical contingency proof to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, or such as Peter Berger creates on a sociological base in his *Rumor of Angels*); but—in line with the fundamental stress of Lutheran theology on the incarnation, the Gospel, and the Cross—he will especially endeavor to provide a case for the deity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ beginning from, but not limited to, the *fides historica*.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than giving today's religious seeker the impression that the Missouri Synod's uncompromising stand on the inerrancy of the Bible is an aprioristic asylum of invincible ignorance, the Lutheran apologist will offer the best evidence in support of our Lord's own assertion that Scripture cannot be broken.

Finally, the confessional apologist will see himself not as a Holy-Spirit-substitute but as a John the Baptist in the wilderness of a secular age, preparing the way of the Lord, making the paths intellectually straight which lead to the Lamb of God—to the only One who can take away the sins of the world.

Admittedly, such an apologetic is not provided, full-blown, in the *Book of Concord*. Apologetics speaks to the fallen man, and the *Zeitgeist* constantly changes. There is no absolute apologetic; the apologetic task faces each generation of Christians anew. But we of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have taken a giant step forward to meet that challenge. A Lutheran Council in the U.S.A. news release of December 1, 1977, quotes the report of a five-year official LCUSA theological study observing that "the LCA and ALC have not felt it necessary to adopt doctrinal statements in addition to the confessional articles. The LCMS, on the other hand, has reserved for itself the right to restate its positions on doctrinal matters throughout its history."

The Missouri Synod has rightly seen that modern secularism requires new confessional responses; she has not been intimidated into accepting modern heresies such as result from the application of historical-critical hermeneutics just because the sixteenth century Confessions antedated them. Surely, then, in the realm of apologetics—a domain far less static than dogmatics—we can no longer employ our theology as the fundamentalists do their sociological blue laws, to wall the church off from the real challenges of the age. Only the Word of God remains forever; nothing else is changeless. Now that



our battle for the Bible has been won, let us with apologetic vigor show modern secular man that the Holy Scriptures still have the last Word.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, VII.
2. Cf. Johann Georg Walch, *Introductio in Libros Ecclesiae Lutheranae Symbolicos, observationibus historicis et theologicis illustrata* (Ienae [Jena]: sumtu viduae Meyer, 1732).
3. See, *inter alia*, the writings of J. N. D. Kelly (*Early Christian Creeds; Early Christian Doctrines: The Athanasian Creed*).
4. W. D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), pp. 142-43.
5. Leonhard Hutter, *Concordia Concors: De Origine et Progressu Formulae Concordiae* (Witebergae [Wittenberg]: Clement Berger, 1614).
6. See Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), pp. 148-55.
7. Published in Swedish in *Ditt Ord ar Sanning: En Handbok om Bibeln, tillagnad David Hedegaard*, ed. Seth Erlandsson ("Biblicums Skriftserie," 2; Uppsala: Stiftelsen Biblicum, 1971), pp. 234-58. Available in English in the *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, XI, 1 (Special Issue; Fall, 1970), and in John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact* (New York and Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).
8. Cf. Montgomery, *Chytræus on Sacrifice* (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1962); Montgomery, *Cross and Crucible* ("Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Idées," 55; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 2 vols.; and Montgomery, "Chemnitz on the Council of Trent," in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology; Festschrift for John H. Gerstner*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 73-94.
9. See Montgomery, *Christianity for the Toughminded* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1973) and *Myth, Allegory and Gospel* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974).
10. F. C. Ep. VII, 42 (486.42). Throughout this essay, citations to the *Concordia* follow the standard system employed by Schlink in his *Theologie der lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften*. For convenience we have also added in parentheses page and paragraph references to the Tappert edition of the *Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), and unless otherwise indicated, English translations of Confessional sources have been quoted from that edition.
11. F.C. S.D. VIII, 43 (599.43).
12. See my essays, "Clark's Philosophy of History," in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark: A Festschrift*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 353-90, 505-11; and "Once Upon an A Priori," in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til*, ed. E. R. Geehan (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971), pp. 380-92, 482-83.
13. S.C. II, 6 (345.6).

14. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. P. F. Koehneke and H.J.A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 3-4.
15. F.C. S.D. II, 43 (529.43).
16. Ap. IV, 229-30 (139.229-30).
17. S.A. III, iii, 18 (306.18).
18. Ap. IV, 9 (108.9).
19. Ap. IV, 27-31 (111.27-31).
20. Ap. IV, 288 (151.288).
21. F.C. Ep. I, 9 (467.9); F.C. S.D. I, 8 (510.8); F.C. S.D. II, 60 (519.60).
22. F.C. Ep. XI, 9, 16 (495.9; 497.16); F.C. S.D. XI, 26, 91 (620.26; 631.91).
23. F.C. Ep. IX, 4 (492.4); F.C. S.D. IX, 3 (610.3).
24. F.C. S.D. VII, 102-106 (587.102-588.106).
25. F.C. Ep. VII, 42 (486.42); F.C. S.D. VIII, 96 (609.96).
26. Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (2 vols.; St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1970-1972), I, pp. 100-103; II, p. 35.
27. Ap. IV, 48, 99, 227, 249, 304, 383, (113.48; 121.99; 139.227; 142.249; 154.304; 165.383).
28. A.C. XX, 23 (44.23).
29. See Carpzov's discussion of this point: Johann Benedict Carpzov, *Isagoge in Libros Ecclesiarum Lutheranarum Symbolicos*, ed. Johann Olearius and Johann Benedict Carpzov, Jr. (third ed.; Lipsiae [Leipzig]: David Fleischer, 1699), pp. 206-207, 224, 286.
30. Cf. John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970), pp. 289 ff.
31. Schlink, *op. cit.* (in note 14 above), pp. 48-52.
32. S.A. III, i, 3-4 (302.3-4).
33. Schlink, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
34. Ap. IV, 375 (164.375).
35. Ap. IV, 383-84 (166.383-84).
36. Ap. XII, 123 (200.123).
37. F.C. S.D. VII, 50 (578.50). See also Gottfried Olearius, *Isagoge Anticalvinistica secundum Formulae Concordiae* (Lipsiae [Leipzig]: Johann Wittigau, 1662), pp. 91-114; and Sebastian Schmidt, *Articulorum Formulae Concordiae repetitio* (Argentorati [Strasbourg]: Josias Staedel, 1696), pp. 348-74.
38. Cf. Montgomery, *The Shaping of America* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976).
39. "Die logischen Satze beschreiben das Gerust der Welt, oder vielmehr, sie stellen es dar. Sie 'handeln' von nichts" (Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.124; cf. 3.42 and 4.023).
40. F.C. S.D. VIII, 41-42 (599.41-42). The *Formula of Concord* is here quoting Luther (WA, XXVI, 321-22).
41. A.C. XVIII, 4 (39.4); we follow the Latin text here.
42. Ap. XVIII, 4 (225.4).
43. Cf. Henry W. Reimann, "Matthias Flacius Illyricus," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXV (February, 1964), pp. 69-93.
44. Ap. XXI, 24 (232.24).
45. Ap. XXI, 19 (231.19).
46. F.C. S.D. II, 26 (526.26).
47. Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge: An Introductory Study in Christian Apologetic Methodology* (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian

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and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976), p. 105. Dr. Robert H. Countess provides an excellent review of this work in *Christianity Today*, November 18, 1977, pp. 34-35.

48. See Montgomery, *Sensible Christianity* cassette series (3 vols.; Santa Ana, Ca.: Vision House/One Way Library, 1976).