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The Use of the Church Fathers in the Formula of Concord

J.A.O. Preus

The use of the church fathers in the Formula of Concord reveals the attitude of the writers of the Formula to Scripture and to tradition. The citation of the church fathers by these theologians was not intended to override the great principle of Lutheranism, which was so succinctly stated in the Smalcald Articles, "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel" (II, 2.15). The writers of the Formula subscribed wholeheartedly to Luther's dictum. But it is also true that the writers of the Formula, as well as the writers of all the other Lutheran Confessions, that is, Luther and Melanchthon, did not look upon themselves as operating in a theological vacuum. They were part of the historic church. Luther was an Augustinian friar, with great respect for the man whose name the order adopted. He had had extensive training in scholastic and patristic theology, for which he made few apologies. Melanchthon was a humanist and was schooled in the great writings of the past. Both had respect for history and tradition, and they viewed the church as an organism in vital continuity with its past and its future. They did not believe that the Reformation was something which had burst full-blown from the mind of God or that they alone had first received the revelation of the Gospel. The writers of the Formula were trained in this same school of thought. They were all sons of the church in the historic and traditional sense. In order to get a picture of the use of the church fathers in the Formula of Concord, it will be necessary to look beyond the limits of that document, since the Formula does not cite the fathers at great length.

I. The Use of the Fathers in Luther and the Pre-Formula Lutheran Confessions

A. Luther

Luther had a great respect for his theological fathers, but he was rather eclectic in his choices. As a study of his exegetical writings will show, he relied heavily on the Spaniard, Paul the

bishop of Burgos. Luther regarded him highly and cited him frequently. Born Solomon ha-Levi in 1351, he became a rabbi, was converted to Christianity by the study of Aquinas, wrote additions to Lyra's work, and was finally made bishop of Burgos, one of the outstanding sees in Spain. Luther was also a great admirer of Lyra (1270-1340), a Franciscan Hebrew scholar who produced excellent commentaries on Genesis and Isaiah. Luther leaned on Lyra quite frequently in his commentary on Genesis, as the doggerel poem states, "If Lyra had not played the lyre, Luther would not have danced." Luther taught a course in the theology of Peter Lombard, who in turn cites many of the fathers. Luther was also a particularly knowledgeable student of Augustine. Thus it is not strange that Luther and his followers would be well-versed in the fathers, use them respectfully, and claim them for their theological fore-runners.

As an example of Luther's use of the fathers, note the account of the Marburg Colloquy,² where Luther, Zwingli and Oecolampadius get into an argument over certain quotes from Augustine and Fulgentius. Luther shows great acquaintance with Augustine and, not only knows him, but tells how he must be interpreted.

B. The Pre-Formula Confessions

As to the use of the fathers in the pre-Formula Lutheran confessions, it should be noted that the Augsburg Confession has fourteen citations from, or references to, the fathers; the Apology has twenty-nine; the Smalcald Articles has only five; the Small Catechism has none; the Large Catechism of Luther has five, with one of them negative (something rather unusual). The comparatively small number of actual quotations or references to the fathers in the Confessions does not indicate a lack of interest in, or respect for, the fathers on the part of the Lutheran theologians, but rather reflects the intended purpose of the Confessions. "Confessions" are the symbols or rallying points for the whole church: for the laity, for parish pastors, and for officials; they are not intended only for theologians. The use of the fathers is far more the task of scholars than of the common people. The very introduction to the Catalog of Testimonies bears witness to this fact. But the manner in which fathers are used is the same in Luther, in Melancthon, in the early confessions, in the Formula of Concord, and in the writers of the Formula.

II. The Use of the Fathers in Lutheran Writings Preceding the Formula of Concord

A. Chemnitz

Next to Luther himself, Martin Chemnitz is the man who has left the greatest mark on the theology of the Lutheran church. The writings of Chemnitz, which continued to be published well into the eighteenth century, are the best examples of the state of theology in the late confessional period of Lutheranism that are currently available. Likewise, Chemnitz' use of the fathers gives a clear picture of the position of late confessional Lutheranism on this subject. It is important to state that there is no significant difference between the usage that Luther, Melancthon, and the pre-Formula confessions make of the fathers and the way in which Chemnitz and the Catalog of Testimonies of 1580 used them. The primary difference is that in the voluminous writings of Chemnitz there are literally thousands of citations which give a total picture of the theology of the church fathers. It should be noted that many of Chemnitz' writings were completed before he began earnest work on the Formula of Concord and the others were produced during the period of work on the Formula. In fact, he produced very little after 1580, and his last years were spent with the work of producing the Formula of Concord, getting others to support and sign it, and defending it.

Chemnitz spent the years from 1550 to 1553 at Koenigsberg where he served as librarian. He apparently spent all of his time reading Luther, commentaries on the Scripture, and the church fathers. He emerged from this literary paradise as probably the best informed and best equipped student of patristics that Lutheranism has ever known. As an example of Chemnitz' treatment of the church fathers, the treatise entitled "On the Reading of the Fathers or Doctors of the Church" may be cited. This treatise was later to be incorporated as part of the introductory material to Chemnitz' *Loci Theologici*.

He begins with the earliest fathers and continues to the time of Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian controversies. The following quote is representative of the material in this treatise:

Irenaeus is by far the oldest among those whose writings are extant and of whom there is nothing doubtful. He sat at the feet of Polycarp, the disciple of John. Moreover, he wrote many things which were preserved by Jerome. But in our day only five books remain, and these indeed are

rather badly translated, since Irenaeus in his own language speaks with great elegance.... However, these books are most worthy of our reading because they deal with the main points of the Christian faith in a most fundamental way. For in those days heretics were rejecting the Scripture and obtruding onto the churches their own absurd ravings under the name of apostolic tradition. Therefore, Irenaeus sets forth the true tradition which had been commended to the church by the apostles, namely, that the summary of the faith is comprehended in the Creed (for he often cites the Creed in almost the precise words) and he says that the tradition in all the apostolic churches is the same. To this he adds the text of the Scripture and in many ways demonstrates which of the writings of the apostles are canonical. He summarizes the matter in two points, tradition or the Creed, and the text of the Scripture; and what does not agree with these, he rejects as heretical. We must carefully observe this in opposition sitto our adversaries who are trying to get the church to accept notable errors and manifest abuses on the grounds that the only traditions are the things which they say. In the second place, the pious mind will be greatly comforted when it sees that in the description of the heretics of that time the face of the papacy is already becoming evident with all its errors and abuses, such as anointing extreme unction, and many other matters. Furthermore, a great many fine doctrinal points are contained in the writings of Irenaeus concerning nearly every article of faith, such as the two natures in Christ, the Eucharist which is not a sacrifice as our adversaries imagine, and that the fathers in the Old Testament were saved by the same faith as the saints of the New Testament. Again, however, because even at that time he was disputing against the same notion which the Manichaeans later embraced, he speaks harshly and unfortunately concerning the free will. Again, because he was opposing those who dreamed that there is one God who is the righteous God of the Law and another God who is the merciful God of the New Testament, he sometimes speaks carelessly regarding the distinction of Law and Gospel. But in other places he makes a proper and careful statement concerning faith in Christ and justification. He does not set forth a sufficiently accurate definition of original sin because he is speaking in opposition to those

who attributed the cause of sin to God. We can read these points in many places in Irenaeus and, when we see clearly both the cause and the occasion of what he says and why he speaks the way he does, then his words can be read without offence and with real profit. There are some rather superficial statements, as in his explanation of Elohim, Adonai, Sabaoth, which are lacking in grammatical foundation. And when he says that Christ was almost fifty years old, he has no historical basis. The ancient church noted in him one basic error, namely, his holding to Chiliasm, and there are in Book 5 a few seeds of this error in his handling of certain chapters of the Apocalypse.⁶

In other writings Chemnitz carries his list of "fathers" down to Luther and Melancthon. He is highly critical and issues warnings against certain men, even some of the greatest. Chemnitz states that Augustine is correct almost all the time, but he did not speak correctly on justification. Chemnitz notes that John of Damascus lived during the decline of the church and the Moslem conquest, and so most of what he has written is worthless; but his Christology is valuable, and therefore Chemnitz quotes him. John Cassian is roundly condemned for his Pelagianism and is approvingly cited for his Christology. Jerome is praised by Chemnitz as an exegete and berated as a tactless and legalistic supporter of Mariolatry and monasticism. Chemnitz' *De Duabus Naturis in Christo*⁷ has certain chapters devoted almost entirely to citations from the fathers. Chapter 25, entitled "Testimonies of the Ancient Orthodox Church," has 313 patristic or conciliar quotations dealing with the personal union, ranging from Justin down to Luther. In all, thirty-three fathers and one council are cited. Again in chapter nine Chemnitz has 240 citations. Likewise in his *De Coena Domini*, chapter ten has over 130 references and chapter twelve over 90, these dealing with the teachings of the fathers concerning the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Chemnitz' trenchant critique of the Council of Trent, the *Examen*, is a fine example of Chemnitz' usage of the fathers. Just a look at the indices of the volumes already published will show what a formidable opponent Chemnitz was to those lordly Iberian Jesuits with his use of weapons from their own arsenal, that is, the church fathers.

B. *The Magdeburg Centuries*

Another factor which perhaps did not influence Melanchthon or Chemnitz greatly, but which shows that the study of patristics was not unknown in Lutheran circles, was the beginning of the publication in 1559 of the now famous *Magdeburg Centuries*. This work was conceived by Matthias Flacius in 1553, begun in 1559, and ended in 1574. It went only as far as the thirteenth century, although it had been projected to go to the sixteenth. Some of it has never been printed, although the manuscripts exist. It was to be a church history, century by century, based on original sources showing the course of the true doctrine and the deviations from it in each century. The Romanists called it an *opus pestilentissimum*.

III. The Use of the Fathers in the Formula of Concord

A. *The Epitome and the Solid Declaration*

In the Formula of Concord itself, the last and longest of the Lutheran confessions, the citation of the fathers is infrequent, as noted before. The Epitome, which was obviously written, like the two catechisms of Luther, for the laity and the parish clergy, has only six citations or references to the fathers. In the Solid Declaration, on the other hand, there are twenty-four, including references to the creeds.

B. *The Catalog of Testimonies*

The most significant use of the fathers in the Book of Concord appears in the Catalog of Testimonies,¹¹ which was prepared by Andreae and Chemnitz and added as an appendix to the Book of Concord. This document, which is concerned only with Christology, contains eight citations from the canons of the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. There are at least 133 references to, or citations from, church councils or fathers. The reason that the Catalog does not appear to be the sole work of Chemnitz is that the Catalog's citations do not tally with the citations in his *De Duabus Naturis*. It is interesting that Andreae, who was also a prolific writer, also wrote a work entitled *De Duabus Naturis in Christo*.

C. *The Real "Father" in the Formula of Concord*

Using Chemnitz' example in his *De Duabus Naturis* as an indication that Luther was ranked with the "fathers," it can be asserted without hesitation that the "father" most quoted in the Formula is Luther himself. This document, which had as its purpose the uniting of the divided household of Lutheranism, operates on the principle that all Lutherans accept the three universal creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the two catechisms of Luther (FC SD Rule and Norm). The Formula of Concord of 1577 was certainly conceived of as being an integral part of a larger *corpus doctrinae* which was adopted in 1580 as the Book of Concord. The authors of the Formula were not being innovative in proceeding in this way because in the decade or so which led up to this Formula many territorial churches had already adopted *corpora doctrinae*, which included the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the two Catechisms.

Without raising everything that Luther said to the level of a confession, it is worthy to note that every single article in the Solid Declaration, except Article XII which is in a special category, has at least one quote or reference to Luther. Some of the articles have many quotes from him. It is also interesting to note that wherever possible they cite his catechisms or the Smalcald Articles. They also cite the Augsburg Confession and the Apology. When they do not cite Luther's confessional writings, they cite his better known and most acceptable ones. There are references to his preface to Romans, his many writings on the Lord's Supper, *De Servo Arbitrio*, *On Councils and the Church*, his commentary on Galatians, and various sermons. They do not cite his more vituperative works. There is no question that Luther is the real "father" and hero of the Formula of Concord, the flag around which his quarrelling sons were invited to rally. It is interesting to note that, in speaking of the Formula as a confession with the great words "we believe, teach and confess," the writers, who represented both the Gnesio-Lutheran wing and the Philippist wing, are raising many of the writings of Luther himself to confessional rank. In no case, except for the "Unaltered Augsburg Confession" and the Apology, are Melancthon's writings treated in this way, nor are those of any other Lutheran, including those of the authors. A rather careful study of the way in which the Solid Declaration is constructed shows that each article begins with a statement of the *status controversiae* which is followed by a clear and concise statement of the correct doctrine buttressed by

Scripture, and then there are citations from Luther and occasionally from the other fathers or councils to support what has been said.

IV. The Relationship of Scripture and the Fathers in the Formula

What is the relationship between Scripture and the fathers as authorities in the enunciation of doctrine in the Formula and in the writings of those who produced it? Despite the fact that Luther, Melancthon, Chemnitz, and the other authors of the Formula make much greater use of the fathers than we do in our age, the fact remains that they are our best teachers in emphasizing that "The Word of God alone shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel" (SA II, 2.15). If one were to accuse these men of traditionalism or crypto-romanism on the subject of authority in matters of doctrine, they would be appalled. Endless quotations can be adduced to demonstrate this fact, but the introduction to the Epitome of the Formula of Concord is a good place to begin (Rule and Norm, 2-3):

"Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, (which are to show) in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this (pure) doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved. And because directly after the times of the apostles, and even while they were still living, false teachers and heretics arose, and symbols, i.e., brief, succinct (categorical) confessions, were composed against them in the early Church, which were regarded as the unanimous, universal Christian faith and confession of the orthodox and true Church, namely, the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, we pledge ourselves to them, and hereby reject all heresies and dogmas which, contrary to them, have been introduced into the Church of God.

The Solid Declaration speaks in the same way (Rule and Norm, 2-3):

...just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols moreover, since this (comprehensive form of doctrine) should not be based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and receiv-

ed in the name of the churches which pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion, we have declared to one another with heart and mouth that we will not make or receive a separate or new confession of our faith, but confess the public common writings which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the dissensions arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession, and as long as in all articles there was on all sides a unanimous adherence to (and maintenance and use of) the pure doctrine of the divine Word, as the sainted Dr. Luther explained it.

First (then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart) the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.

It is also significant that the Catalog of Testimonies is not merely a collection of testimonies from the fathers, but in each article the opening statements consist of testimonies from Scripture dealing with the particular point at issue. This is a practice which Chemnitz commonly follows in his writings: First a chapter of testimonies from Scripture, then a chapter of testimonies from great men of God. Chemnitz' *Examen* has some extremely interesting quotations from the fathers which show their dependence upon Scripture and their insistence that Scripture is to be the highest authority in the church. One such statement of Augustine provides a good example:

I do not accept this opinion of Cyprian, that heretics are to be rebaptized, although I am incomparably inferior to Cyprian; as also I do not accept the opinion of the apostle Peter where he forced the gentiles to judaize, nor do I act upon it, although I am incomparably inferior to Peter.¹³

He put the authority of Scripture above even the greatest men. How Chemnitz must have enjoyed throwing this quotation in the teeth of the Jesuits!

V. Reasons for Citing the Fathers

The question may be asked as to why our Lutheran fathers, with their strong emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*, felt any need or desire to cite the ancient fathers of the church, many of whom were in error on many points and whose writings added greatly

to the burden of studying a doctrinal point. The Anabaptists and other sects condemned in Article XII of the Formula were already ranting about the lack of complete house-cleaning by Luther and his followers, but the Lutherans of the period of the Formula of Concord held firm.

About eight different reasons may be adduced for the use of the fathers in this and succeeding periods of Lutheran church history, even down to the present day in the works of Francis Pieper and other moderns.

1. The Catalog of Testimonies begins with this statement: In the article of the Person of Christ, some have without reason asserted that in the Book of Concord there is a deviation from *phrasibus* and *modis loquendi*, that is, the phrases and modes of speech of the ancient pure church and the fathers, and that, on the contrary, new, strange, self-devised, unusual and unheard-of expressions are introduced....

This point appears several times in the writings of Chemnitz. There is a strong desire to remain within the tradition of the ancient pure church not only in teaching but even in terminology.

2. There was a desire to show the unbroken tradition of teaching. This was certainly the philosophy behind the *Magdeburg Centuries*. This was one of the chief defenses against the Romanists. Chemnitz in his *Examen*:

We confess also that we disagree with those who invent opinions which have no testimony from any period in the church, as Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists, and others have done in our time. We also hold that no dogma that is new in the churches and in conflict with all of antiquity should be accepted.

Chemnitz was not the first, but he was certainly a strong advocate of the historical approach to the study of theology.

3. There was the desire to identify with the ancient purer church and its interpretation of Scripture. The point is often made that the closer one can get to the time of the apostles, the closer one gets to the correct teaching. Chemnitz is very upset with Andrada:

Andrada wrongs us in that he clamors that we count the authority of the fathers as nothing, that we overthrow the approbation, faith, and majesty of the church. For we can affirm with good conscience that we have, after reading the Holy Scripture, applied ourselves and yet daily apply ourselves to the extent that the grace of the Lord permits to

inquiry into and investigation of the consensus of the true and purer antiquity. For we assign to the writings of the fathers their proper and, indeed, honorable place which is due them, because they have clearly expounded many passages of Scripture, have defended the ancient dogmas of the church against new corruptions of heretics, and have done so on the basis of Scripture, have correctly explained many points of doctrine, have recorded many things concerning the history of the primitive church, and have usefully called attention to many things.

Chemnitz adds that he longs to see them in the life to come.

4. The Lutheran theologians of the Reformation and confessional period wanted to establish authority for their own teaching. This is certainly Luther's practice in his numerous citations. This is also quite evident in the use that the Augsburg Confession and the Apology make of the fathers.

5. The fathers were used by the Lutherans to refute errors, both in the Roman camp, as Chemnitz does so brilliantly in his *Examen*, and also in the Reformed camp, as both the Formula and the writings of the Lutherans of the confessional period demonstrate.

6. The Lutheran confessors used the fathers to distinguish between the Scripture and the writings of men, even the highly honored fathers themselves. This is very evident in a work such as the treatise "On the Reading of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church" in the introduction to Chemnitz' *Loci Theologici*. He is swift to point out that, great as some of the fathers were, all made mistakes. The Scripture did not. The Scripture was and is for us the ultimate authority.

7. The fathers were cited to help in establishing a normative interpretation for certain key doctrines and passages. This use is evident both in Chemnitz' *De Duabus Naturis*, as well as in the articles on free will and the Lord's Supper in the Formula where there are substantive quotations from Augustine and Chrysostom. For example, Chrysostom says in his "Sermon Concerning the Passion" (cf. FC SD VII, 76):

Christ Himself prepares this table and blesses it; for no man makes the bread and wine set before us the body and blood of Christ, but Christ Himself who was crucified for us. The words are spoken by the mouth of the priest, but by God's power and grace, by the word, where He speaks: "This is My body," the elements presented are consecrated in the Supper. And just as the declaration, Gen. 1:28: "Be

fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth," was spoken only once, but is ever efficacious in nature, so that it is fruitful and multiplies, so also this declaration ("This is My body; this is My blood") was spoken once, but even to this day and to His advent it is efficacious, and works so that in the Supper of the church His true body and blood are present.¹⁷

8. Finally, it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility that the Lutherans were a little impressed with their own learning and wanted to display it to the supercilious and sophisticated Romanists, as well as to the ignorant and uneducated fanatics. "Are they Hebrews? So am I" (2 Cor. 11:22). Chemnitz was a very learned man, as was Andreae. So were Luther and Melanchthon. They and other Lutheran theologians took a back seat to no men of their age. It can be conjectured that the reason Chemnitz did not stay at Wittenberg, where he was called in 1553 as a professor, perhaps to succeed Melanchthon, was not his modesty or his lack of self-confidence or his inability to teach (for he was very popular), but the fact that he saw coming down the road a head-on clash with his mentor, and this neither he nor his beloved Lutheran church needed. It is significant that the fathers of the Formula waited till both Melanchthon and Osiander were dead before they got busy.

VI. Lessons for Our Times

A. *The Position and Principle of the Formula of Concord*

In conclusion, certain lessons from this study may be drawn for our church life today. Robert Preus is correct in summing up the position of the Formula of Concord in his recent book, *Getting into the Theology of Concord*, where he states:

Now that we have talked about the authority of our Confessions and creeds as norms for teaching in the church and also about the authority of Scripture, the reader may be a bit confused. Are there, then, levels of authority? Yes. Precisely. Specifically there is a threefold tier of authority in the church, according to our Confessions.

1. "The prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments" are "the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated" (FC SD, Rule and Norm, 3). That statement means two things: (a) Scripture is the one divine source from which, as

from a spring or fountain, we draw all our theology; and (b) Scripture is the *only* norm to judge teachers and teachings in the church.

2. The Confessions, on the other hand, are the "basis, rule, and norm, indicating how all doctrines should be judged in conformity with the Word of God" (*ibid.*, Heading). This means, quite simply, that the Confessions state what we Lutherans believe to be the teachings of Scripture and what we therefore believe, teach and publicly confess.

3. Other good Christian writings, that is, "good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles" have their place too. They are not to be rejected or spurned. "If they are in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine (namely, the Confessions), they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations" (*ibid.*, 10).

Scripture, the Confessions, other good Christian literature! Scripture's authority is divine and absolute. The Confessions' authority is derived from their agreement with Scripture and is binding for everyone who professes to be a Lutheran. Other Christian writings are authoritative and useful too when they agree with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.¹⁸

In the Formula of Concord there is respect for the Scripture, but not in the fundamentalist sense that there is a total gap between the days of the apostles and our time. There is also respect for the on-going confession of the church down through the ages, a confession which is reached after careful and prayerful discussion and study. There is no place for the grandstander, the individualist, the loner in Lutheranism. By the time of the Formula many of the "fathers" of Lutheranism had developed clay feet—Melancthon, Osiander, Amsdorf, Flacius, John Agricola, and many others. Even Andeae, after the adoption of the Formula, was told to go home and stay there.

B. Resolutions by Church Bodies

The Lutheran Church, in the adoption of its last confession, had stated that the day of the individualistic theologian, be he left-wing or right-wing, ecumenical or exclusivistic, honored for his learning or despised for his irascibility was over. From

this point on the Lutherans were a church, not just a confessional movement, not just a disorganized rabble, not a massive case of rampant congregationalism, not a case where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." We work by church decision and collective deliberation. The Missouri Synod, in this sense, is a true child of the Book of Concord. We have often been criticised for our use of "synodically adopted doctrinal resolutions," for "voting on doctrine," for denying the individual rights of the congregations (which is often a euphemism for the predilections of individual pastors or professors), and of being guilty of denying the Gospel by weeding people out of the church. If we are guilty, so were the framers of the Formula, who had only the one motive of keeping Lutheranism together and confessing the pure Gospel and the sacraments. The willingness of the writers of the Formula to come to grips with the problems facing Lutheranism itself, to condemn men who had at one point or another been heroes of the faith and honored professors, to hold to the Lutheran understanding of the Scripture in the face of threats from the papists, infiltration by the crypto-calvinists, and treachery by their own theologians — all of this we honor and admire. And well we should, for they built well, they called us back to the sources (*ad fontes*), they gave us a heritage which we treasure today.

C. Our Present Problems, Direction, and Responsibility

As we look back to this era in the history of our church, we can draw some conclusions. The writers of the Formula tried for unity and peace. They did not resort to name-calling. They did not demand the impossible. Chemnitz, for example, who was a Gnesio-Lutheran, who hesitated to work with Andreae because he had at one time been interested in peace at any price, this same Chemnitz was willing to leave some questions to be settled in "the heavenly academy," because they could not be solved in this world. We must be careful in our synod that we do not expect more of people than they can bear (cf. Luke 11:46) or than Scripture clearly states. Nor dare we, on the other hand, allow any, be he a modern Melancthon or Flacius, gifted and honored by the church, to chip away at our cherished doctrinal stance and then cover it up by denial, evasions, and failure to take proper disciplinary action. Souls are at stake as is the doctrinal integrity of our church.

Thus we must punctiliously observe our synodical regulations regarding changes in the doctrinal position of Synod. The rules are there. We must use them or stop harassing the church. We must not use students or immature pastors to fight our battles for us. Melanchthon, Osiander, Flacius, and others all misused their offices and teaching positions to undermine the position of their church, and they ultimately were destroyed. Imagine the embarrassment for the Lutherans of the time of the Formula to have to add the word "unaltered" every time they mentioned the Augsburg Confession. The very writer of their basic confession betrayed it. What an embarrassment it was for our synod to have the faculty of a seminary where Walther, Pieper, and Stoeckhardt taught trying to mislead the entire synod. How tragic it would be if, after this sad episode, we would fritter away our energies on issues not clearly settled in Scripture and allow major deviations from the clear teachings of Scripture, the Confessions, and our doctrinal heritage to remain unchallenged because of cronyism or timorousness. Faculties have had a special responsibility and a special temptation, both in former days and in our own time. Unfortunately, we are witnessing today an incredibly swift deterioration of confessionalism in Lutheranism, led by faculties and officials who are intimidated, incompetent, or, worst of all, have abandoned the Scripture as the highest authority in the church. In such an environment, the wisdom and guidance of the church fathers is often glibly overlooked. However, the stalwart example of the authors of the Formula of Concord and their attitude towards the fathers should give to all of us a renewed determination and resolution to make every effort to keep our church faithful to the Scripture, the confessions, and the theological heritage given to us by the fathers down through all the ages of the church.

FOOTNOTES

1. All confessional references in this paper are quoted from *Concordia Triglotta. The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).
2. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-1972), 38:58ff.
3. *Triblotta*, pp. 1106-1113.
4. [Martin Chemnitz], *Oratio de lectione patrum* Wittenberg, 1154).

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Dr. J.A.O. Preus is Immediate Past President of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and a former President and professor of Concordia Theological Seminary Springfield, IL (now Fort Wayne, IN)