

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*The Augsburg Confession: Renewing Lutheran Faith and Practice.* By Timothy J. Wengert. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. 349 pp.

This commentary on the Augsburg Confession (CA) aims to do what it says in the subtitle—to renew Lutheran faith and practice. Written by a coeditor of the *Book of Concord* (2000), the author demonstrates deep knowledge of the context and contents of this key Lutheran confessional document. Robert Kolb, fellow coeditor of the *Book of Concord*, writes in the Foreword that this commentary focuses on “the living voice of the gospel and its application in the world in which believers experience the blessings of God” (ix). This book, then, is much more than just another commentary on the CA.

In the introduction, the author stresses the importance of the confessional nature of the CA. It is far different from a series of doctrinal articles. “Luther put readers on notice that the real point of the Augsburg Confession was not simply stating correct doctrine or compelling compliance to such doctrine . . . but rather as a moment of confessing” (1). An overview of the context and history of events leading to the writing and public reading of the CA on June 25, 1530, follows.

The book has twenty-eight chapters, one for each article in the CA. These chapters are divided into two parts. The first covers the preface to the CA plus articles I through XXI (13–203). Each chapter follows a pattern. After what this reviewer terms a “teaser” chapter title, the author shares a personal experience or observation, drawn from his years as a scholar, teacher, and pastor. In part one, translations of both the German and Latin texts follow. Thereafter the author shares phrase by phrase reflections or commentary. Each chapter closes with “We Teach and Confess,” which links the doctrine to present day teachings and practices. Of interest for this reviewer is the title of the fourth chapter, “The Christian’s Two Religions,” and its longer first section on Article IV (49–57). The author

expands on the terms “Up Religion” and “Down Religion” to set the context for understanding the unconditional nature of God’s grace, as set forth in this key article on justification “on account of Christ through faith” (52).

Part two is entitled “Practicing the Faith” and focuses on articles XXII–XXVIII (215–299). The chapters follow the same pattern as earlier chapters, but reflections are limited to key sections of these much longer articles, with the text of the articles in an appendix with the German and Latin translations side-by-side on two-page spreads (300–343).

The epilogue, entitled “We Confess and Teach,” begins with a chilling first sentence. “They were caught in the act of confessing their faith” (293). A list and brief description of each of the signers of the original document follows. “This act of confessing shaped not just the document but also, more importantly, their witness within the church catholic down to the present day” (294). While the author then mentions ordination practice in the 1950s in the New York Ministerium where candidates were required to subscribe their names to the Augsburg Confession, this reviewer has witnessed this same requirement for ordinands in the current Lutheran liturgies for ordination. The Augsburg Confession is as vibrant a confession now as it was in the sixteenth century!

Throughout, the author threads articles with common themes together, resulting in a beautiful confessional fabric, e.g., IV to III and VI (53–54), V to XVIII (59), VII to VIII and XV (83). This unifies the confession, thus discouraging reading the articles as a list of disparate doctrines. Less key but helpful is the shift to sans serif typeface for longer quotations, as well as footnotes and an index to aid study of the text.

This book was a delight to read. For teachers, pastors and all interested in the distinctive nature of Lutheran confessions, this commentary, together with *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations* (Wengert, Fortress Press, 2006), should be included as standard for classes on Lutheran confessional writings.

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