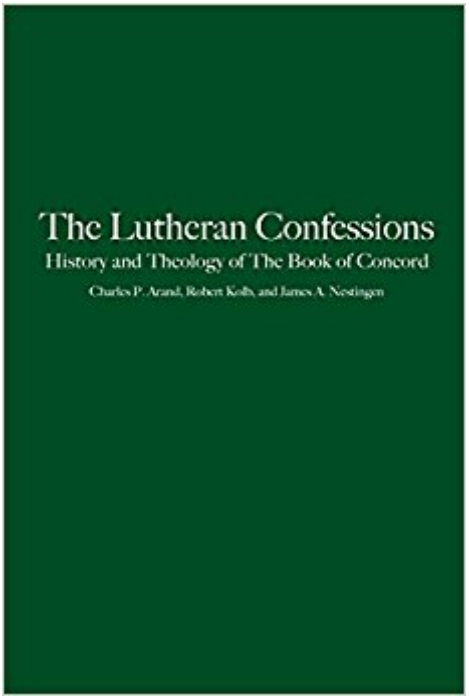
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The Lutheran Confessions: History And Theology Of The Book Of Concord



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Synopsis

From their formulation in the sixteenth century through the present day, every generation of Lutheran leadership has grappled with the centrality and importance of the Lutheran confessional writings. In this important new volume, Arand, Kolb, and Nestingen bring the fruit of an entire generation of scholarship to bear on these documents, making it an essential and up-to-date class text.The Lutheran Confessions places the documents solidly within their political, social, ecclesiastical, and theological contexts, relating them to the world in which they took place, and assists readers in understanding the issues at stake in the narratives, both in their own time and in ours.

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Customer Reviews

Charles P. Arand is Waldemar A. and June Schuette Chair in Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. His recent publications include The Genius of Luther's Theology (2008).Robert Kolb is Mission Professor of Systematic Theology, Emeritus, and Director of the Institute for Mission Studies at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Among his many publications are The Book of Concord (coeditor, 2001), and Martin Luther: Confessor of the Faith (2009).James A. Nestingen has taught Church History at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a nationally recognized Luther scholar as well as a popular speaker and lecturer. Nestingen is the author of numerous books, including Martin Luther: A Life (2003) and Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord (coeditor, 2001).

I bought this at the recommendation of a friend and find it very useful. I was trained as a historian rather than a theologian, so find it helpful that it provides more in the way of background and development than most books on the Lutheran credal statements.

In a post-modern age with little tolerance for absolute truth claims, the authors of The Lutheran Confessions begin their introduction delineating a phenomenon foreign to modern readers, namely, the concept of public confessions as fundamental descriptions of reality. Ninian Smart lists six basic elements necessary for living within the bounds of a shared Christian profession: (1) doctrine or teaching, (2) narrative, (3) ritual, (4) ethics, (5) community, and (6) the personal faith, and sense of reverential awe that binds the first five together. While every ideological system embraces all six elements, different Christian traditions assign differing values to each point. The Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican communions count upon their bishops and liturgy to hold the church together. Baptists highlight their identity through one peculiar doctrine in the context of a shared community experience. Reformed and Lutheran believers have defined themselves by an interpretation of the entire biblical narrative, composing documents labeled "confessions of faith" under adverse historical circumstances. In 1530, Roman Catholic Emperor Charles V demanded an elucidation from the German principalities who were introducing allegedly illegal reforms by Martin Luther and his Wittenberg colleagues. Philip Melancthon was tasked to lead a diplomatic team of theologians, delegated by Evangelical rulers to the Imperial Diet summoned to Augsburg, to defend the Lutheran reforms as being anchored in Scripture and the catholic tradition of the ancient church. This event led to what some called, "the most significant event that has ever taken place on earth," the Augsburg Confession. This statement of faith set the boundaries of early Lutheran confessional identity. The volume under review intends to be an aid in understanding the Lutheran confessional documents in their historical context in order for Christ’s church to confess an accurate interpretation of God’s word in the twenty-first century. The first part of the Lutheran Confessions addresses the history and theological contributions of the ancient ecumenical creeds: Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian.. This section is critical to understanding the conservative catholicity of the Lutheran Reformation and undergirding of later confessional documents. The authors begin by establishing the importance of the ecumenical creeds for defining the boundaries of historic Christianity. In a fragmented post-modern world of thirty-thousand Christian denominations, the ecumenical creeds establish a genuine catholicity in setting forth what Christians have historically held in common. This is why the Lutheran churches placed these creeds first in their confessional

documents. In contrast, the biblicist left-wing of the Reformation tended to downplaying the ecumenical creeds. The succinct Apostle's Creed is the most ancient, and according to the church fathers, was originally used as a baptismal formula in Rome. The contents are rooted in the teaching of the Apostle Paul and were specifically framed to refute the Gnostic heresy. The revolutionary Nicene Creed was posited as a response to the Arian controversies and harmonized the monotheistic principle of one God, with the Christological principle, that the Son is fully God. The Filioque clause [that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son] was appended in medieval times and was a major contributing cause in the Great East-West Schism of 1054. The origins of the Athanasian Creed are shrouded in mystery, but it provides a fine Augustinian window into the theological decisions of the fourth and fifth-century church. This document confidently states that whoever wants to be saved must hold to the Incarnation of Christ and the "catholic faith...whole and inviolate," or they will "perish eternally." The authors rightly observe how this confession will no doubt shock many twenty-first century readers. In chapter two, the authors discuss that despite their different origins, all three creeds safeguard the gospel, the Trinity, and the Incarnation, and are nothing less than the church's answer to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). A point obscured to modern evangelicals is that the historic creeds stand in the trajectory of the various New Testament confessional statements. The Apostle's Creed speaks of God in economic language, but the Arian controversy forced Nicaea to adopt ontological language in order to confess the co-equality of the three persons of the Godhead. At stake in the Arian debate was the question, "Is Christ the God who saves us or not?" During the fifth century, a controversy exploded between Nestorius of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria that began over whether Mary should be regarded as the mother of God. This title in no way implied Mary's deity but, rather, whether the child she carried in her womb was truly the Son of God. The Council of Ephesus (451) rejected Nestorius' position that divided the person of Christ into two persons and denied a personal union of the divine and human natures. The West adopted that the Son of God had one nature (divine) prior to the Incarnation and two natures after the Incarnation. The issue came to a head at the Council of Chalcedon (451), which used Antiochene expressions to convey Alexandrian content. After addressing the major ecumenical councils subscribed to by all orthodox Christians, the authors consider a lesser council, the Second Council of Nicaea (787), which dealt with the iconoclastic controversy over religious images. Leo had ordered the destruction of images fifty years earlier (726) on the grounds that they violated the prohibition against graven images. It is interesting that Pope Leo III came to a proto-Reformed iconoclastic position so early, and that he did so within the Western framework numbering the Decalogue. All recognized that God, as a Spirit, cannot be

pictured but that God became a man who can be portrayed. Leontius of Jerusalem pointed a way forward by arguing that the divine person and divine nature were separate principles. The council affirmed that, since God became a human creature, it was proper for images to be made of Jesus, angels, and the saints; these images were not intended for worship, but to recall to memory the prototypes they represented. The authors note, "In doing so, it saved Christian art for the church." Noticeably absent, from author's praise of the seventh council, is the mentioning of the council's other decrees regarding the efficacy of prayers by and for the dead, holy relics, and clerical discipline issues. In contrast to orthodox First Nicaea, Lutheran stalwart Martin Chemnitz rightly referred to Seventh Nicaea as an "image worshipping council." The second part of the Lutheran Confessions proceed to the sixteenth-century Wittenberg Confessions, Luther's and Melancthon's confessions of faith. It begins by helpfully noting the backdrop of Luther's medieval apocalypticism using Oberman's definition of "the waiting of God to act by in-breaking in space and time." Developments between 1517 and 1527 nurtured this hope, when an obscure monk from a remote region was catapulted to the center of European attention. With succeeding crises ranging from theological division at Wittenberg and conflicts with major academic lights, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, to one hundred thousand persons slaughtered in the Peasant's War, Luther's existential apocalyptic sense was well grounded. It was from this perception of God acting in time that Luther authored the Small and Large Catechisms. Unlike other reformers of the time who sought to overhaul the life of the church and state, Luther believed that, conceived in light of eternity, human projects would fail and only God's work would endure. The authors compare Luther's monergistic view of God's transformation through the Word, with the synergistic programs of self-reform, initiated by Jesuit founder Ignatius Loyola on one side, and the Reformed on the other. Both Zwingli and Calvin sought the ideal of a theocratic commonwealth in which ecclesiastical and political authorities linked to transform their communities. In contrast, Luther's monergistic view of reform is expressed in the statement, "While Philip and Amsdorf and I drank Wittenberg beer; the Word reformed the church." Luther would have been mortified to foresee the rise of a sectarian denominationalism, because he saw himself a catholic in every sense of the word. This ecumenical orientation of Luther has been classically referred to as "the conservative reformation," which stands in contrast to the transformational and programmatic views of reform. Eugene Fairweather observed that the history of the medieval church is the story of one failed reformation after another and, then finally, one that worked. As a comparison, a frequent critique made by conservative Anglicanism against the left-wing English Puritan and Scottish Covenanter models, was the inherent fragility and non-sustainability of leftist reform agendas. A historical-theological comparison of attempted

conservative and radical reforms and their long-term sustainability in various contexts would be of great value. After treating the context of the 1526 Saxon Church Visitation, the deep and complex friendship between Luther and Melancthon, and the Johann Agricola controversy, the authors return to the subject of Luther's writings. It was surprising to learn, that in 1520, over three-fourths of the book in print in Germany were written by Luther. Luther's Large Catechism was written for pastors and teachers; the Small Catechism was for families to use in the instruction of their children. Part of the genius of the Luther's catechisms was that they were designed for pastors and parents to learn even as they were teaching the truth to others. Luther's sensible manner in setting forth the Christian faith gave the catechisms a practical power, to the point that the Small Catechism eventually became known as "the layman's Bible." Organized around the Decalogue, Apostle's Creed, Lord's Prayer, the sacraments, and absolution, Luther's catechisms were Protestant in principle, while ecumenically catholic in substance. This Protestant principle and catholic substance are evidenced by Luther transforming the Augustinian Enchiridion order found in the medieval catechism of faith (the Creed), hope (the Lord's Prayer), and love (the Decalogue) - to the Decalogue first, the Creed second, and the Lord's Prayer third. Luther's rationale was biblical and experiential, namely that a sick person must first have their illness diagnosed (Decalogue), then find a prescription for the cure and find the medicine which will restore health (Apostle's Creed), and then seek and procure the medicine (Lord's Prayer). The authors address Barth's critique of Luther's law-gospel order but inexplicably lump the entire Calvinist tradition with Barth in insisting that the true knowledge of God (gospel) precedes diagnosing unbelief (law). This allegation is mystifying, since the opening chapter of Calvin's Institutes declares that the genuine cognizance of God and of self, of faith and repentance, occur simultaneously. Orthodox Calvinism has always maintained this position. Elementary errors of this sort tend to undermining the credibility of beneficial comparisons with the Reformed, a point that should be considered in the editorial review process. When compared to the various Reformed confessions, it was confusing to understand the conspicuous absence of theological terms in the Lutheran catechisms. There is no mention of justification by faith alone, simul iustus et peccator (simultaneously just and sinner), the bondage of the will or the uses of the law. The authors explain that the Small and Large Catechisms are not, properly speaking, theological documents but rather expressed in everyday language of God meeting his children of all ages. The explanation of Luther's concept of the Word of God in all its forms - oral, written, and sacramental, is helpful to those from outside the Lutheran tradition. The authors note how, in each of the sacraments, the oral Word clothes itself with the visible Word, as God embodies or materializes the gospel by joining the Word with the visible substance of everyday

life. The Lord’s Supper is more than bread and wine; baptism is more than mere water, so that when appended to the power of God’s Word, "forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation" is offered. Because the Word is God’s self-expression, it accomplishes what it declares. The Lutheran conviction of the finite containing the infinite by the miraculous creative power of God’s Word is, in the reviewer’s opinion, a pivotal presupposition to embracing a truly Protestant catholicity. Chapters 4 and 5 consider the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Obscured to the modern reader is an understanding basic to premodern Europe, that religious unity provided an essential prerequisite for political concord. The rise of the papacy had enforced Latin as the language of the church, so that the language, liturgy, and politics were intimately linked. Though Damasus of Rome (366-384) was the first to be given the title of "pope," it is important to remember that there was no supreme Roman bishop who dominated the Imperial Catholic Church. Before the barbarian invasions and fall of Rome (ca. 476), the concept of Christ’s church being "universal" but "Roman" (i.e. local) would have been viewed as an oxymoron, particularly in the eyes of the Greek Eastern Church. Luther’s insistence of reforming the mass to the common tongue of the people, encouraging monks, and nuns to marry, reforming the liturgy from all vestiges of works-righteousness, and reforming confession, and absolution from being instruments of social control, was viewed by Emperor Charles V as promoting sedition. Between 1517 and 1548 three Saxon electors, six rulers, and fourteen imperial cities supported the Lutheran Reformation, adding both political and military weight. With politics being the art of the possible, Charles and his imperial advisers looked for intermediate options. Meanwhile, the Protestants sought to consolidate their position by working out discrepancies among themselves. In 1529, Lutheran and Reformed participants met at Marburg and initially debated the nature of language, a seemingly innocent, but decisive, issue. The Swiss Reformed argued that words can only signify the ultimate reality behind it, whereas Luther held that words spoken by God are creative and have the power to accomplish what they declare. Though the delegates agreed on fourteen out of fifteen articles, on the fifteenth, concerning the real presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper, they did not. This is arguably the saddest chapter in Reformation history. Luther’s confession of 1528, the Schwabach Articles, along with his summary of the Marburg Colloquy, provided the raw materials for the Augsburg Confession. A summary of the history behind each article is provided, delineating how the framers attempted to navigate between two extremes: the abuses of Roman Catholicism on the right bank and, on the left bank, the moralistic, anti-clerical, anti-sacramental, millenarian, biblicism of the radical reformers. When Charles entered Augsburg with a corpus Christi procession, the offended Lutherans refused to participate which, in turn, offended Charles. Luther’s insistence on a radically Word-centered way

of thinking of reality was at complete odds with the Roman Catholic insistence that hierarchy and ritual held the church together. Both the catechisms and the Smalcald Articles bear Luther's name and marks, for they were written for public use. Melancthon composed the Augsburg Confession to defend the reformation before the civil authorities. In contrast, the Apology was Melancthon's personal response and formal defense to Charles V. In contrast to older scholarship, which argued that the Apology betrays that Melancthon and Luther were following different trajectories, recent scholarship has disputed this. Since the two Wittenberg reformers viewed their own roles in reform as distinctive, they have become an easy target for criticism. However, to do so is to compare watermelons with grapes. Four areas of alleged differences are discussed: the Lord's Supper, justification, the human will, and law. Both men held to the same principles, emphasizing different truths, and in the words of the authors, "Furthermore, no one had informed either one of them that Melancthon was supposed to be Luther's clone." Chapter 6 addresses the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope by noting the three-dimensional crisis for the Wittenberg Reformers. The first dimension was political and military. The second dimension was churchly in that, while maintaining firm allegiance to the catholic tradition of the church, Luther was bitterly critical of the corrupt power structures of the Mediterranean world and, particularly, the Papacy. The third dimension was the responding to the criticism of whether the reformation was merely a personal crusade. If Charles V were given the opportunity, then Lutheranism could quickly go the way of a whole succession of medieval reforms - into the ecclesiastical graveyard. A critical discussion of the church's relationship to the Roman Empire sheds light on the relation of church and state. Since the Donation of Pepin the Short (754), the papacy was notorious for intervening in governmental affairs, the net result being that political and religious authority was intimately linked in Europe for many centuries. The Roman theory of the two swords, civil and religious, was more of a theoretical distinction than a real separation. In analogous fashion, Zwingli and Calvin developed their own version of two swords tradition, brought church and state together for the establishment of Christendom, and utilized the civil authorities to enforce religious reform. Both men gave city officials a prominent role in civil affairs that, on paper, was distinct from ecclesiastical affairs. In practice, however, the personnel were closely intertwined, with city councilmen serving as church elders and church discipline cases frequently turned over to the magistrate for civil punishment. Including a comparison with Luther's two-kingdom framework and the aberration taught by some in the faculty of Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA. would have been of helpful. After addressing four aspects of the Smalcald Articles, an interesting excursus is taken to the background of Luther's attack on "enthusiasm," the view that the Holy Spirit speaks and leads people directly instead of

through external means of Word and sacrament. These radical "god-within-ism" reformers were labeled Schawrmer or "ranters" by Luther, with three species identified: the Anabaptists, the Spiritualists, and the Anti-Trinitarian Rationalists. Though different in some ways, all the enthusiasts believed the Holy Spirit is available to the faithful immediately, instead of mediately. Luther associated such views with the papacy, which boasted to have "all laws in the shrine of his heart," even when it is above or contrary to the Word. A comparison with the Reformed views of mediate vs. immediate grace and broad evangelical perspectives on "the leading of the Spirit" except from the Word would have helped. The modern reader is challenged to appreciate Luther's denunciation of the papacy as Antichrist except from understanding that, in the thirteenth century, Innocent III declared submission to papal sovereignty over all creatures as a condition of salvation. Using Matt. 28:19 as a pretext, the Vatican claimed rights over gold for the Spanish in Peru and slaves for the Portuguese in Angola. Luther was convinced that the key to papal supremacy was found in the sacrifice of the mass. By controlling all forms of Christian ministry, the pope dominated God's channels of grace and, therefore, all spiritual traffic from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Zwingli ontologically attacked the underlying premise of this claim, Christ's bodily presence in the Eucharist. Luther attacked the same point eschatologically, that the risen Christ, who is even now reclaiming all things, joins his people through the external Word, whether preached or administered sacramentally. Luther's demolishing of medieval sacramental abuse was based upon the criterion that a sacrament is properly a word of promise accompanied by a sign. When promise or the sign is missing, then there is no sacrament. The Lord's Supper is no sacrifice directed to God; neither is it merely an act of pious remembrance. Rather, it is God's act in Christ for the ongoing restoration of creation based upon the promise in the Protoevangelium of Gen. 3:15. Luther's "promise" theology was picked up by Zwingli, who renamed it "covenant" and developed the concept considerably. Though Zwingli is rightly credited with developing covenant theology, in the reviewer's mind, there is little doubt that the initial recovery of this concept should be credited to Luther. Note that Luther's promise of the gospel is purely unilateral with no commandment, and therefore, not a covenant, but a testament. For the Zwingli and the Reformed, the Covenant of Grace is a bilateral action of Spirit-wrought faith and repentance. Christ's promise makes the efficacy of the sacrament independent of personal intention, hierarchy of offices, or the pious feelings of the recipients. Since it is God who justifies through means, attempts of any institutional conduit to monopolize God's redemptive work reeked of hubris and enthusiasm. For Lutherans, Word and sacrament constitute visible unity and catholicity. For the Reformed, it is Word, sacrament, and discipline. Once discipline is included in the marks, one is required to think of the church as an institution as much as one must

have visible office holders to discipline and enforce the covenantal terms of communion. Hence, the late Reformed insistence that certain forms of church government are essential to the well being or fullness of the church. The point is that, for the Reformed, law is definitive for the existence of the church, whereas for Lutherans, the church can be discerned purely through gospel. A long tradition had linked the papacy with the office of Antichrist, using the very passage that papacy invoked to establish its claims, Matthew 16. If Peter were indeed the rock upon which Christ would build his church, he was explicitly designating in the verses following as Satan's tool. Using 2 Thessalonians 2, Luther demonstrated how the papacy fit every description of the "Man of Sin" given by the Apostle Paul. Persuaded that his Roman Catholic opponents would treat him the same way they did Hus under a banner of safe conduct, Luther "wanted to publicize these articles through public press, in case (as I fully expect and hope) I should die before a council could take place." The third section of the book is substantial and addresses a variety of background topics to the formulation of the Book of Concord. On February 18, 1546, a quarter-century after Emperor Charles V declared him to be an outlaw, Martin Luther died. This event coincided with Charles deciding to take military action against the two dominating princes of the Protestant Smalcald League, Elector John Frederick of Saxony and Landgrave Philip of Hesse. The authors observe that the original vision of the founders of great ideological movements must be precisely defined, clarified, and refined by their disciples in successive generations. The definition of Luther's legacy was worked out in the turbulent second half of the sixteenth century. The resulting controversies and conclusions reached were codified in the Formula of Concord. An imperial diet began in Augsburg in 1555, resulting in a religious concord that guaranteed German Lutherans an inferior, but legal, status secured from persecution. One caveat was that any ecclesiastical princes who wanted to convert to the Evangelical faith would have to forfeit their property. The description of the conservative Philippist and more radical Gnesio-Lutheran party was informative, particularly set along the helpful parallel between right-wing Anglicanism and the more radical break with the medieval past found among the Dutch Calvinists and English Puritans. The Phillipists relied heavily on patristic citations to bolster their arguments, whereas the Gnesio orientation was inclined to the corpus of Luther's writings to establish disputed points. Despite their differences, all the Wittenberg reformers believed that the proper distinction between law and gospel lay at the heart of preaching and pastoral care. This is reflected in the fifth article of the Formula, which presents the wide and narrow sense of "gospel." Law refers to God's design for human living and defines what is right and God-pleasing. Gospel is "a proclamation of comfort and a joyous message which does not rebuke or terrify but comforts the conscience...directs them solely to Christ's merit, and lifts them up again through the delightful

proclamation of the grace and favor of God, won through Christ's merits." The doctrine of election controversy is well represented, considering the small, but sharp, exchanges between Calvin's and Luther's disciples. Though ardently affirming election in On Bound Choice, Luther focused assurance on the promise of the gospel instead the perception of internal marks. Luther's pastoral approach to the subject is contrasted to Calvin's logical approach. Both parties sought to take human responsibility seriously while preserving a monergistic salvation. The focus on comfort in God's Word, instead of discerning his hidden will, reflected Luther's "theology of the cross" in contrast to Calvin's "theology of glory." Luther was also concerned that emphasizing double predestination would lead to a false sense of security in believers and condemn to despair those who stumble, thinking that God has decreed that they not persevere. The Formula affirmed an unconditional election, rejected double predestination, and anchored the believer's understanding of election grounded in the means of grace. The Osiandrian controversy discussion was excellent, the reviewer being unaware that Andreas Osiander had neo-platonic tendencies resulting from the influence of mystical Kabala Jewish theology. Having studied Judaism under a Rabbi Michael Cain of Hebrew University, this illuminates for the reviewer the metaphysics that formed Osiander's conceptual framework of justification consisting of having Christ dwell in one's heart. The authors correctly observe that, "Osiander's theology was no more than a return to a medieval uncertainty regarding God's forgiving Word, a return to a view of salvation that had to be turned inward instead of directed toward God." The prevalence of Osiander's views among modern evangelicalism would have helped for the authors to have noted. Osiander's theology was not the only avenue of Christological disputes. The left-wing of the reformation was shaped by Greek thinking and rejected not only the Roman Mass, but also Luther's position that God could work his saving will and deliver grace through the sacramental Word. Attributable partly to his Ockhamist training, Luther was convinced that God's power was not bound by Greek definitions and that God can do with his creation what he wants, including placing his power and incarnate presence where and in whatever forms he wishes. Holding firmly to the Chalcedonian formulations, Luther maintained that the presence of Christ's body and blood is based on the words of Christ. Known as the communicatio idiomatum (communication of attributes), Luther believed in a joining of the divine and human concretely in Christ's person, which was so intimate that each nature shared the characteristics of the other, even though these characteristics never actually become the property of the other nature. Luther deprecated Zwingli's assertion that heaven was a created place and that "the right hand of God" was a physical locale, instead arguing exegetically that God's right hand designates Christ's possession of the divine characteristics of power and majesty. John Calvin eventually modified his

earlier position that the sacraments actually convey salvation and adopted the Consensus Tigurinus (1549) to establish communion with the Zwinglian reformed church at Zurich. Calvin accused the Lutheran pastor Westphal of consubstantiation that is, asserting that the bread and body, wine and blood, coexist in a manner that could be grasped through Aristotelian physics. The author's comment, "His [Calvin's] philosophical paradigm prevented him from grasping another alternative, such as that which Westphal actually held: Luther's understanding of a genuine, sacramental - that is, mysterious or unexplainable in terms of physics - presence." The seven test questions devised by the theologians at Jena to distinguish the Lutheran versus Reformed understanding of the Sacrament are helpful, just as it is the comparison of the differences in interpreting the descent of Christ into hell. Whether the blame lies with the proper representation of the truth or with personality conflicts, no Christian regards a disunity in the church as a positive. All Lutherans, particularly the princes, longed for a harmony that would only be found in a common confession of truth. When Emperor Charles abdicated the imperial throne in 1556, his brother Ferdinand succeeded him and vigorously sought a religious conciliation. Melancthon was commissioned to draft a statement of consensus before the parties meeting at Worms which called for unity based upon four articles: justification, new obedience, the Lord's Supper, and adiaphora. In its final form the Book of Confutation condemned the teachings of the Unitarian Michael Servetus, the spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld, the antinomians, the anabaptists, the sacramentarians, Andreas Osiander, Francesco Stancarus, Georg Major, the adiaphorists, and those who erred on free will. The list of writings (corpora doctrinae) predating the Formula of Concord are described in the "Rule and Norm" section of the Formula of Concord. The Book of Concord was eventually compiled by Jakob Andrae and Martin Chemnitz. The authors conclude by noting that to make use of the Book of Concord in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to understand the documents in their historical context, enabling the church to bring the message of Jesus Christ to our generation. This is the reviewer's first reading of a book dealing specifically with the background of the Lutheran Confessions. He found the work to be well-written, interesting, and informative. The authors are obviously experts in their field and convey a wealth of knowledge. The treatment of Melancthon was sensitive and balanced, and the bibliography is helpful. This recent scholarship is critical in bringing the message of the Book of the Concord, as an accurate interpretation of Scripture, to believers and unbelievers in the twenty-first century. Unlike the Reformed standards, which as theological documents can be understood in large measure apart from their history, portions of the Lutheran Confessions are unintelligible, apart from a basic knowledge of its historical moorings. As a friendly critique, the following points are noted: (1) the book is unclear in defining its target audience and orienting the

writing style to that end; (2) portions of the text are rich, but occasionally dense, and would benefit from simplification and streamlining; (3) footnotes would have been preferable to endnotes; (4) a summary of each section would be a great aid to the uninitiated in comprehending the often complex subject matter and making the content accessible to a wider audience; (5) details regarding the actual publication of the Book of Concord are conspicuously absent; (6) the editors would have been prudent to have included an expert from the Reformed tradition on their review panel to verify and sharpen comparative distinctions. Overall, The Lutheran Confessions is highly recommended and is essential reading for Lutheran pastors, teachers, and lay leaders.

This book gives the history and theology behind the books that comprise the Lutheran Confessions (the three ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the Large and Small Catechisms, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, The Formula of Concord).Often these "symbols" of Lutheranism are obscured by time, but this book seeks to put each one within its proper historical context. This book is helpful because it is:-Rich in the theological background information behind each document of the Lutheran Confessions-Erudite in its discussion of the three ecumenical Creeds that form the backbone of the Confessions-Judicious in the choice of political and historical information to include that does not detract from the importance of the Confessions, but enriches them-Moderate and even positive in its portrayal and discussions of Philip MelanchthonThe book is just a solid body of text though, with table of contents in the front and footnotes in the back with an index, but there are no maps or time-lines or charts at all. Sometimes it can be very exasperating for a non-historian to keep straight all the different German political figures and second-tier reformers, many of whom are quite obscure. I think I was greatly aided in my task of understanding this complex history because when I read this book I also had one of the writers as my professor in seminary!For Lutheran pastors and seminary students I think this book will become standard reading. It will greatly benefit from a second edition, though, that would include maps, charts, timelines, and more introductory material on the political situation in the German states before the Reformation began.

This is a great resource. I wish I had this when I was still in Seminary. I bought this as our SMP Vicar is taking his Confessions class. It is very readable, accurate, informative. Excellent.

Very helpful book in understanding what we believe as Lutherans.

For those who wish to understand the Lutheran Book of Concord in a historical light, rather than a theological light, this is a book for you... It can get muddled at times (typical of Arand), and it is need of some general English Language editing, but all in all it is a good read for those who care to learn...

The historical detail is much appreciated. Probably the most precise treatment of this 16th century chapter in Reformation history to date in English. Yet, it reads like an old fashioned telephone book.

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