

The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord.

Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen.

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. x + 341 pp. \$39.00. ISBN 978-0-8006-2741-6.

REVIEWED BY: Timothy Maschke

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Theology and history have had a venerable relationship over the centuries. Scholars routinely recognize the relationship between past events and doctrinal issues, yet in recent decades have shied away from bringing the two together in a winsome way. The sixteenth century provides a unique opportunity to scrutinize the men and the means employed in discriminating and disseminating the critical issues of the Lutheran reformation.

Marking the third contribution of a three-volume project, this somewhat delayed addition presents "a historical introduction to the development and content" (vii) of the Book of Concord. The first volume was the new translation published in 2000. The second volume came out the following year as *Sources and Context of the Lutheran Confessions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). While the focus of this present work is on the historical context of the documents contained in the Book of Concord, the personalities and politics of the participants played prominently in the subsequent formulations, particularly of the Formula of Concord. Although this book is not a definitive history of the latter document, the complexities of the issues facing the Lutherans for the fifty years following the presentation of the Augsburg Confession are significant and dealt with in greater detail. (The last half of the book in nine chapters deals with the formation of the Formula of Concord.)

Arand, Kolb, and Nestingen each authored one section and collaborated on the final product. While authorial idiosyncrasies remain, the overall volume provides a beneficial overview of the theological potency of this intriguing half-century. Arand's chapters on the foundational creeds illuminate an oft-neglected aspect of the Book of Concord and the catholic dimension of Lutheran theology. Nestingen's four chapters, which deal with Luther's two Catechisms, Melanchthon's Augsburg Confession and Apology, and finally with Luther's Smalcald Articles and Melanchthon's *Treatise on the Power and the Primacy of the Papacy*, review the major documents of the Book of Concord. The last half of this book by Kolb explores in unprecedented detail (at least in English), the controversies which led to the formation of two distinct documents in the Formula of Concord. Scholars will benefit greatly not only by the content, but by the collaborative approach taken by these historians and theologians of Lutheranism.

Serving as the recognized basis for Christian unity, the ecumenical creeds are foundational for Lutheranism. Arand provides a thorough, yet quite readable rehearsal of the histories of the Apostles' Creed and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. Since Lutherans also considered the Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque Vult*) one of the creeds of the church, both in her liturgy and in her preservation of theological precision, particularly on the Trinity, Arand underscores its Christological emphasis. All three creeds stand in continuity with the biblical revelation and remained the focus for the evangelical witness of Jesus as Christ and Lord, fully God and fully man. But more than merely expressing the common Christian faith, the Lutheran confessions, notes Arand, wanted to underscore the fact that God came *pro me* in Christ.

Confessional scholarship begins most distinctly with Luther's catechisms, which is the appropriate beginning of part 2 on the Wittenberg Confessions. After exploring both of Martin Luther's catechisms as handbooks for the home, Nestingen reviews the various

colloquies and theological statements which led to the final form of the Augsburg Confession presented to Emperor Charles V in 1530. Almost twenty-five pages are given to the Apology, since that document is lengthier even in the Book of Concord. Nestingen carefully (and kindly) explains Melanchthon's "seemingly ponderous" (130) style as evidence of his medieval disputation training. Luther's Smalcald Articles, officially adopted in Luther's absence, and Melanchthon's *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* are combined into one chapter, which is somewhat challenging, since the authorships were different, yet because of their similar historical circumstances are considered together. The priority of God's word as ultimate authority is a central feature of these last two documents.

Having captured the context for much of what followed among Lutherans in his inimitable scholarly, yet readily accessible style, Robert Kolb orients the reader toward the theological tensions, or, as he calls them, the "culture of controversy" (171) in the almost fifty years following the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. The theological intricacies and formidable personalities of these years, particularly following Luther's death, are handled evenhandedly (at least in contrast to the version of the last century by Bente).

Knowledge of the background to these confessional writings are not mere historical data to be placed on a shelf and taken down when curious investigators seek odd insights into the sixteenth century. The authors of this book understand the documents as having lasting influence on theology in the twenty-first century, as noted in their postscript. With almost fifty pages of notes, a one-page scripture index, and an index of names and subjects, subsequent scholars and students will be able to continue to analyze and advance their investigation of these historic decades of the sixteenth century.

Ecumenical and evangelical perspectives will remain essential for the future of Christian conversation, especially as the quinquecentennial of the Lutheran reformation arrives in 2017. Fortress Press is to be commended for publishing this final volume on the Book of Concord. Theology and history come together in a most helpful example of scholarly collaboration and necessary reassessment of Lutheranism in the sixteenth century for twenty-first-century Christianity.



Martin Luther, *The Bible and the Jewish People: A Reader*. Ed. Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna.

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012. viii + 247 pp. \$26.00. ISBN 978-0-8006-9804-1.

REVIEWED BY: Rebecca C. Peterson

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Brooks Schramm and Kirsi I. Stjerna provide selected readings exemplifying Martin Luther's statements about Jews over the course of his career. It supplements recent works by Eric W. Gristch and Thomas Kaufmann. The editors believe that Luther's expressions of anti-Semitism must be acknowledged, while making some distinction between this religious anti-Semitism and the more modern racial anti-Semitism. This religiously based bias was and is dangerous, especially coming from the pen and mouth of such an influential leader. They argue that Luther's statements cannot be dismissed simply because they echoed what others said at the time, because he was in a position to make a difference by taking a different stand. The editors intend this work to help students deal with a difficult subject and its enduring effects.

Schramm and Stjerna each provide preliminary essays. Schramm's introduction notes Luther's distinction between biblical and postbiblical Jews, explaining Luther's Christological

make preaching not easier but instead more difficult (194), to make it as hard as necessary for the preacher (99, 537). Theology must be impeccably disciplined hermeneutical theology because the gospel purely proclaimed, that is, properly differentiated from the law, is how the *deus iustificans* invokes justifying faith in the *homo peccator*.

Presumably published to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth, Beutel's book honoring Ebeling's "life for theology" as "a theology for life" (519, 538) has surpassed the merely biographical and represents an incisive, chronological commentary on twentieth-century theology. This work is a masterpiece to behold and to be bought.

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
LA MESA, CALIFORNIA

Mark D. Menacher

The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of the Book of Concord.
By Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen.
Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012. 341 pp.

This volume is the second supplemental text to accompany the new edition of the *Book of Concord: The Confessional Writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Fortress Press, 2000). It provides a much needed update to the historical study of the Lutheran Confessional writings by G.F. Bente (Concordia, 1965), as well as a rich exploration of the theological themes within the confessional writings. It is hard to believe this book could contain so much within its covers.

The book has three parts. Part One covers the ecumenical creeds, exploring their history and theological contributions. The authors do an excellent job of showing how the other symbols found in the *Book of Concord* are reflections upon the creeds, something the framers of the other symbols were careful to identify. In Part Two, the confessions written by Luther and Melancthon are explored. Part Three, over half the book, deals with the Formula of Concord.

Many delightful surprises await the reader. In Part One, the authors include discussions of the history of the creeds, including the *textus receptus* of the Apostles Creed and also the sources for texts of the creeds as found in the *Book of Concord*. Not content with an historical overview, however, the authors also provide an insightful

chapter on the theological contributions of the creeds for the reformers—something often overlooked in reformation studies in general and in studies of the Book of Concord in particular.

In Part Two, the authors cover all the main points of the history, theology and intrigue of the symbols written by Luther and Melanchthon. In dealing with the catechisms, the section on the visitations provides a succinct update of the state of studies in this area. The authors also provide a corrective to the modern emphasis on the doctrine of the catechisms, and draw the readers back to the original goal of the catechisms as a formation aid for the church. In dealing with the Augsburg Confession, they throw a curve at the reader by beginning with a section on the politics of liturgy—not the traditional starting point in a study on the Augustana, but a starting point that is most helpful. One of the highlights in the chapter on the Apology is the thoughtful discussion of the relationship between Luther and Melanchthon.

I had hoped that the chapter on the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise would clear up, once and for all, the debate over whether the Smalcald Articles were officially signed at the meeting of the League, or whether the signings were independent, voluntary actions. Unfortunately, the authors leave the readers to draw their own conclusions about the initial public authority of the text, nicely sidestepping this ongoing debate.

Part Three, dealing with the various controversies addressed in the Formula of Concord, provides a rich tapestry of history, theology and politics masterfully woven together. The authors give the reader a sense of the characters involved, rather than a simple chronological unfolding of the controversy and resultant solution. At times, this section is like reading a novel filled with intrigue and suspense.

Overall, I am impressed with how much is packed into the pages of this book. More than a simple history book, and more than an executive summary of the theology of the Book of Concord, this volume provides an excellent synopsis of the history, theology, politics and characters of the Reformation. It is “must” reading for anyone taking a course on the Lutheran Confessions or wanting to know about what went on behind the scenes as these symbols were developed. While the authors do not solve all the puzzles and unanswered

questions, they concisely explain and ground the Confessions, allowing these symbols of an ecumenically minded Lutheranism to be heard in fresh way.

LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

Gordon A Jensen

Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction. Edited by Kelly M. Kopic and Bruce L. McCormack, et. al. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2012. 421 pp.

This anthology takes on a complex and daunting task: to present a comprehensive introduction to theology in the modern era. In addition to the editors, Fred Sanders, Stephen Holmes, Daniel Treier, Katherine Sonderegger, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Webster, Telford Work, Richard Lints, Brian Brock, Richard Osmer, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, and Michael Horton contribute. Unlike other commendable introductions which present modern theology chronologically within its historical content, this volume takes a systematic approach. It is extremely thorough without being pedantic, with much to commend it to students and scholars.

Each chapter deals with a specific doctrine or theme. The towering figures of the modern theological landscape from Schleiermacher and Hegel, to Barth and Paul Tillich, as well as more contemporary scholars such as N. T. Wright, and even less well-known individuals such as P. T. Forsyth, are well represented. The thoughts of modern theologians on Trinitarian theology, the doctrine of God, Scripture and hermeneutics, creation, anthropology, Christology, the atonement, the providence of God, pneumatology, soteriology, ethics, practical theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology are all addressed at length. The historical dimension of modern theology is not abandoned. On the contrary, the authors show the development of a given doctrine from the end of Protestant orthodoxy and the birth of the Enlightenment all the way into the so-called postmodern era. Special attention is given to the shaping of doctrines through the legacies of philosophers from Kant and Hegel to Derrida and Foucault. Although each author brings expert observations to the study of modern theology, the historical

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When Fortress Press published the Kolb-Wengert edition of *The Book of Concord* in 2000, the plan was for two companion volumes: one providing translations of some of the key documents which helped inform the Lutheran Confessions and another tracing their historical development and content. The first volume, *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*, was released in 2001. After a lengthy delay for a variety of reasons, the historical introduction has now been published.

The intent of this volume is to replace the venerable *Historical Introductions to the Symbolic Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* by F. Bente, published in the *Concordia Triglotta*. This new historical introduction succeeds as a replacement by incorporating the vast scholarship of the past 50 years in this area of history. The extensive end notes provide the reader with direction for further study. It is also much more readable for the twenty-first century student and is not bogged down by lengthy quotations. The authors are to be commended for writing in a narrative style which keeps the reader's attention.

All three authors, who are current or retired seminary professors in the areas of systematic theology or church history, underscore that "the creeds and confessions seek to be nothing less than answers to Jesus' question, 'Who do you say that I am' (Matt. 16:15)" (41). The Christocentric focus, and the subsequent pastoral nature, of the Lutheran Confessions are highlighted throughout the book.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part gives an overview of the history and theology of the ancient creeds. This overview will be invaluable for pastors as they teach catechism and Bible information classes. The second part covers the so-called Wittenberg Confessions: Luther's catechisms, the Augsburg Confession and Apology, and the Smalcald Articles, providing the important historical information on each confession. The third part, addressing the Formula of Concord, is the lengthiest, over 100 pages. The reason for this is the perception that most modern students are less familiar with the history surrounding the Formula of Concord than the other confessional writings. The authors avoid some of the Lutheran "triumphalism" which is often evident in Bente by presenting a balanced rendering of both the political and religious situation influencing the development of the Formula of Concord.

Because of its thoroughness in covering the historical background of the Formula of Concord, the intention is that this book will replace Bente as the history "textbook" for the seminary's course on the Formula of Concord. Because the study of the Lutheran Confessions demands an understanding of their history, it also deserves a place on the shelf of every pastor who aims to continue digging into the Lutheran Confessions for their gospel-centered, pastoral value.

Joel D. Otto

