

What Does It Mean To Be A Confessional Lutheran?

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I have been asked to share some thoughts with you on what it means to be a confessional Lutheran. One might say immediately that, obviously, it means to be confessional, that is, to be committed to, honor, and conform one's teaching to the Lutheran Confessions. And that's true. However, since there are many people out there calling themselves "confessional" who may not have actually thought through what this means, we will devote some time here today to considering the question, "What does it mean to be a confessional Lutheran?"

1. To be a confessional Lutheran means to recognize the Scriptures as God's word and to submit to their authority.

First of all, to be a confessional Lutheran means that one recognizes the Scriptures as God's word. This is true because the Confessions repeatedly call the Scriptures God's word. Any thought that the Scriptures, or parts of them, are not God's word but simply the writings of men is totally foreign to the Confessions. The Scriptures are inspired by God (1), and as such they are His word, true in every respect. (2) This is simply accepted in the Confessions as an a priori truth, to be accepted by all, without thought that it would be challenged.

Of course, in modern times this has been challenged. The Enlightenment with its ensuing "enlightenment" of man has brought about just the opposite attitude. Men now use historical and textual scholarship to discount and question any number of truths revealed in Scripture, and those who consider themselves confessional Lutherans are not absent from this group. Lutheran seminaries now teach that the Bible contains God's word rather than that it is God's word, "contains" meaning that some of Scripture is God's word and is to be believed while some of Scripture is simply the word of men, to be understood in its historical context and not binding upon the Church today. The result of this is that many Lutheran pastors, some who consider themselves to be confessional, deny basic truths found in Scripture.

Not too long ago this was demonstrated in a conversation that I had with an ELCA pastor who serves a church in Pennsylvania. He considers himself to be the most confessional Lutheran pastor in his area, even going so far as to say that the Bible is God's word and is true in matters historical, doctrinal, and moral. Yet he has no trouble with women serving as pastors in the churches. A further inquiry on my part, as to how one can confess that the Scriptures are true in all matters of doctrine, read 1 Corinthians 14:26-34 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and then deny that women serving in the Ministry is contrary to Scripture, went unanswered.

Being a confessional Lutheran means that one accepts the Scriptures as the word of God, true in all matters historical, moral, and doctrinal, including the doctrine that the women, as precious as they are, are to be silent in the churches. They are not to teach or exercise authority over the man, even as Scripture says.

Since the Scriptures are God's word and are true, the confessional Lutheran also accepts and confesses another principle found in the Confessions, namely, that the Scriptures are the only rule, judge, and norm of all teaching in the Church.

In the Formula of Concord, we find the following:

“We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written Ps. 119:105, ‘Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’ And St. Paul, ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed.’” (3)

And again:

“First, 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.” (4)

And yet again:

“The Word of God alone should be and remain the only standard and rule of doctrine, to which the writings of no man should be regarded as equal, but to which everything should be subjected.” (5)

And Dr. Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles:

“It will not do to frame articles of faith from the works or words of the holy Fathers; ... The rule is this: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.” (5)

So, does that mean that the confessional Lutheran rejects all else? Does it mean that he rejects all that has been written in the Church prior to his own personal search of the Scriptures? No, for we find the authors of the Confessions accepting first the three Ecumenical Creeds and then other orthodox writings as well.

“Since of old the true Christian doctrine, in a pure, sound sense, was collected from God's Word into brief articles or chapters against the corruption of heretics, we confess, in second place, the three Ecumenical Creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as glorious confessions of the faith, brief, devout, and founded upon God's Word, in which all the heretics which at that time had arisen in the Christian Church are clearly and unanswerably refuted.” (6)

And again:

“Other good, useful, pure books, expositions of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, explanations of doctrinal articles, are not rejected; for as far as they are consistent with the above-mentioned type of doctrine” (namely, Holy Scripture) “these are regarded as useful expositions and explanations, and can be used with advantage.” (7)

So the confessional Lutheran does not reject writings other than the Scriptures out of hand.

However, he does not accept them a priori. He accepts them only because they are faithful to the Scriptures. Which brings us to the second point that we will consider.

2. To be a confessional Lutheran means that one commits himself to and submits to the doctrine of the Confessions.

Throughout its history, the Church has committed itself to extra-biblical symbols and confessions of faith. As we just noted, the Ecumenical Creeds are three examples. While they are not quotes from Scripture per se, they briefly summarize the doctrine of Scripture. Originating as confessions of faith at baptism (the Apostles' Creed), confessions to address heresy (the Nicene Creed), and as affirmations of the doctrine of God (the Athanasian Creed), they have been used and confessed in the Church from the earliest centuries.

The confessional Lutheran accepts these Creeds not because they were formulated by the early Church, and not because they have been used for centuries, but because the doctrinal affirmations they contain are faithful to Scripture. The doctrinal affirmations of the Creeds are doctrinal affirmations of the Scriptures themselves.

For this reason the Lutheran confessors confessed the Creeds, the Lutheran Confessions confess the Creeds, and the confessional Lutheran confesses the Creeds. The confessional Lutheran does not change the Creeds, because they are not his to change. And the confessional Lutheran does not make up his own creeds. The confessional Lutheran confesses the faith once delivered to the saints in the orthodox Creeds of the Church.

There are those who claim to be confessional Lutherans who disagree with this, and one can find an assortment of modern creeds confessed in various churches. The thought being that if one departs from a standard, set form and varies the wording of the creeds the people will take them more to heart. What they confess will be more meaningful for the people, more meaningful than memorizing a set form and confessing it over and over again. This, of course, is not true. Memorizing the Creeds makes them no less meaningful than memorizing John 3:16 makes it less meaningful. Using the set form, as the Confessions do, ingrains the faith in the heart; and this is good, for the time may come, as our eyes and minds dim with age, when all we have may be is what is ingrained in our hearts.

Being a confessional Lutheran also means that one submits himself to the doctrine of the Confessions. Not that he accepts the Confessions a priori as he does the Scriptures. He accepts the Scriptures because they are not of man but of God. Their doctrine is straight from heaven, therefore it may not be challenged. The Scriptures are the "norma normans," "the norm that norms" or "the rule that rules" all of the teachings of the Church (or at least they should).

This is not true of the Confessions. They are not accepted a priori as the Scriptures are. They are the "norma normata," "the norm that is normed" or "the rule that is ruled" by the Scriptures. They are accepted and submitted to only because they agree with the Scriptures, and it is incumbent upon each generation to read them and to challenge them and to ascertain that they do. For to not do this, to submit to the Confessions without having ascertained that their doctrine

agrees with Scripture, would not only be blasphemous, placing an authority above God, but it would be contrary to the Confessions themselves. For, as noted above, the Confessions

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repeatedly state that no other writing is to be placed on a par with Scripture. All other writings, from any source, must be subject to Scripture.

Having determined that the doctrine of the Confessions agrees with Scripture, however, the confessional Lutheran submits himself to them, not only for the sake of peace and conformity among the churches, which is in itself a God-pleasing thing, but because by submitting to the doctrine of the Confessions he is submitting to the doctrine of Scripture. And having thus submitted himself to the Confessions, the confessional Lutheran pledges himself to them even as the first Lutheran confessors did.

“Since for thorough, permanent unity in the Church it is, above all things, necessary that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form wherein is brought together from God’s Word the common doctrine ... which the churches which are of the true Christian religion confess, just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols; moreover, since this should not be based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and received 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 of the churches of the Augsburg Confession.” (8)

And again, regarding the Augsburg Confession specifically:

“Since this doctrine has been collected from, and according to, God’s Word into articles and chapters of the Augsburg Confession against the errors of the Papacy and also of other sects, we confess also the first, Unaltered Augsburg Confession as our symbol for this time, not because it was composed by our theologians, but because it has been taken from God’s Word and is founded firmly and well therein.” (9)

Does this mean that confessional Lutherans may never compose other doctrinal confessions but must confess and submit only to the Lutheran Confessions (the Book of Concord of 1580)? No. As doctrinal issues arise which are not treated at length in the Confessions, other statements may be composed which deal specifically with those issues. Such statements, however, may never conflict with the doctrine of Scripture and the Confessions, but rather address and further explain the controverted articles.

For example, the Confessions take for granted, and state as a matter of accepted fact, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the pure, inspired word of God. This was not a matter of contention in that day. Times have changed, however, as we noted above, and today this is a contested doctrine. Therefore, the churches have the right, even the obligation, to confess uniformly the biblical, confessional doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture.

The same is true for the doctrine of the order of creation. (10) During the time the Confessions were written, there was no serious contention over the order of creation nor over its application

to gender roles in the home and in the Church. Not so today. Instead, today the doctrine of the order of creation is contested and denied widely in the Church and in society, as are biblical applications of this doctrine in home, society, and in the Church. Hence we see men reneging on their God-given responsibilities, and we see women disregarding the decisions of their

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husbands, ruling over men in society, and serving in the pastoral office, ruling over the churches. Even in professed confessional Lutheran church bodies, such as the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, one sees this doctrine contested and denied in practice. There women may serve as presidents and elders of congregations, as chairs of boards at any synodical level, as members of the CTCR (Commission on Theology and Church Relations), as “reconcilers” called in to settle disputes between pastors and congregations of the synod, and they may speak and vote in congregational, district, and synodical assemblies.

As these and other issues arise in the Church and in society, confessional Lutherans may and should address them through extra-confessional writings. For being a confessional Lutheran means not only confessing the faith, but also confessing the faith. As doctrinal and moral heresy arises, the confessional Lutheran will confess the truth, privately and publicly, to the Church and to the world, even as the apostles and our confessing Lutheran fathers did.

A word or two must be said here about the type of subscription made by the confessional Lutheran to the Lutheran Confessions. The confessional Lutheran, having determined that the doctrine of the Confessions is the doctrine of Scripture, subscribes to the Confessions “quia,” because they agree with the Scriptures, not “quatenus,” in so far as they agree with the Scriptures.

In doing this he also honors his ordination vow to teach in accordance with the Confessions, not only because God demands that he keep his vows, whatever they may be (Numbers 30:2), but because in doing so he is faithfully teaching the doctrines of God Himself, for, as we have noted, Scripture’s doctrines are God’s doctrines, coming to man from God Himself.

Does this “quia” subscription mean that the confessional Lutheran accepts the Confessions as inerrant, as He does the Scriptures. No again. For the Confessions are not inspired by God as are the Scriptures. There may be points of exegesis found in the Confessions with which confessional Lutherans disagree, but they will agree with the dogmatical assertions of the Confessions.

One example that comes to mind is the question of whether or not John 6:51-58 refers to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In the Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VII “Of the Holy Supper,” John 6:54 is said to refer to the spiritual eating which occurs “in no other way than with the Spirit and faith, in the preaching and meditation of the Gospel, as well as in the Lord’s Supper.” (11) Such spiritual eating is said to be “nothing else than faith,” and is contrasted to the oral or sacramental eating of Christ’s essential body and blood which also takes place in the Lord’s Supper.

Without going into a lengthy discussion of the sacramental or non-sacramental nature of John 6, for that is worthy of a paper in and of itself, the question of whether or not Jesus refers to the sacramental/oral eating as well as the spiritual eating of His flesh and blood in that passage is

primarily an exegetical question, not a dogmatical one. The dogmatical assertions are that there are two kinds of eating associated with the Supper, the spiritual eating, which is faith, without which one cannot receive the Sacrament to his good, and the oral or sacramental eating, where the true body and blood of Christ are received with the bread and wine. Whether or not John 6

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is accepted as referring only to spiritual eating (faith) or to both spiritual and oral/sacramental eating really does not effect either dogmatic assertion. Nor does the exegesis of this passage really effect the doctrine of the Lord's Supper per se, namely, that Christ is essentially present in the Sacrament with His body and blood for the forgiveness, spiritual strengthening, and eternal life of those who receive in faith.

This author, at least, would not question the confessional status of a fellow Lutheran solely on the question of the sacramental nature of John 6, provided that one's exegetical position on the passage did not lead one into doctrinal errors condemned in the Confessions. (For example, errors such as those of Andrew Osiander, a Lutheran theologian of the mid-to-late 1500's, who replaced the central doctrine of justification by grace through faith with a doctrine of salvation through the indwelling essential righteousness of God Himself, one being saved not by God imputing the righteousness of Christ to those who believe, but by God infusing His own righteousness into man through the indwelling of the divine nature of Christ.) (12)

Regarding confessional subscription, the Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod of 1932, puts it like this:

“We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580. The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines. ... Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not ‘in so far as,’ but ‘because,’ the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated *ex professo*, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines. The obligation does not extend to historical statements, ‘purely exegetical questions,’ and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All *doctrines* of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture.” (13) (Italicized portions original.)

This is a well balanced statement. In it, the confessional Lutheran subscribes to and teaches according to the doctrine of the Confessions. He pledges himself to them because they agree with Scripture, yet he does not make them a inspired supplement to Scripture. And he allows that within the parameters of faithfulness to their dogmatic assertions, some differences of exegesis between fellow confessional Lutherans may exist.

3. To be a confessional Lutheran means that one respects and honors the practice as well as the theology of the Confessions.

There is an old saying in the Church, “Lex orandi, lex credendi,” or, “What you pray is what you believe.” We can expand that to “What you pray or practice is what you believe,” and the

saying would still be true.

It is true because what we practice does indeed reflect what we believe. Jesus says, "Whatever you pray in My name, that I will do," (John 14:13) and John says, "If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 John 5:14-15) If we really

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believe that God hears prayer, we will pray, trusting that He hears us for Jesus' sake. Our prayer and our practice will reflect what we believe.

The same is true for the Church and for the confessional Lutheran. What the Church and the confessional Lutheran practices reflects what they really believe. One cannot divorce belief and practice. This principle is reflected in both the liturgical life and the sacramental life of the confessional Lutheran.

Liturgical life:

In these days of mega churches, where thousands of people are drawn to "contemporary" worship, questions have come up regarding the historic liturgies of the Church. Should we keep them, even though our membership numbers are low? Or should we jettison the liturgies and institute contemporary worship ourselves, hoping that more people will be drawn to our churches? Should we, or can we, adopt evangelical (reformed/contemporary) style while maintaining Lutheran doctrine and substance?

In addressing these questions, the confessional Lutheran should steer clear of two extremes. One extreme is that all of the liturgies inherited and adopted by our confessional Lutheran fathers must be maintained (or reintroduced), including the ceremonies that often went with the liturgical rites, and that maintaining such things is a criterion for what it means to be a confessional Lutheran. The other extreme is that the liturgies do not matter. Since they are adiaphora, the liturgies can be jettisoned at will. To answer these questions and to stay clear of these extremes, the confessional Lutheran looks for guidance from the Scriptures and from the Confessions themselves.

In the Scriptures, Jesus condemns those who teach as doctrine the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9) Therefore, since the confessional Lutheran bows first and foremost to Scripture, he will not command what God has not commanded, nor will he teach as necessary things which God Himself has not declared to be necessary.

In addressing Rome regarding the status of ceremonies, the Confessions state the following:

First, in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII: Of the Church:

"And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike." (14)

Secondly, in the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article X: Of Church Rites:

"We believe, teach, and confess also that no church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God the other, if otherwise there is

agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy Sacraments, according to the well-known saying: ‘Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.’” (15)

And yet the Confessions also state that the Lutherans did not use the freedom they found in the Gospel to throw out the ceremonies they inherited from the Roman Catholic Church. For when they were accused by the Roman Catholics of doing so and of abolishing the Mass (the

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Communion service with its liturgical rite), they objected by stating the following:

In the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: Of the Mass:

“Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved, save that parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people.” (16)

And again, in Article XXVI: Of the Distinction of Meats:

“Nevertheless, very many traditions are kept on our part, which conduce to good order in the Church, as the Order of Lessons in the Mass and chief holy-days. But, at the same time, men are warned that such observances do not justify before God, and that in such things it should not be made sin if they are omitted without offense.” (17)

So the Lutherans kept most of the ceremonies they inherited not because they had to, but because of good order and the peace it brings in the Church. So too the confessional Lutheran of today will promote good order in the Church through orderly, liturgical worship.

However, there is another reason why the confessional Lutheran will retain orderly, liturgical worship in the Church. It has to do with the Means of Grace, the way that God works in the hearts and lives of the people. It has to do with the means used by the Holy spirit to bring men to faith and preserve them in the faith, namely, the Word of God, read or heard, and the holy Sacraments.

In the Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article VIII: Of Confession, Luther writes the following:

“In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world, having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power, and strength of all heresy, Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments.” (18)

And in the Formula of Concord, Thorough declaration, Article II: Of Free Will, we find the following:

“Therefore God, out of His immense goodness and mercy, has His divine eternal Law and His wonderful plan concerning our redemption, namely, the holy, alone-saving Gospel of His eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, publicly preached: and by this collects an eternal Church for Himself from the human race, and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of sins, and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And by this means, and in no other way, namely, through His holy Word, when men hear it preached or read it, and the holy Sacraments when they are used according to His

Word, God desires to call men to eternal salvation, draw them to Himself, and convert, regenerate, and sanctify them.” (19)

So God calls people to the faith, sanctifies them, and keeps them in the faith through His Word, heard and read, and through the Sacraments; but of what does the liturgy consist but of Word and Sacrament? One only needs to pick up a Lutheran hymnal and check the canticles and liturgical responses to find the answer to this question. From the Psalms, to the Kyrie, to

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the Gloria in Excelsis, to the Offertory, to the Agnus Dei, “O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,” to the Sanctus, to Simeon’s song in the Nunc Dimittis, to the Benediction, much of the liturgy is made up of God’s Word. And those parts not specifically taken from Scripture, like the Gloria Patri, are summaries and statements of scriptural doctrine, in that case of the essence and nature of God, one divine essence yet three distinct Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

There are basically two types of emphasis in worship forms. One is enthusiasm, that is, worship centered on feelings, emotion, and on what makes one feel close to God. The other is based on God’s Word, the means God uses to work in the hearts of people. Contemporary worship forms largely follow the former. The historic liturgies follow the latter. When one uses the liturgies, he is not only learning God’s Word, which is always a good thing, but he is using the very means that God Himself uses to engender and to strengthen faith. This is also good, for as God says through the prophet Isaiah, His Word will not return to Him void, but it will accomplish what He pleases and prosper in the things for which He sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

Therefore, since the confessional Lutheran wants what God wants, namely, good order in worship, since he wants to be taught by God and to be edified by His Word, since he believes that God works in his heart through His Word and Sacraments, and since he believes that it is God-pleasing and salutary to practice what we believe, he rejoices in the liturgy and gladly uses it in worship.

Sacramental life:

Believing that God creates and sustains faith through the Word and Sacraments, the Lutheran Church has been a sacramental church, and the first confessional Lutherans were sacramental Lutherans. In other words, they practiced what they believed, and the Sacraments were an integral part of the life of the Church.

Baptism was maintained because of Jesus’ institution and command, “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19) and because of its salutary effects, that in Baptism God grants the new birth as children of God and grants remission of sins. Therefore, practicing what they believed, the confessional Lutherans baptized in that Name and confessed in their churches, “I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.” (20)

Taking to heart the command and blessings of the Lord’s Supper, that Sacrament too was an integral part of the life of the Church, as it had been from the days of the apostles. For in the Supper Jesus promises His presence, His body and blood, given and shed for the remission of

sins, and there His people commune with Him and He with them. And where there is remission of sins and communion with God there is also eternal life. Therefore, for the confessional Lutherans the Sacrament was a regular part of the worship life in the churches. Realizing their need and the great promises and blessings Jesus attaches to the Sacrament, it was offered every Sunday in the Lutheran churches.

Regarding this practice, we find the following in the Confessions (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV: Of the Mass):

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“We do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord’s Day and on other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved.” (21)

This frequent offering of the Sacrament is defended, in the same article of the Apology, by referring to the practice of the early Church as found in the writings of Epiphanius, a Church Father from the 4th century:

“Epiphanius writes that in Asia the Communion was celebrated three times a week, ... And indeed he says that this custom was handed down from the apostles. For he writes thus: ‘Assemblies for Communion were appointed by the apostles to be held on the fourth day, on Sabbath eve, and the Lord’s Day.’” (22)

As one can see from these two references, the custom of the apostles was not slavishly kept by confessional Lutherans. It was not held sacrosanct simply because the early Church practiced it or even because the apostles in their day had instituted it. For when the Confessions were written, the standard practice was not to offer Communion three times weekly, but once weekly, on Sunday when the people gathered for worship, and on other festival days such as Christmas.

There are lessons and principles in all of this for those who would be confessional Lutherans in our day. Customs and practices are not kept just because someone else kept them, whether they be our Lutheran fathers or even the apostles themselves, but rather because of their relationship to the Gospel and for the good, edification, and blessing of the people. The Lutherans first and foremost kept the every-Lord’s Day offering of Communion because of sin and the needs of the people, and because there Christ comes to us with all His blessings, forgiveness of sins, strength for godly living, eternal life, and the resurrection from the dead. And who would not want these blessings? Who would not want to commune with God and receive them?

In our day, many Lutheran churches have gotten away from every-Sunday Communion. The main reasons for this being: 1) Pietistic influences, where subjective feelings and emotions are given precedence over objective truth and the objective blessings offered in the Sacrament, 2) the influence of other Protestant denominations in which the efficacy of the Sacraments is denied and in which the Sacraments play no central role, and 3) in some cases, the historic inability of churches have their own resident pastor, so that Communion could not be offered except on a more infrequent basis.

So, given this situation, what is the confessional Lutheran to do? If he wants to be confessional, he will neither unilaterally re-institute every-Sunday Communion, nor will he demand that it be

re-instituted. He will teach the people concerning the great blessings of the Sacrament and so encourage them to desire it and want it. As Luther says in the Preface to the Small Catechism:

“We are to force no one to believe, or to receive the Sacrament, nor fix any law nor time, nor place for it, but are to preach it in such a manner that of their own accord, without our law, they will urge themselves and, as it were, compel us pastors to administer the Sacrament.”
(23)

On the subject of Communion practice, there is one more issue for the confessional Lutheran to consider, namely, the issue of open versus closed Communion. Closed Communion sounds so

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negative, so exclusionary, while open Communion sounds so loving and non-judgmental. And as we well know, open communion has become the practice in many Lutheran churches in our day. However, open Communion is not scriptural nor is it confessional practice. It is neither in accord with Scripture nor with the Confessions to administer the Sacrament to those who reject Christ’s words, and so the orthodox faith, or to those who refuse to repent of their sins and are living contrary to God’s word. To do so would not only make the administering pastor an unfaithful steward of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1-2), but it would compromise the one true faith and the Sacrament would then be administered to the detriment of the people. Therefore, in confessional Lutheran churches, led by confessional Lutheran pastors, the practice of closed Communion is observed. It is observed evangelically, not legalistically, but it is observed, and no one is admitted to the Sacrament without having been examined first. For as the Confessions state, “none are admitted except they be first examined,” (24) and “the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved.”
(25)

4. Conclusion

Other issues of doctrine and practice could be addressed which are also relevant for those who would be confessional Lutherans, but time and circumstances do not permit me to explore them now. However, hopefully this paper will re-enforce and encourage some in their confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice, open the eyes and minds of others who would be confessional Lutherans, and stimulate salutary discussion at this conference and elsewhere.

**“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you will know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
John 8:31-32**

**“Plenteous of grace, descend from high
Rich in Thy seven-fold energy;
Make us eternal truths receive
And practice all that we believe.
Give us Thyself that we may see
The Father and the Son by Thee.”
Hymn 236, TLH**

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**End Notes**

1. Concordia Triglotta, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church; Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1921, pg. 1067
2. Triglotta, 771.76
3. Triglotta, 777.1
4. Triglotta, 855.9
5. Triglotta, 467.15
6. Triglotta, 851.4
7. Triglotta, 855.10
8. Triglotta, 849.1
9. Triglotta, 851.5
10. For the Order of Creation and its applications see: 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-10; 1 Corinthians 14:34; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Peter 3:1-6.
11. Triglotta, 995.61, 62
12. Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, F. Bente; Concordia Triglotta, Concordia Publishing House, 1921, pg. 155
13. "Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod," Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1932
14. Triglotta, 47.2
15. Triglotta, 831.7
16. Triglotta, 65.1-3
17. Triglotta, 75.40, 41
18. Triglotta, 497.9-10

19. Triglotta, 901.50
20. Nicene Creed, Third Article
21. Triglotta, 383.1
22. Triglotta, 75.40, 41
23. Triglotta, 537.22
24. Triglotta, 65.6, 7
25. Triglotta, 385.1