

The Formula of Concord in the History of Swedish Lutheranism

*By Docent Seth Erlandsson, Uppsala**

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Has the Formula of Concord and therewith the whole Book of Concord been accepted by the Church of Sweden as a symbolical writing or not? Opinion is divided on this question. At the center of this debate lies the question of the meaning and significance of the decree of the Uppsala Council of 1593, the 1686 Church Law and the Constitution of 1809. However, not enough attention has been given to the position to which the Church of Sweden has given expression in regard to the Book of Concord in a number of councils since 1893.

The following particular questions are to be considered in this essay:

1. What confessions were accepted in Lutheranism's earliest days in Sweden?
2. What is the significance of the decree of the Uppsala Council of 1593?
3. What was the position of the FC during the period of orthodoxy in the 17th century?
4. What is the significance of the mention of the Book of Concord in the Church Law of 1686?
5. How did the inroads of Pietism in the 18th century affect the attitude toward the FC?
6. Did the Constitution of 1809 set aside the FC?
7. What is meant by the "evangelical" view of the Book of Concord, sanctioned by the Church of Sweden in a number of synods since 1893?
8. What is the status of the Book of Concord in Swedish Lutheranism today?

By the answers to these individual questions I believe that the principal question of the status of the FC in Swedish Lutheranism will be answered clearly.

Early Swedish Lutheranism

Lutheran doctrine was introduced into Sweden by Olavus Petri (1493–1552) in the fall of 1518 when he returned to Sweden from Wittenberg and immediately began to spread "the evangelical doctrine" with an appeal to the Holy Scriptures. He became chancellor to Bishop Mattias in Straengnaes and was ordained as a deacon in 1520. After the Stockholm Massacre, in which Mattias was the first victim, Petri served as teacher in the cathedral school in Straengnaes, where he soon aroused interest and unrest with his lectures on the Bible. In the beginning Olavus Petri, like Luther, had no intention of breaking with Rome. In 1518 Luther had, after all, not yet debated with John Eck in Leipzig and Luther's important works of 1520 had not yet seen the light of day.

The breakthrough of the Reformation in Germany was contemporaneous with a battle in Sweden for independence from Denmark and the Hanseatic League under the leadership of Luebeck. Gustav Eriksson, who was chosen as Dalarna's military leader in January of 1521 and acknowledged as regent by the province of Goeta in August of the same year, was elected king of Sweden in June of 1523 after being nominated for that position by leading Catholic churchmen. He took the name Gustavus Vasa. The archdeacon in Straengnaes, Laurentius Andreae (ca. 1470–1552), who took over the leadership of the Straengnaes diocese in 1520 after Bishop Mattias' execution, formally proclaimed Gustavus Vasa as Sweden's king in the cathedral.

In the spread of the Lutheran doctrine in Sweden Gustavus Vasa, together with Laurentius Andreae, who became the king's chancellor, and Olavus Petri played a decisive role. Through Laurentius Andreae, who was his superior, Olavus Petri came into contact with Gustavus Vasa, who in 1524 called him to Stockholm as city

* The author is a member of the Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden and the head of its Biblicum Foundation.

secretary. That he at the same time was given the right to preach in the city church became even more significant for his reformatory work.

At the diet in Vaesteraas in June of 1527 King Gustavus Vasa (king 1523–1560) declared to the assembled estates (the four estates were nobles, priests, burghers, and farmers) that he had seen to it that “the pure Word of God and the Gospel, which our Lord Himself has commanded” was preached. But Bishop Hans Brask (1464–1538) declared on behalf of the priestly estate that this group was bound by oath to the pope and could undertake nothing in respect to doctrine and other spiritual matters without the pope’s consent and support. The nobles supported the declaration of the priestly estate. Olavus Petri then rose to defend the evangelical doctrine concerning the pure teaching of God’s Word, while the Catholic theologian Peder Galle (ca. 1450–1538) opposed him. The debate between Olavus Petri and Peder Galle before the estates went on until late afternoon, and thereafter the estates declared that those who preached the evangelical doctrine had good reasons for their position and taught nothing else than God’s Word. “And they all asked that God’s Word might be preached in its purity everywhere in the kingdom.” The basis of the church’s preaching was to be *God’s pure Word*, and the king was given the authority to supervise the official activity of the bishops. Luther’s name is not mentioned in the decree of the diet. No express break with Rome had as yet taken place. The old Catholic bishops and the cathedral chapters retained their positions.¹

At a meeting of the priests in Oerebro in 1529 the bishops promised to see to it that the parish priests preached God’s pure Word. God’s Word was to be preached “purely and without adulteration.” In the cathedral churches there was to be daily instruction in God’s Word “with good and honest interpretation.” Likewise in the schoolrooms there was to be “daily instruction in the Holy Scripture.”

Of significance in the training of pastors were Olavus Petri’s church books. In 1529 he issued a church handbook in Swedish, in 1530 a postil, which also contained a little catechism, and in 1531 *Then Swenska messan* (*The Swedish Mass*). Besides these, the New Testament in Swedish was issued in 1526 and the whole Bible in 1541.

In 1531 Laurentius Petri, a younger brother of Olavus Petri, was elected archbishop. Laurentius Petri had studied in Wittenberg and his leadership and theological writings came to be very important. In him Sweden had its first evangelical archbishop, a position which he held until his death in 1573.

In October 1536, under the leadership of the archbishop, a council was held in Uppsala. The first point in the resolution of this council was an order that enjoined the pastors to preach God’s holy gospel to the people with diligence. The second point prescribed that the Swedish mass was to be used thereafter in all cathedral churches as well as in all the churches of the country wherever this was possible and that the whole clergy was to cooperate in this with all its power. Olavus Petri’s Swedish order of service was there ordered adopted as the official liturgy for the whole kingdom. The conference also adopted a resolution pertaining to the moral life of the priests and the marriage of priests. “Those priests who according to Catholic custom lived with a ‘housekeeper’ were to be suspended, and every priest was either to live in a chaste unmarried state or else enter an honorable marriage. In early 1536 a priest still had to ask for a royal dispensation in order to be married.”²

At the diet in Vaesteraas in 1544 a so-called *ordinantia* was adopted, ordering that “God’s Word and the holy Gospel shall be used in the Christian congregations here in Sweden.” Those who were present pledged themselves never to leave “the teaching which is now in effect,” without specifying more clearly by a reference to any definite confession.

In 1549 the king, the archbishop, and some other priests introduced the religious regulations imposed by the emperor, the so-called *Interim*. Just as was done by the gnesio-Lutherans in Germany, the “interim” was rejected by true Lutherans in Sweden as a document which prepared the way for papism and brought with it the sacrifice of the mass for the living and the dead, the worship of saints, purgatory, monstrances, and other things, which, in accord with God’s Word, had already been abolished. They declared that they intended to continue in

¹ Regarding the significance of the diet in Vaesteraas see H. Holmquist, *Svenska kyrkans historia, III: I* (Stockholm 1933), pp. 154ff, and S. Carlsson—J. Rosen, *Svensk historia, I* (Stockholm, 3 ed., 1969), pp. 351ff.

² Holmquist, *op. cit.*, p. 246

“God’s pure and clear Word” and that they would never give assent or approval “to the papal system or the interim, which has gone out of style.”³

In 1571 Archbishop Laurentius Petri gave his church law (KO—*Kyrko-ordning*) to the printer. In this church law the papists “gross errors and abominable idolatry” were rejected, as well as the doctrine of the enthusiasts, the Anabaptists, the sacramentarians, the Zwinglians and Calvinists, through which “the free course of the holy Gospel” was hindered. Every pastor is to present the gospel set forth in the Bible “in its truth and purity, without addition or subtraction, as happened in the papacy.” “A good and true evangelical preacher” must be “thoroughly versed in the Scriptures.” Therefore both those who have already entered the pastoral office, as well as those who are preparing to enter, ought “with the greatest diligence to read and study the Bible, so that they might from it learn properly to understand the basis of all the doctrines and articles which belong to the preaching of the Gospel and Christian teaching.” The pastors are not to interpret the Bible according to their own opinion and will, “but in accord with its own correct and natural intent and the sense of the Holy Spirit who has given it.” Candidates were to give the following promise at their ordination: “to continue steadfastly in the pure Word of God and flee from all false and heretical doctrine.”

Even though Laurentius Petri by the pure evangelical doctrine had in mind Lutheran teaching, yet he does not mention expressly any confessional writing. Lutheran doctrine, after all, wants to be nothing else than the pure biblical teaching. In his essay “Concerning Church Regulations and Ceremonies,” composed in 1566 (printed in Wittenberg in 1587 after the author’s death) he however says expressly that the Church of Sweden has declared its adherence to the same doctrine which had been adopted by the German Lutherans.

At the pastoral conference in Uppsala in 1572, called by King John III (1568–1592), the KO of 1571 was adopted officially. It can also be mentioned that John III in documents of July 20, 1570, and March 8, 1571, referred to “the Augsburg Confession” as a doctrinal norm.⁴

After Laurentius Petri’s death in 1573 many earnest attempts were made by Rome to reunite the Swedish and the Catholic Church. Pope Gregory XIII appointed a “congregation for the northern lands,” and John III now began to work for a reformed Catholicism. A stop in that direction was the so-called “Red Book” (*Liturgia Sveecanae Ecclesiae*), which he issued in 1576 and which was adopted by the clergy at a meeting in Stockholm in 1577. In the years from 1576 to 1580 the movement for a Catholic Sweden reached its peak and Sweden came close to becoming Roman Catholic again. But in 1580 John III broke with the Jesuits and in 1583 the Jesuits’ efforts to rewin Sweden had come to an end.⁵

The Uppsala Council of 1593

When John III died in 1592 the situation again became serious, since John’s son and heir to the throne, Sigismund, had sworn loyalty and obedience to the head of the Roman Church when he had shortly before been elected king of Poland. It was generally held that Sigismund had lost his right to the Swedish throne if he did not want to permit the evangelical faith in Sweden. While waiting for Sigismund’s arrival in Sweden, John’s brother, Duke Karl, took over the regency. He wanted to call a diet to achieve unity in religion but was prevented from doing so by the Council. According to a letter from Sigismund, Duke Karl had no authority to call either a synod or a diet.

But the demand for a meeting to discuss religious affairs grew in broader circles and therefore Duke Karl and the Council formed a united front and resolved to act outside the law, to retain control of the kingdom and defend everyone in the practice of the true religion: God’s pure Word, interpreted in the A.C.

A council was called to meet in Uppsala. It began on February 25, 1593, and the decree of the council is dated the 20th of March. It behooved the assembled clergy (306 pastors) to give clear and definite expression to their rejection of the Roman Church’s doctrine and practice and of a middle-of-the-road church which John had

³ H. Levin, *Den svenska kyrkans bekaennelse i historisk belysning* (Stockholm 1897), s. 23.

⁴ See *Sv. Ecc. handl.*, I, nr 60, 63.

⁵ Cp. trygve R. Skarsten, “The Reaction in Scandinavia,” *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord*, eds. L.W. Spitz and W. Lohff (Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1977), s. 144ff.

wanted to create by his actions, especially his liturgy. The decree of the conference can be summarized in the following statements:

1) The subscribers to the decree want to remain faithful to God's pure and saving Word. The divine origin of the Holy Scriptures is emphasized, as well as its sufficiency, its clearness, its ability to interpret itself, and its absolute validity as rule and norm for faith and works.

2) It is also their intention to remain faithful to the three ecumenical creeds and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530.

3) It is also their intention to remain faithful to the religion which became common in the kingdom during the last portion of Gustav Vasa's rule and during the lifetime of Archbishop Laurentius Petri and which was expressed in the KO of 1571 and adopted officially in 1572.

4) They expressed their dissatisfaction with the "Red Book" and pledged never to accept it nor to use it, "or anything else of papistic doctrine or error, by whatever name it may be known."

5) In the same way "all errors of the sacramentarians, Zwinglians, and Calvinists, as well as those of the Anabaptists and other heretics" were rejected.

The decree of the Uppsala Council was officially adopted by parliament of February 16, 1594, when the estates unanimously declared that they did not want to depart from the council's decree. At the diet in Soederkoeping on October 21, 1595, it was resolved that all who built and dwelt in the country should be devoted to the doctrine that had been accepted. According to civil law it thus became a crime not to confess the Lutheran doctrine in agreement with the Uppsala Council decree. Apostasy from Lutheran doctrine was punishable by the loss of civil rights and exile from the country. Foreigners who had a different confession were not permitted to hold either public or private services.

Both during and after the Uppsala Council difficulties arose between Duke Karl and the clergy and the estates in general. Duke Karl did not want to bind himself to the Lutheran confessions but was willing to accept only the A.C. "insofar" (*quatenus*) as it agrees with Scripture, not "because" (*quia*) it did this. The reason for this was his ever increasing Reformed sympathies. When the coronation diet met in 1607 the estates desired to include in the declaration of the king a pledge to the A.C. and the Uppsala Council decree. By threatening to abdicate Karl was able to persuade the estates to compromise and include in the king's declaration the addition that Karl wanted. It says that the king desires to be faithful to the unaltered and correct A.C. and the Uppsala Council decree "insofar as this decree is grounded in God's Word and the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures and insofar as it advances the welfare of the kingdom and its rule."

The Book of Concord

The first time the question of the whole book of Concord as a symbolic writing was raised was shortly after King Karl's death at the diet in Nykoeping in 1611. In their address to Gustav Adolph (king 1611–1632) the estates proposed:

And inasmuch as our Christian religious articles have been more fully explained in *libro concordiae*, which all pure evangelical congregations which are faithful to the A.C. confess *pro symbolo verae doctrinae*, therefore we ask in obedience that His Princely Grace, even if it cannot be done at once, will graciously at his coronation give his declaration under oath to the estates on the Book of Concord.⁶

Gustav Adolph, however, did not agree to this request to have the Book of Concord declared a symbol.

The leading men of the church were of the opinion that a correct subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession demanded a subscription to the whole Book of Concord, which claims to be nothing else than an explanation of that faith which came to expression in the three symbols of the ancient church and in the A.C. In

⁶ This proposal was offered by the priestly estate but accepted by all the estates, see Levin, *op. cit.*, pp. 59f.

1608 a church handbook was prepared. It was not printed until the reign of Gustav Adolph II in 1614. It was prefaced by an address by Archbishop Kenicius to his brethren in office. There it says that the most high God has correctly revealed His holy and saving Word, pure and undefiled, to the people of Sweden, and a short summary thereof is contained in the oldest, correct and unaltered Augsburg Confession “*and more fully explained in the Christian Book of Concord.*”

In 1619 the bishops submitted a proposal for a new church law. There all the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church are accepted. Of the Smalcald Articles it says that they are “a symbol of our Christian religion and faith.” About Luther’s Large and Small Catechisms it says that since these contain everything one ought to know about Christianity “we also want it publicly known that we confess these catechisms.” All preachers and teachers both in churches and schools are encouraged to teach and preach in accord with these writings “for the young and for other simple Christians.” In regard to the FC it is said that “some prominent, learned, pious, peace-loving, trusted theologians” have produced and published this book because of the controversy and disunity which had arisen within the Lutheran Church, and that “the correct and unaltered Augsburg Confession’s true understanding and meaning is repeated and explained” in this book.

The prepared church law never won the king’s ratification. Laurentius Petri’s church law of 1571 was not replaced until this was done by Karl XI’s church law of 1686 (see below). The attempts made in the early years of the reign of Gustav Adolph II, partly by the estates and partly by the clergy, to have the whole Book of Concord declared a symbolical writing did not succeed. But the desire to have this book declared a symbol always was very great among the pastors.

During the years 1636–1638 the Scotch pastor John Duraeus visited Sweden and vigorously promoted a union between the Lutherans and the Reformed. He could count on sympathy with his ideas from Johannes Matthiae, among others. During the Thirty Years War, Duraeus had visited Gustav Adolf II and Axel Oxenstierna in Germany. Somewhat later also Johannes Matthiae and then Johannes Terserus began to advocate unionism or syncretism, that is, church fellowship without agreement in biblical-Lutheran doctrine. In 1625 Johannes Matthiae became professor in Stockholm, in 1629 court preacher and Gustav Adolf II’s companion during the Thirty Years War. In 1632 he was chosen by the king to be Kristina’s teacher (Kristina queen 1644–1654), and in 1643 he was appointed bishop in Straengnaes. Johannes Terserus in 1633–1637 made a study visit to Germany, France, England and Holland, during which he came under the strong influence of the unionistic theologian George Calixtus. In 1640 Terserus became professor of theology in Aabo, in 1647 in Uppsala, and from 1658 to 1664 he was bishop in Aabo.

The unionism and syncretism which was vigorously promoted by Duraeus, Matthiae and Terserus was generally in disfavor among the Swedish pastors, and again a strong need was felt to have the Book of Concord officially ratified as symbolically binding for the Church of Sweden. At the request of the pastors, Duraeus was ordered to leave the country in 1638, but it took a long time before Matthiae and Terserus were deposed.

The question of an express acceptance of the Book of Concord came up at the diet in 1647. It was raised on the floor by Bishop Jonas Magni of Skara. In a sermon preached in Queen Kristina’s presence he made an attack “against crypto-Calvinism,” clearly directed against Matthiae, and he insisted that “those who do not recognize the FC as a symbolical book ought not to be considered Christians.” Extensive discussions were held about this question in the priestly estate. Only Matthiae and Terserus rose to oppose the Book of Concord.

From the theological faculty in Uppsala the diet received “an opinion concerning the *Libris Symbolicis*, especially concerning the Formula of Concord,” dated March 9, 1647. The opinion may be summarized as follows:

- 1) There is no doubt about which confessional writings are expressly named at the Uppsala Council in 1593.
- 2) The catechism (sic) of Luther is “*in genere and implicate*” accepted by the Uppsala Council.
- 3) “The Book of Concord has for a long time not only, by the tacit consent of all, or certainly of most of those in these national assemblies who have read it, been approved and acknowledged as an orthodox writing, but also has been at various general national meetings

of the priestly estate and other estates recognized as the Christian doctrine that ought to be followed and in regard to which the ratification of His Royal Majesty should be requested. This happened for the first time at the diet of 1611, where the first point among others offered by the National Council and the estates was a formal request to King Gustav the Second and Great for the acceptance and ratification of the Book of Concord. It was done the second time at the diet of Stockholm in that answer which at the urging of the priestly estate was given to the Calvinist Duraeus, and in which the writings assembled in the Book of Concord were vouched for as a declaration about the Augsburg Confession, from which they confessed they did not want to depart. These things are in the same way expressly stated in the preface to the revised Handbook issued in 1614. The Book of Concord has up to now also been accepted and used in schools and academies here in our country as a secondary norm and a setting forth of sound doctrine in both public and private readings and debates. So far as we know, there has been no one who has confessed himself to be a sincere Evangelical or Lutheran and yet has rejected this book.”⁷

This report is signed by Joh. Canuti Lenaeus, Laur. Stigzelius, Joh. Laur. Stalenus and Ericus Brunnerus.

This opinion certainly carried a great deal of weight in the actions of the diet. Bishop Jonas Magni maintained that anyone who refused to subscribe to the Book of Concord should not be considered a brother. The Bishop of Vaesteraas, Olof Laurelius, asserted as Jonas Magni had done earlier, that the Book of Concord already was and always had been a symbolical book.

In the minutes of the priestly estate of March 26, 1647, it is said that the pastors of the diet in their own names and in those of their absent brothers, “have held and still hold that the Book of Concord is the rule and touchstone of our true religion and a further explanation of the unaltered Augsburg Confession.” But the request of the priestly estate to have the whole Book of Concord ratified as a symbolical book never gained the approval of the government. Queen Kristina was greatly influenced by Johannes Matthiae.

At the coronation of Karl Gustav in 1654 (1654–1660) a new attempt was made to have the whole Book of Concord referred to in the royal declaration. But the attempt came to nothing, very likely because of Terserus and Matthiae, who stood in great favor with Karl Gustav X.

In the fall of 1662, when Sweden had a regency (Karl XI did not come of age until 1672), Olof Laurelius submitted a proposal for a church law to the regent, Per Brahe, and the chancellor, Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie. In this proposal the FC was listed as a confessional writing and the suggestion received a favorable reception from both statesmen. The need for an official recognition of the FC as one of the confessions had again become clear, partly because Matthiae in a series of pamphlets in 1656–1661 had developed a syncretistic program of church union, and partly because Terserus had in 1662 issued a catechism explanation which the theological professor in Aabo, Enevald Svenonius, immediately declared heretical in a counter publication. Svenonius was of the opinion that the priestly estate had the right to decide what was a confession, and since the FC had been subscribed at the 1647 diet by the bishops and the pastors it had thereby become a symbolical writing according to his view.⁸

On August 14, 1663, the government published a general “decree concerning religious affairs” because of the syncretism of Matthiae and Terserus. The government wished “by a legislative act to give the FC a normative position. His Royal Majesty has been able to do this in the confidence that he was acting in accord with the wishes of the priestly estate. The influential Laurelius had through his historical presentation of the symbol question in Sweden in his *Necessaria consideratio* of 1663 demonstrated beyond question that the priestly estate was of the opinion that Matthiae and Terserus, who had now been convicted of syncretism, were the chief reason why the demand of the clergy relative to the FC had not been accepted earlier by His Royal

⁷ See *Ecclesiastike Samlingar*, F. Oehrstroemer, Ed.. Third volume (Stockholm 1813), s. 62 ff.

⁸ See S. Goeransson, *Den synkretistiska striden i Sverige 1660–1664* (Upps. Univ. Aarskrift 1952:6), s. 148.

Majesty. The orthodox Brahe had also taken the position that the FC through the resolution of the priestly estate of 1647 was a symbol in Sweden.”⁹

According to the religion decree of 1663, ratified by parliament in 1664, the subjects of the kingdom were to adhere

not only to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the two Catechisms of Luther, the Smaller and the Larger, as these had been written in Luther’s time, but they are also to be guided by the two books which are specifically called the Formula of Concord, one of which is titled *Epitome articulorum* etc. and the other *Solida, plana et perspicua repetitio et declaratio* etc., which were composed after Luther’s time and now are in almost all Evangelical congregations looked upon as normative and symbolical books.

In the same year Terserus was suspended for serious “errors” and the decision in the cases of both Terserus and Matthiae was referred to the next session of parliament in 1664. In order to get his suspension lifted Terserus offered many recantations. In the recantation which he offered to the priestly estate on May 24 he pledged “to maintain, with God’s gracious help, a steadfast unity with pure Lutheran theologians at home and abroad” and to adhere to all the symbolical books contained in the Book of Concord.¹⁰ The honesty of Terserus’ recantation came to be questioned by the majority.

On June 14 His Royal Majesty took up the religion question in a proposal to parliament. In the first section His Royal Majesty gave a historical resume of the events that had taken place since the previous diet. In this review the controversies that had arisen as a result of the writings of Matthiae and Terserus and the actions that had been considered because of them are portrayed. After a number of shifts in this matter His Royal Majesty finally took into consideration the priestly estates’ *ius in sacris* and deposed both Matthiae and Terserus.

The Church Law of 1686

It was not until 1686 that Sweden got a new church law (Kyrkolag—KL), in which the Book of Concord is expressly named. There it says in chapter 1, section 1:

In our kingdom (and subject lands) all shall confess only and alone the Christian doctrine and faith, which is based on God’s Holy Word, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and contained in the three chief symbols, the Apostolic, Nicene, and Athanasian, as well as in the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530, accepted at the Uppsala Council in 1593, and explained in the whole so-called Book of Concord; and all those who enter any office in the teaching profession in churches, academies, (gymnasia), or schools, shall at their ordination (or when they accept any degree) pledge themselves with a solemn oath to this doctrine and confession of faith. (The words in parentheses were taken away through a later resolution.)

The formulation “and explained in the whole so-called Book of Concord” is based on the Book of Concord’s claim to be the true explanation of the faith which came to expression in the three symbols of the ancient church and the A.C. Thus the Thorough Declaration part of the FC is introduced with the words, “joint, clear, proper and final repetition and explanation of some articles in the Augsburg Confession.” In the “preface” to the FC the writers confess their adherence to the *Apology*, since in it “the said Augsburg Confession is explained and defended as much as is necessary.” Furthermore they confessed the Smalcald Articles “as these were originally composed and printed in order to...be delivered as an explanation of the aforementioned

⁹ Goeransson, *op. cit.*, s. 207f.

¹⁰ See Goeransson, *op. cit.*, s. 304f.

Augsburg Confession.” Concerning Luther’s catechisms it says, “In them the Christian doctrine drawn from God’s Word is summarized for the simple laymen in the most correct and simplest way, and likewise explained so far as this is necessary.” The Formula of Concord also claims to be the correct explanation and interpretation of the doctrine which along with the three symbols of the ancient church got its confessional expression in the A.C. A proper subscription to the A.C. therefore cannot be reconciled with a rejection of the FC but must include a subscription to the whole Book of Concord.¹¹ For that reason the pastors wanted a clear declaration that there would be a pledge to “the whole so-called Book of Concord.”

However, also after 1686 an ordination oath with the following wording came into use: I, N.N., ...promise and swear by God and His holy Gospel, that I will...neither in secret for myself hold or openly for my hearers spread and preach any other doctrine than that which God Himself has dictated and taught and which is contained in detail in the holy Bible but in short form in our confession of faith and the accepted symbols, the Apostolic as well as the Nicene and Athanasian, together with the Augsburg Confession, which were accepted and approved in the Uppsala Council of 1593 by all the estates of the kingdom.

The words from the first paragraph of the church law “and explained in the whole so-called Book of Concord” were not included in the oath formula until 1719. The reason why this did not happen earlier is probably to be found in this that after the battle against the unionism of Matthiae and Terserus was brought to a conclusion, there was no longer any open questioning of the whole Book of Concord as the correct explanation of the ancient church symbols and the A.C. Bishop Erik Benzelius wrote in 1687 that the symbolical books “are contained in the Book of Concord and have now been accepted for a long time.” And in a letter of the king to the faculty in Uppsala, dated June 28, 1687, “the symbolical books collected in the whole so-called Book of Concord” are spoken of.¹² Many bishops also saw to it in the last part of the 17th century that the priests at their ordination and the pastors at their installation expressly pledged themselves to the Book of Concord. (Translator’s note: In the Church of Sweden a man becomes a “priest” at his ordination. He becomes a “pastor” (Kyrko-herde) when he no longer serves as an assistant but becomes the chief or head pastor of a parish.) But when the 18th century began a new danger threatened, namely, Pietism, with its indifference in matters of doctrine. Therefore it became important also to mention the FC expressly in the pastoral oath.

The Formula of Concord as “Explanation” also a Symbol?

Cathedral Dean Lars Molin’s theses “Concerning our Symbolical Books” (1715) created another controversy about the symbolical character of the Book of Concord. Molin did not want to acknowledge the Book of Concord as symbolical, even if he acknowledged its authority. Professor Daniel Lundius led the battle against Molin and maintained that the Book of Concord had the character of a symbolic book for the Church of Sweden. He based his view on the KL (*kyrkolag*—church law) of 1686, the resolution of the priestly estate on the diet of 1647 and the royal religious proclamation of 1663. Archbishop M. Steuchius held that the matter now being debated “is a very delicate question.” He was of the opinion that one ought “to stay with the clear words of the church law, that the A.C. is explained in the Book of Concord and its books,” which words make it clear that the contents of this book are recognized as “a norm which shall be considered in all cases in which the A.C. and its articles come into debate.” The Book of Concord constitutes “a secondary norm.”

Against the background of spreading Pietism the clergy urged an express determination that the acceptance of the Book of Concord as a correct explanation of the doctrine implies that the whole Book of Concord was thereby accepted as a symbolical writing. Thus it happened already at the diet in 1719. The priestly estate as good as unanimously desired to get an express declaration on the part of the assembled estates that the Book of Concord should be considered a confessional writing. In that connection many maintained that

¹¹ Cp. H. Lindroth, “*vilka aero Svenska kyrkans bekaennelseskrifter?*” *Sv. Teol. Kvartalskrift* 1946:2, s. 109ff.

¹² See S. Kjoellerstroem, “*Vaar kyrkas bekaennelseskrifter i svensk sprakdraekt?*” *Sv. Teol. Kvartalskrift* 1945, s. 258.

it already was recognized as such. Bishop Jesper Svedberg and Molin disagreed, but they stood pretty much alone. Bishop Svedberg expressed the opinion that the FC “would be more necessary and useful if it continued to be an *explanation of the symbols*,” but he did not want to bind himself to it with an oath as a “*symbolical book*.” The archbishop Steuchius thought that since the FC had won a position of authority in the church, it ought also “to be considered a symbolical book.” The whole priestly estate agreed that “the whole Book of Concord is a symbolical book of our church.” They desired an addition to the first point in their charter where the whole Book of Concord is expressly declared to be symbolic. According to the proposal of the priestly estate “the true and pure evangelical doctrine” shall be explained as being

based on God’s Holy Word, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, contained in the three chief symbols, the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian together with the unaltered Augsburg Confession and *explained in the whole so-called Book of Concord, which among us, as with many of our spiritual brethren, are recognized as normative and symbolical* (the addition desired by the priestly estate is here printed in italics).¹³

Various disputed questions arose within the estate so that the question concerning the clergy charter came to no conclusion.

The 1809 Constitution

In paragraph 2 of the 1809 constitution (Regeringsform—RF) it says: “The king shall always hold the pure evangelical faith, as it was accepted and declared in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and in the decree of the Uppsala Council of 1593.” The demand for adherence to “the pure evangelical faith” thus applied also to the king and likewise to all civil officials. RF, paragraph 4, expressly mentions the members of the National Council and paragraph 28 “all other civil officials within the realm and the judges.” This demand has since been significantly modified through revisions in the constitution made by parliament in 1862 and 1863 and 1870. But the union between the Swedish state and the Swedish church continued.

As is clear from paragraph 2, the 1809 constitution lacks any reference to the ancient symbols and to the Book of Concord. Does this mean that the framers of the constitution intended to correct the church law of 1686? There is no indication of this in the records of the acts of parliament from that time. Nor does the new constitution indicate that the confessional oath was changed or that the words “as explained in the whole so-called Book of Concord” were removed. Not until 1829 did the oath receive a new formulation.

But the difference between KL 1686, chapter one, paragraph 1, and RF 1809, paragraph 2, was to be appealed to later by those who were opposed to the Book of Concord as a confessional writing. When the Pietist Peter Wieselgren in 1827 sharply criticized the theology of the FC in writing and wanted to limit radically the number of the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden, he thought that he found support for this in RF 1809. The discussion about how far the KL 1686, chapter 1, paragraph 1, had been abrogated by the RF 1809 reached its climax at the general synod in 1893 (see below).

General Councils

It was not until November 16, 1863, that parliament decided that the Church of Sweden as an organization should have its own representatives. Before that time there were no other representatives for the church than the state representatives. Church affairs had to be dealt with by the diets. But now a spokesorgan for the Church of Sweden was to come together for a *general council* “every fifth year, at a time and place fixed by the king; the king, however, was not deprived of the right to call a meeting more often.” (Council Constitution, paragraph 1.) After the necessary changes in the RF were legally made in 1866, the first general

¹³ See Levin, *op. cit.*, s. 137.

council met in Stockholm from September 3 to October 7, 1868. The Swedish government and parliament still was (and is) the highest decision making body in church affairs, but now the consent of the council was needed as a condition before a church law could be adopted. Furthermore, the council shall “take up church matters, which are submitted to it by the king or concerning which questions are raised by any of its members. Beyond what is granted in the charter, however, the conference has no authority to decide on reports and protests or requests which are to be humbly submitted to the king” (paragraph 1).¹⁴

Already at the first general council in 1868 criticism was directed against the binding force of the Book of Concord. The author Viktor Rydberg said, among other things:

However, it is a fact that the pastoral oaths on the confessions, which are prescribed by the church law, are by very many members of the church considered to be an unconditional pledge to hold to all the doctrines of the confession both in form and content (General Council, 1868, p. 155).

Because many like Viktor Rydberg had accepted the historical-critical method of Bible study with its denial of the deity of Christ and the Bible’s inspiration and inerrancy, which was forcing its way into the church, it became impossible to hold fast to the doctrinal content of the Book of Concord. Many therefore believed that the forms of Lutheran doctrine and confession exercised a harmful coercion on scholarly research and on the individual’s freedom of thought (see General Council 1868, p. 509).

Instead of the confessional oath, Viktor Rydberg wanted to have a simple promise which was formulated as follows: “that the Protestant Scripture principle, which secures authority of the Holy Scriptures and the independence of biblical research, may be more clearly maintained” (p. 499f). What are according to the Book of Concord gross departures from Bible doctrine Rydberg described as biblical, because they had support in modern biblical research. He therefore said that he was fighting for “the Holy Scripture’s exclusive authority in questions of Christian faith” (p. 491) when he advocated a number of un-Lutheran teachings.

The conservative members of the council, who wanted to guard the authority of the Bible, seem on the whole not to have seen through Rydberg’s pious formulations. The majority in the council took a favorable attitude toward a new formulation of the confessional oath, which contained nothing but a *general statement* of what formed the essential purpose of the pastor’s activity.

General Council 1893

At the general council in 1893 the synod had to consider a law proposal from His Royal Majesty which stemmed from the apparent conflict between the 1809 constitution (*Regeringsform*—RF), paragraph 2, and the church law (*Kyrkolag*—KL) of 1686, chapter one, paragraph 1. The idea that RF 1809 had changed the church’s doctrine as set forth in KL 1686 had won a hearing from His Royal Majesty. The proposal of the king therefore aimed at this that the Book of Concord should no longer be mentioned in the church law. It had the following wording:

The teaching of the Church of Sweden is the pure, evangelical doctrine, grounded in God’s Holy Word, the writings of the Old and New Testaments, as that was accepted and explained in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the decree of the 1593 Uppsala Council.

¹⁴ This is expressed in *Riksdagsordningen* (RO) of June 28, 1866. RO, paragraph 34, for example, prescribes that at the opening of parliament a service for the members shall be conducted. At the solemn opening of parliament on October 3, 1978, a woman pastor preached for the first time, which thus is viewed as not in conflict with “the pure evangelical doctrine.” On October 17, 1958, parliament adopted a law “regarding a woman’s right for pastoral service.” In this law it is said, “A woman shall possess the same rights as a man to be appointed to pastoral service according to merit and competence.”

The proposal of His Royal Majesty, however, was not approved by the council. Instead a motion offered by a member named Sjoecrona was adopted. He maintained:

According to my understanding the stipulation in chapter 1, paragraph 1 of the church law regarding the teaching of the Church of Sweden, has not been abrogated or changed by what is prescribed in the constitution of the year 1809.

He therefore offered the following counterproposal for a law:

It is hereby ordered that chapter 1, paragraph 1, of the church law should have the following wording: The teaching of the Church of Sweden is the pure evangelical doctrine, which, grounded in God's Holy Word, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, were accepted in the unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 and the Uppsala Council decision of 1593, and explained in the whole Book of Concord.

Mr. Sjoecrona's law proposal was accepted by the council and submitted to the king on October 10, 1893 (The Council's Obedient Letter, No. 17). But the king and the government never submitted any law proposal to parliament.

When the council rejected the king's proposal by a vote of 30 to 28, the contribution of Bishop Gottfrid Billing to the debate played a large role. He urged that the whole Book of Concord should be kept as an explanation of the doctrine of the Church of Sweden. But his reason for this was that he believed that a confession of more extent gave greater freedom than a shorter confession. Bishop Billing issued the following famous retort:

It is easier to say that one is bound more firmly by 700 pages (the whole Book of Concord) than by 70 pages (the A.C.), but if someone could prove that, I would be surprised. As far as I am concerned I say that one is just as little bound by the 70 pages as by the 700; one is not more firmly bound by the many pages, but it is my conviction that they are instead apt to set men free.

It is easy to show that Billing's view concerning the Swedish church's relation to the Book of Concord does not agree with the view of the fathers of the Book of Concord nor with that of the first subscribers. Billing's view came to be called the correct "evangelical" view in contrast to what was called a legalistic or juridical view. Archbishop Nathan Soederblom insisted in his eulogy held for Billing after his death that Billing had maintained "the evangelical religion's free and deep view of the church's confession against a legalistic and narrowminded conception."

The General Council of 1903

The loose and diffuse obligation to the Book of Concord, which came to be called "the evangelical view" was accepted at the 1893 synod by a slim majority, but it very quickly thereafter became the official view of the Church of Sweden. That became clear when ten years later the Confession again became a topic of debate at the synod. At the 1903 general synod the second question asked at ordination to the pastoral office was given the following changed wording at Billing's suggestion:

Do you intend, in accord with your best understanding and conscience, purely and clearly to proclaim God's Word as it is given to us in the Holy Scriptures and as our church's confessional writings witness thereto?

Many, among others the writer of this article, have not known what lay behind this proposal. I had earlier believed that the question meant that a pastor in the Church of Sweden is pledged to preach in agreement with the doctrine of Scripture and wholly in agreement with the presentation of this doctrine as it is given in the Book of Concord. But that was not the intent of Billing's proposal. That was made clear by his son Einar Billing at the 1934 council. But "God's Word" no longer has reference to the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (so still the 1893 council), but God's Word in the Scriptures. And with the word "witness" he intended to say that within the Book of Concord one could find testimony about "God's Word," not that everything which the confessions teach is taught in the Bible.

A member by the name of Boethius had in large measure correctly understood the meaning of the new proposal for the ordination promise when he in the council in 1903 emphasized the following:

At the close of the morning meeting some words worth considering were spoken about the fact that our "*folkkyrka*" (people's church) must offer great latitude for various opinions. Yes, it is just this that she must do, for this is her *raison d'être* as a *folkkyrka* (General Council, 1903, p. 173f.)

The treachery in the so-called "evangelical view" of the Book of Concord lies in this that it consciously uses ambiguous formulations. In that way the conservatives can always be made to believe that the church adheres to the Lutheran confession, while the liberal theologians' unbiblical confession cannot be rebuffed, since it is only in conflict with a "legalistic" slavery to the Book of Concord and not with the "evangelical" view of the Church of Sweden.

The General Council of 1920

The so-called "evangelical view" of the Book of Concord was spelled out more precisely and ratified as the view of the Church of Sweden in the councils of 1920, 1925, and 1934. Since the Church of Sweden has been unwilling to remove any confession from the Book of Concord, many have drawn the conclusion that the Church of Sweden still considers itself bound to the teaching of the Book of Concord and thus at least formally is to be considered as a confessionally faithful Lutheran church. That this is a misunderstanding is already implied by the synods of 1893 and 1903, but it is made even clearer by the synods of 1920, 1925, and 1934.

At the church conference in 1920, Bishop Personne moved changes in the church law of 1686, chapter 1, paragraph 1. He wanted above all to get rid of the Athanasian Creed, but he saw that many, on the basis of the "evangelical view" would argue that there was no need to set aside something from which one already felt free. He said:

And then it is said in churchly circles that this so-called symbol is not at all a typical expression of our church's faith and confession and that nowadays there is scarcely any thinking member of our church, pastor or layman, who "believes in" this medieval product of the wild and bloody controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries.

Personne wanted to remove the Athanasian Creed because in his opinion it contained "grave errors." He said:

Now the beginning, the middle, and the end—the real point of the document—contains, both from the biblical point of view and that of the church's confessions, an unusually grave error, the error that this scholastic speculation over and formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity and the doctrine of the person of Christ is *the catholic Christian faith* (the doctrine of faith) *which one must believe* (consider true) *in order to be saved*. I do not only hope but I am fully and firmly convinced that there is not a single member of this council, representatives of the Church of

Sweden, who can have any other opinion of this Athanasian doctrine of salvation than that it is a grave error....For insofar as the Athanasian Creed forms a part of the Uppsala Council's decree, it naturally belongs to those details in this decree to which a member of the Church of Sweden is only historically obligated (General Council Minutes, October 25, 1920).

The church law committee, which had to deal with Personne's motion, proposed to the council (Report no. 32), that Personne's motion should not result in any council action. It pointed out that this was not the first time the council had received a proposal to the effect that the whole Book of Concord should not be listed as the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden. But, the committee maintained, these proposals had been rejected every time since they "have arisen not out of our church's evangelical view of the binding force of the confessional writings but out of a legalistic juridical slavery to the letter." If the council would adopt Personne's motion and exclude the Athanasian Creed from the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden, the council would thereby surrender to the false conception that the Church of Sweden considers itself to be bound to everything which her confessional writings teach. Thereby we would lose our freedom over against those confessions which are not removed. So the committee argued. Personne, according to the committee,

makes himself guilty of the misunderstanding that our church by considering this creed [the Athanasian] to be one of its confessional writings would be binding itself not only to its evangelical content but also to its literal formulations.

The church law committee thus did not reject Personne's criticism of the Athanasian Creed, but maintained only that Personne's view of this creed would not in any way come into conflict with an "evangelical" obligation to the confessions. Gottfrid Billing writes in his *Levnadsminne* (Memoirs) concerning the 1920 church conference:

Most troubling of all was the revival of the confession question. The situation was reminiscent of the great subjects of discussion at the 1893 council. In the discussions the question about what obligation or freedom over against the confessional writings meant would also now be raised. Personne's argument was premised on a feeling of obligation to the historical, verbal wording....With some help from Einar, I wrote the proposal for the committee statement, and this was there approved unanimously.¹⁵

How far the Church of Sweden had moved from a Lutheran doctrinal position is demonstrated also by the church law committee's statement on the Christian faith. It said that the Christian faith

is not the acceptance of certain doctrinal formulations, but the heart's trust in Jesus Christ as He meets us in the Gospel. To say this is also to affirm that, even if it seems that one could draw another concept of faith out of certain expressions in the so-called Athanasian Creed, this cannot be considered as an expression of our church's confession.

The church law committee does not understand the true doctrine of faith and it mixes together the faith with which one believes, namely, personal faith in the heart (*fides qua*) and the faith which one believes, namely the doctrines which are taught in the Bible (*fides quae*). We become members of Christ's invisible church through the *fides qua*. But this trust in the heart only God can see. The *fides quae*, that is, the doctrine, the objective truth of God's Word, is the basis on which Christians acknowledge and exercise church fellowship with other Christians here on earth. But the church law committee maintained the "Christian faith" means only the *fides qua* and that therefore the true doctrine is less important. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of modern Protestant theology, would surely have been satisfied with this statement of the church law committee.

¹⁵ Gottfrid Billings *Levnadsminnen*. Utgivna med inledning och kommentar av H. Pleijel (Lund 1975), s. 203.

In reality the Church of Sweden had already gotten rid of that which Bishop Personne believed to be a “grave error.” But this abolition had taken place in “a clearer way” than through a formal removal of certain confessional writings. For through a formal removal of parts of the Book of Concord one ran the risk of losing one’s freedom in regard to those parts which had not been removed. This was the meaning of a statement issued by Bishop Einar Billing on behalf of the committee:

We intended, in other words, with our statement, just as Bishop Personne requested, to place brackets around those parts of the Athanasian Creed (which do not give expression to our conception of faith) and we believe that we have done that in a clearer way with our statement than would have been done in the way that had been proposed (no. 5, p. 32).

In a free attitude over against the Athanasian Creed Einar Billing saw an analogy to “our attitude over against the writings of the Old Testament.” He says, “Also there is found much which from a Christian viewpoint appears to be outmoded, strange, sometimes offensive” (no. 5, p. 34). Finally Einar Billing emphasized that “the church conference through the statement of the law committee got an opportunity, just as in 1893 and 1903, once more to indicate what the church’s view of the confessional writings is.”

In these council debates Bishop Gottfrid Billing participated for the last time. He emphasized that acceptance of Personne’s motion would mean that the council agreed with the mistaken notion that before this time we had been bound to the literal meaning of the Athanasian Creed.

When the matter came to a vote, the council said yes to the committee’s proposal. Thereby the so-called “evangelical view” of the confessional writings had again been ratified as the official view of the Church of Sweden. The vote was 42 in the affirmative and 12 negative.

The General Council of 1925

At the general council of 1925 Bishop Personne once more came with a motion (no. 15) concerning a change in the 1686 church law, chapter 1, paragraph 1. He again brought

a protest against the unbiblical speculations of the unknown author of the falsely so-called Athanasian Creed, but an even stronger and more serious protest against this author’s shameful assertion that his unbiblical speculations are “the catholic Christian faith” and that no one who does not believe this “can be saved.”

“Gottfrid Billing was now gone, but his spirit hovered both over the committee opinion and over the debate in the plenary session.”¹⁶ Professor Herner’s statement made during the debate may be said to be characteristic:

Therefore he [Gottfrid Billing] believed that the Athanasian Creed ought to be kept. It ought to remain as an old memorial marker from an earlier period in the church’s history and worthy of respect. It ought to remain to show that we are not bound to formulations but bound only to the Gospel content which we can read behind the lines of this creed...If therefore some pastor in our church or some theological student cannot come to terms with some passage not only in the Athanasian Creed but in any other of the confessional writings, he can be assured that he is not bound to this formulation but only bound to the Gospel content (no. 5, p. 57).

What this “Gospel content” is each and everyone is allowed to determine subjectively “according to his best understanding and conscience” (the wording of the ordination promise). Generally it means “that which testifies to this that God is near us” (see below).

¹⁶ H. Pleijel, “*Svenska kyrkan och bekaennelsen under sista halvsekklet*,” *En bok om kyrkan av svenska teologer* (Lund 1942), s. 225.

The church law committee, of which Einar Billing was chairman, referred to the committee report of 1920 on this point and again played off the *fides qua* against the *fides quae*:

The thought forms with which it [the Athanasian Creed] operates are very foreign to our times, and this makes it more than ever necessary to distinguish between the real content of faith and its formulations. And especially in this concept of faith a common failing in this creed and its whole time betrays itself, a failing which we have overcome through the reforming determination that faith is the truth of the heart directed toward God in Christ (Report, no. 25). The debate about the confession was concluded without a vote being asked for.

The view which Einar Billing had during the debate called “our evangelical view of the confessional writings” had again been certified as official.

The General Council of 1934

At the 1934 council Prof. Emmanuel Linderholm offered two motions relative to the confession of the Church of Sweden. He made a motion “for a reform in the ordination promise, a summary of the Apostles’ Creed and the removal of the so-called Athanasian Creed from the symbols of the Church of Sweden, and likewise of the present ordination oath from the ordination ritual” (motion, no. 51) and also “for a renewed examination of some of the expressions in the 1819 hymnal and the new proposed hymnal” (motion no. 52).

In the second motion he attacked, among other things, “the old unhistorical biblicism of verbal inspiration,” the expression “born in sin,” the statement that Jesus is “the Lord God,” faith in Jesus and His merit, “faith in hell, Satan, and devils together with the doctrine of eternal punishment.”

The council did not reject Linderholm’s gross criticism of Christianity as irreconcilable with the Lutheran Confessions. According to the “evangelical view” of the confessional writings Linderholm’s opinions, after all, had to be tolerated.

In motion 51 Linderholm, among other things, asserted: “as you all know, it is especially this last expression,...*conceived* by the Holy Ghost, which is felt to be most oppressive for reason and conscience.” In regard to the Athanasian Creed he said, “It seems to me to be about time for this document to be dropped out of our church’s collection of symbols.” He held that the phrase “conceived by the Holy Ghost” was not part of biblical doctrine but that it was rather an expression of the “vulgar faith” of the ancient church.

In the church law committee’s report on Linderholm’s motion reference is made to what was said about the church’s confessions at the councils in 1893, 1903, 1920, and 1925. The report summarizes:

The council has rejected every proposal to accept changes in regard to the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden; but at the same time the council has been just as anxious to maintain a pure evangelical view of the confessions and to reject every “legalistic, juridical slavery to the letter” in our relation to them.

In the debate on the motion Prof. Linderholm, among other things, said, “Jesus never (and for this view I would be willing to be shot anytime) believed Himself or felt Himself or had any desire to be God” (no. 7, p. 57).

Even in the face of this gross denial the council did not stress the importance of holding fast to the teaching of the Bible and the Book of Concord. Nor did that happen when Linderholm said the following about the doctrine of the Trinity:

The doctrine of the Trinity is found not even in Paul. All theologians know that. But why are you so unwilling to say that openly? Why should the people be kept in ignorance? (no. 7, 58).

Linderholm was therefore not satisfied with the refusal of the Swedish Church to speak clearly, that is to say, that the church in her words said something that she did not literally mean.

What becomes of the evangelical view of the relation to the confessions if it implies that we should not understand the words as they read and pay no attention to them? Yes, to what shall one then pay attention and why then bind the church to these documents? It is the words to which we must adhere. They talk about the spirit. Yes, the spirit here is even more terrible than the words, I am used to saying. Under such conditions to what shall we adhere? (no. 7, p. 59).

Linderholm saw through the ambiguity and the consequent dishonesty in the “evangelical view” of the confessions. He correctly demanded that the liberal conception of the Christian religion should not be concealed under pious formulations. If the Church of Sweden believed that many things in its doctrine and its confessional writings were wrong, then it ought to say that clearly and not pretend that it still confessed the whole Book of Concord. But the double-dealing of the Church of Sweden in the question of the confessions ever since 1893, that is, a formal defense of the whole Book of Concord while at the same time limiting its binding character to a minimum, has been very effective in changing the Church of Sweden from a Lutheran to an un-Lutheran and syncretistic church. The conservative groups within the Church of Sweden could in this way be reassured and the liberals could not be disciplined. Linderholm could, without the risk of discipline, talk about “what was new in Paul, the Gnostic revamping of the *Gospel*” and say that

in the New Testament and later in the doctrine of the church, notions and ideas from various sources are heaped together and an attempt is made to bring them into unity with each other. But the effort did not succeed, because they are too disparate from one another (no. 7, p. 59).

The debate about the confessions and the ordination promise at the 1934 council was brought to a conclusion by Bishop Einar Billing. By his speech he wanted once more to emphasize that the Church of Sweden took a free attitude toward the Book of Concord. The Church of Sweden guards “an evangelical view of our relation to the confessional writings,” he maintained.

Regarding the correct interpretation of the ordination promise he said,

It is presupposed that he who gives the ordination promise is convinced that there is a Word of God in the Holy Scriptures. It does not say that everything in the Holy Bible is God’s Word in the same degree but that God’s Word is given to us in the Holy Scriptures (no. 7, p. 74).

A pastor in the Church of Sweden therefore has a right to embrace Lindershom’s view of the Bible and the conclusion of historical-critical Bible research concerning mistakes, myths, and legends in the Bible, for he confesses only that “there is a Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.” And “God’s Word,” according to Billing’s explanation, means “the Gospel that God is with us,” “the deed that assures us that God is near us.” The whole Bible testifies about this fact “that God is near us,” and it is this that constitutes “the primary revelation.” This is what the spokesman of the church law committee makes clear in response to Linderholm’s motion calling for a reform of the ordination promise and the confessions.

When a pastor in the Church of Sweden promises “according to my best understanding and my conscience to proclaim God’s Word purely and clearly as it is given to us in the Holy Scriptures,” this should therefore not be understood to mean that the pastor is pledged purely and clearly to proclaim the teaching of the Bible in all points since the Bible is God’s Word.

What is meant when he continues, “and as the confessional writings of our church witness thereto?” Bishop Billing made this clear at the 1934 Church conference:

The confessional writings are humble witnesses. They must always be tested anew, even by the pastor in our church, on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, and if he finds that they in some point depart from the Holy Scriptures he has not promised to follow them. *He who gives the ordination promise has only said that he finds a witness in them, and he will according to his best understanding and his conscience listen to this witness to the extent that he finds that they really witness to the Word of God* (that is, the primary revelation that God is with us, my note) “*in the Holy Scriptures*” (no. 7, p. 74, my emphasis).

Billing could not make clearer that the Church of Sweden is no longer a confessionally faithful Lutheran church.

Regarding the Apostle’s Creed Billing declared, “If one is to take this literally, then I must publicly confess (I say this cheerfully before the council), I am not completely orthodox” (p. 75). Regarding the Athanasian Creed he said:

To the same degree in which it does not agree with our basic point of view it is not binding for... When a moment ago I read this creed, I did it with the freedom which I take over against all such formulas, as a piece of poetry. If one looks upon it as a law, it would be impossible for me to pledge to believe that. But this, this also, witnesses about the Gospel (p. 77).

Billing closed his plea with the following words:

I am convinced that Professor Linderholm is really completely in agreement with me. I have spoken about the excellent traditional line which the council has followed in this matter (the relation to the confessions). I consider it to be *the very noblest and highest line*. One could call it a formula for concord, *a way to evangelical unity*... I am convinced that in his heart he is in complete agreement with us, with me, with the committee (p. 77, my emphasis).

Billing, the committee, Linderholm, and the majority in the council united in regard to a free attitude toward the Lutheran doctrine. The only difference was that Linderholm wanted to speak clearly and not say many things with words which the church did not believe. But the Church of Sweden wanted to follow another line, the “evangelical” one. If the Church of Sweden would speak plainly about its real confession and consequently strike out a number of sections in the confessional writings, the church would lose the appearance of being a Lutheran church and as a consequence lose the minority which wants to be confessionally faithful. What Billing calls “the very noblest and highest line” means that the church does not speak out plainly about its real confession. This “excellent traditional line” of the Church of Sweden is “a way to evangelical unity,” because thanks to it conservative and liberal groups are united in the same church. The conservatives have been duped into remaining in church fellowship with the Church of Sweden, into remaining in a so-called “evangelical unity.”

After Billing’s speech Landerholm declared that he was satisfied. His only problem was that not all understood that the Church of Sweden takes “a free position over against the symbols,” since it does not speak out plainly. “If such a free position over against the symbols were everywhere in force, there would be no trouble,” he declared (p. 78). Linderholm felt sorry for those studying for the ministry who found it difficult to assent to the words of the Apostles’ Creed and who did not understand that one did not need to mean what one said in those words. He said, “I must also tell you that it is extremely difficult for many young men—just as it was for me and as I believe that it was also for Nathan (Soederblom) once upon a time—to repeat these words literally” (p. 78).

After Billing’s speech on behalf of the committee and after Linderholm said that he was satisfied with the committee’s free position in relation to the confessions, the council agreed without a vote to approve the

committee's stand. Thus the so-called "evangelical" view of the Book of Concord had once more been confirmed.

Editions of the Confessional Writings of the Church of Sweden

The first edition of the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden was issued in 1594 under the title *Confessio Fidei*. This edition did not include the whole Book of Concord but contained only the following: First a Swedish preface, then *decretum Upsaliense* (the decree of the Uppsala Council, 1593), the three ancient church symbols and the Augsburg Confession (without Melancthon's preface). Finally there followed an appendix and the names of the many subscribers.

A long time went by before the whole Book of Concord came out in a Swedish translation. In August 1688 a Swedish translation of the whole Book of Concord was available but this translation was never published. In a letter to the diet from the chaplains in Stockholm, dated February 16, 1720, a demand was made that the symbolical books should be translated "the sooner the better." But the consistory of Stockholm together with the archbishop were of a different opinion. They thought that the Formula of Concord was not something for laymen. If a translation was made, this ought to be done at the command of the government and with the advice and consent of the estates (parliament), and produced by some theological faculty "but otherwise by no one else."¹⁷

At the diet in 1723 the burghers declared that it was "both advisable and useful" that the Book of Concord be translated into Swedish and printed. The nobles and the farmers agreed. On November 14, 1724, the German pastor in Norrkoeping, Reinarus Broocman, received King Fredrik I's "permission to edit the symbolical books in the Swedish language." The translation was, however, to be thoroughly censored by the theological faculties. The faculty in Uppsala, however, took a very negative attitude toward the whole project and did its best to sabotage the work.

In 1730 the first Swedish edition of the Book of Concord was printed by Broocman with the title *Concordia pia*. Broocman's own preface is dated January 15, 1730. In his edition Broocman left out the preface to the Formula of Concord but otherwise followed the whole arrangement of the Book of Concord. At the end of his edition he placed the preface to the decree of the Uppsala Council, *decretum upsaliense*, together with the subscribers' names. In 1842 a new edition of Broocman's translation was issued, printed in Umeaa.

Peter Fjellstedt (1802–1881) demonstrated great interest in the Book of Concord. In 1852 he reported that he had "begun the publication of our church's symbolical books or the whole *Concordia pia*, faithfully following the old translation (1730) with the addition of a historical introduction." In a letter to His Royal Majesty, dated September 28, 1852, Fjellstedt maintained that the confessional writings were of great importance for the church but "almost unknown" among the common people. He suggested therefore that His Royal Majesty "would order the acquisition of a copy of our church's symbolical books for every congregation or at least a copy for every parish, where no copy is at present available."

In 1853 the Fjellstedt edition of the Book of Concord was issued in Gävle. Its title is *Concordia pia. Evangelisk-Lutherska Kyrkans symboliska boecker jemte Upsala moetes beslut af aar 1593, samt ett kort historiskt foeretal af P. Fjellstedt*. (*Concordia pia*. The symbolical books of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church together with the decree of the Uppsala Council of 1593, and a short historical preface by P. Fjellstedt.) Fjellstedt's edition evidently was in great demand, for already in 1854 a new edition was printed. In his preface Fjellstedt emphasizes that the symbolical books are "the password, the criterion by which the Lutheran church distinguishes itself from other Christian churches or sects."

At the back of his edition Fjellstedt included a subject index which demonstrates how he, in distinction from many of his contemporaries, understood the difference between Pietism and the Lutheran doctrine. Some examples of rubrics in his index are the following:

¹⁷ The minutes of the Stockholm consistory Feb. 17 and 24, 1720, and the acts of the Stockholm consistory of 1720, Stockholm state archives.

The doctrine that there are three causes of man's conversion is incorrect....The Holy Scriptures speak of only two causes that produce man's conversion, the Holy Spirit and the Word....The error that man is able to cooperate in some degree, however slight, to his conversion....The synergistic statement that man is not altogether dead to good....The expressions of the fathers, for example, Chrysostom: "God draws but He draws the willing," or Basil: "Only be willing and God will anticipate you" are not in agreement with a doctrinally sound way of speaking....That it is a false doctrine to say that not God's mercy and Christ's merit alone, but also something in us, is the cause of God's election.

Many of Fjellstedt's closest friends who shared his opinion reacted against his confession of the whole Book of Concord. In the book *State Church or Free Church*, published in 1855, P.G. Ahnfeldt expressed his great disappointment over the fact the Fjellstedt, with "his strong support of a free church position," seemed to be "uncertain about which our church's symbolical books really are" (p. 24f.). Ahnfeldt had been impressed by Peter Wieselgren's arguments against the Book of Concord in a book published in 1827.

The most vehement reaction came from Bishop C.A. Agardh. When the congregations were directed by a royal circular letter to make their own decision about the purchase of the symbolical books, Agardh felt compelled to remind the public that the Church of Sweden's "only symbolical book is the Augsburg Confession" and he referred the reader to the 1809 constitution and the ordination oath of 1829. Agardh writes:

The so-called symbolical books, which are now no longer valid, have thus only a historical significance, and instead of being studied as a norm for the Church of Sweden, they ought much rather to be regarded as heretical and as writings that ought to be rejected by our Swedish people.¹⁸

Agardh directed his attack first of all against the Formula of Concord.

In 1877 the society *Kyrkans Vaenner* (the church's friends), was organized in Norrkoeping. This organization's chief purpose was to stand up for the confessions of the church. A new edition of the *Concordia pia* was planned, but the work was never finished. However, Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen had Fjellstedt's edition of the *Concordia pia* reprinted in 1880.

As a consequence of the decision of the 1893 council in regard to the confession of the Church of Sweden, Bishop Gottfrid Billing in 1895 issued a new edition of the *Concordia pia*. The title read, *Lutherska kyrkans bekaennelseskifter (Concordia pia) aa nyo utgifna samt foersedda med inledning och noter af Gottfrid Billing* (The Lutheran Church's Confessional Writings (*Concordia pia*) issued anew and furnished with an introduction and notes by Gottfrid Billing). In this edition Billing has translated and included the preface to the Book of Concord. A new printing of Billing's edition came out in 1914.

In 1912 Oscar Bensow issued a completely new translation of the Book of Concord. This translation was made on the basis of Mueller's *Die symbolischen Buecher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche, deutsch and lateinisch*. Bensow's edition had the title *Svenska kyrkans bekaennelseskifter*.

In 1944 the edition of the confessional writings prepared by Prof. Dick Helander was published. Also this edition had the title *Svenska kyrkans bekaennelseskifter*. It was reprinted in 1957 but with this change that Prof. Hjalmar Lindroth's 1953 translation of the FC was included and Archbishop Ruben Josefson was responsible for the preface and introduction.

Josefson declared in his "introduction" that the Church of Sweden publicly proclaimed itself to be an Evangelical Lutheran confessional church at the Uppsala Council in 1593 (p. 9). He mentions nothing about the fact that the Church of Sweden at the church conferences of 1893, 1903, 1920, 1925, and 1934 proclaimed a free "evangelical" view of the confessions and therefore the Church of Sweden is no longer an "Evangelical

¹⁸ C.A. Agardh, *Samlade skrifter*, I (1863) s. 116ff.

Lutheran confessional church.” Relative to the differences between the formulations in the 1686 KL and the 1809 RF Josefson writes correctly—

Only a very formal way of looking at the matter can, however, see any contradiction here. The church law (KL) confesses the Christian doctrine, as it is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, summarized in the three symbols of the ancient church and the Augsburg Confession, accepted at the Uppsala Council and explained in the Book of Concord. The constitution (RF) does not mention the doctrine’s basis nor its explanation, only where it is summarized and when and where it was accepted. When the church law adds the Book of Concord to the three chief symbols and the Augsburg Confession this is done expressly with the claim that it is to be understood as an authoritative explanation of the evangelical doctrine, which is expressed in the first-named symbols. This agrees completely with the intention that lay behind the origin and publication of the Book of Concord (p. 13).

It is therefore easy to believe that the Church of Sweden still confesses the doctrine of the Book of Concord if one does not take into consideration the decisions of the above-named church conferences. If one reads the *Svenska kyrkans bekaennelseskrifter* of 1957 and Josefson’s introduction, one gains the impression that the confession of the Church of Sweden and the doctrine of the Book of Concord are one and the same thing.

The Book of Concord and Swedish Lutheranism Today

Only after the freedom of religion law was passed on October 26, 1951, did it become possible for confessors of the Lutheran faith to step out of the Church of Sweden and organize a Lutheran confessional church on Swedish soil. Any true Lutheranism without membership in the Church of Sweden could up to that time not be recognized. Even though the Church of Sweden had long since taken a free attitude toward the content of the confessions, yet it was still regarded as a Lutheran church.

The union between the Swedish state and the Swedish church is still in existence. By virtue of his office in the church, a pastor in the Church of Sweden is an official of the state. But the demand to adhere to the doctrine of the Church of Sweden applies not only to those state officials who are pastors, but also to the king and anyone who “is responsible” for matters which concern “the care of the church or religious instruction, the exercise of the pastoral office, promotion or official responsibility in the church” (RF 1974). The words in RF 1809, paragraph 2, are still valid, that “the king shall always be an adherent of the pure evangelical doctrine,” and in RF 1974 it is decreed that “no one may be named to a pastoral post in the Church of Sweden unless he confesses the doctrine of the church.” Thereby it is asserted that those persons who are named to a pastoral post in the Church of Sweden confess that church’s doctrine. When therefore the government or the cathedral chapter appoints to pastoral positions such persons as deny, e.g., the reliability of the Bible, the deity of Christ, and bodily resurrection (e.g., Bishop Ingmar Stroem), these unbiblical and un-Lutheran doctrines are thereby sanctioned as “the church’s doctrine” or “the pure evangelical doctrine.”

The Swedish Church’s view of the Book of Concord can be illustrated by the following statement. In the “Prayer Day Proclamation,” issued by His Royal Majesty in 1972 it is said:

The message of the Reformation removes all man-made hindrances to Christian unity and fellowship. The ongoing discussions between Lutheran and Reformed church families have resulted in the abandonment of the old narrow confessionalism. The boundaries of separation, which were drawn up in the 16th century, are long since out of date, and new possibilities confront the churches of diverse confessions.

According to the “evangelical” view of the Book of Concord now current in the Church of Sweden a number of the doctrines set forth there are an expression of “narrow confessionalism” and the boundaries of separation which they impose are “long since out of date.” Doctrines which are for a confessional Lutheran church indispensable parts of a biblical confession are for a church that takes a free attitude to the contents of the Book of Concord “narrow confessionalism” and “out-of-date” differences.

In an article in the *Uppsala Nya Tidning* of January 28, 1978, Archbishop Sundby stated that in the Church of Sweden, as an “evangelical” church, “there has always been within the wide boundaries of its confession plenty of room for various points of view.” That statement is in full agreement with the so-called “evangelical” view of the Book of Concord, even if it is an overstatement that the Church of Sweden had always been such a church (see above).

The conservative movements within the Church of Sweden take somewhat different positions over against the confessions. The high church movement has not been willing to recognize the whole Book of Concord as a confession of the Church of Sweden. It has not been willing to recognize so-called “distinctive” Lutheran doctrines which are not found in universal (catholic) tradition. The A.C. is accepted with certain reservations in respect to Article 28, since “the teaching about one office undeniably is in conflict with catholic church tradition and has its background completely in the politics of the time and anti-episcopal tendencies associated with the breakthrough of the Reformation.”¹⁹ The division into the office of bishop, priest, and deacon is viewed as existing by divine right (*de iure divino*). The complaint is made that “the teaching of the apostolic succession is not developed in the confessions,” and it is denied that the office of the keys is given to the whole church.²⁰ It is especially this high church view of church and ministry which lies behind this dissatisfaction with the Smalcald Articles, the Tractate concerning the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the FC. It is emphasized that “the difference between the actual confession and the rest of the writings is not only a matter of emphasis but a difference in character.... The Book of Concord is to be viewed as an explanation of the confession without binding force.”²¹ As support for this conception reference is made to the 1809 RF, a support which we have seen above is not valid.

The “Lutheran” revival movements are more or less influenced by Pietism. They want to stand up for the evangelical-Lutheran doctrine but are quite out of harmony with the doctrinal content of the FC. Pietism’s synergism stands in conflict with Articles I, II, and XI. Its subjectivism leads to unionism. It does not stand up for a correct administration of the means of grace. No arrangements are made for a confessionally faithful fellowship around both Word and sacrament but the groups remain within an apostate church as special interest groups among many others. No demand is made for a confession which teaches everything the Bible teaches, but certain biblical doctrines are treated as open questions. Subjective faith and the inner life are emphasized at the expense of pure doctrine.²²

A faithful adherence to the FC and the whole Book of Concord is nevertheless still found in Sweden. In this connection we might mention first of all *Stiffelsen Biblicum*, (the Biblicum Foundation) which was organized in 1968 as a protest against the Swedish Church’s apostasy from the Bible and the doctrine of the Lutheran confessions. This foundation, which from an organizational point of view is completely independent, has the purpose of working for a Bible-believing research center, where the contents of the Bible are studied in a believing way and published. According to its doctrinal basis Biblicum is to “build its activity on the Bible as God’s inspired and altogether reliable Word and on the confessions of the Church of Sweden.” By the expression “the confessions of the Church of Sweden” is meant “the confessional writings of the Church of Sweden,” that is, the Book of Concord, not the so-called “evangelical” view of the confessions, against which Biblicum is a protest.

¹⁹ I. Hector, *Praestaembetet enligt Svenska Kyrkans bekaennelseskifter* (Kallinge 1951), s. 11.

²⁰ Hector, *op. cit.*, p. 14. Regarding the high church view of church and ministry, see I. Furberg *Praestaembetet och teologin (Biblicum, 4, 1978)*.

²¹ Hector, *op. cit.*, s. 2, 4.

²² Regarding Pietism’s attitude toward the Book of Concord, see S. Erlandsson *Pietismen och den lutherska bekaennelsen* (Landskrona, 1978).

When *Biblicum* began to publish its first research results on the right view of the Bible, the biblical doctrine of justification, true church fellowship, etc., strong opposition arose both from high church and Pietistic groups. Through *Biblicum*'s instruction about true church fellowship it became evident that the Church of Sweden was not a Lutheran confessional church and that it could not be reformed to become such a church again. As a result of *Biblicum*'s studies and instruction, *Lutherska Bekaennelsekyrkan i Sverige* (The Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden) was organized in 1974.²³

As a hope-inspiring conclusion to this presentation of the position of the FC in Swedish Lutheranism the following excerpt from the doctrinal statement of the Lutheran Confessional Church is cited:

The Lutheran Confessional Church teaches that the Holy Scriptures, in distinction from all other books on earth, is God's Word, for the holy men of God who have written it have written only what the Holy Spirit gave them (2 Pt. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore the Bible is completely reliable and inerrant, without any mistakes or contradictions (Jo 10:35; I Cor. 2:13). This is true not only of such things that have a direct relation to our salvation, but of everything which the Scriptures teach. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and instruction of the Scriptures might have hope (Ro 15:4).

But other writings, of older or newer teachers, whoever they may be, are not to be considered equal to the Holy Scriptures, but must all be subordinated to them, and may be looked upon as no more than witnesses which indicate how and where this prophetic and apostolic teaching has been preserved since the time of the apostles.

The Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden confesses itself to all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church gathered in the Book of Concord of 1580, because these in everything agree with God's Word.

The Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden shall therefore see to it that all of God's Word is preached in all its truth and purity in all its congregations, and therefore in these congregations nothing may be taught or tolerated which in any way differs from the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He is faithful who promised." (He 10:23.)²⁴

²³ See S. Erlandsson—S. Johansson, *Biblicum's Battle for Biblical Faith* (1974).

²⁴ Excerpt from *Grunddokument*, adopted Sept. 7, 1974.