

Use of Symbols and Scriptures in the Church and Ministry Debate

By Wayne Mueller

I. The Great Treasure of the Lutheran Confessions

The Lutheran Confessions provide a summary witness to our teachings for those inside and outside Lutheranism.

Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses [which are to show] in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this [pure] doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved. (FC, *Triglotta*, p777)

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the Catechisms and Schmalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord, have been formally declared by an immense majority of the Lutheran Church as their Confession of Faith. (Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology*, 179)

Scripture is a rule or norm of faith; the symbols are witness of the faith of the Church. (Calov, cited by Robert Preus in *The Inspiration of Scripture*, p133)

The Confessions serve to establish peace in the visible church.

The Symbolical books have ecclesiastical authority, and by virtue of this are called a rule, namely, with regard to the public profession of faith, by which we declare the unanimous consent of the Church in doctrine. (Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p101)

The Symbolical Books are necessary, not absolutely but hypothetically, for the condition of the Church, which was induced by weighty reasons to their publication (a) to establish solid, permanent, and firm concord in the Church of God, so that there may be a certain compendious form or type approved by universal consent, in which the common doctrine, which the churches of purer doctrine profess, collected from the Word of God, may be contained. (Hollaz, in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p 102).

Since for thorough, permanent unity in the Church it is, above all things necessary that we have comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form wherein is brought together from God's Word the common doctrine... (FC, *Triglotta*, p777)

The Lutheran Symbols judge all doctrines insofar as they directly or indirectly address them. They distinguish the true members of the church from her enemies. They provide a minimum standard by which the church may bind its public teachers.

They are public confessions, drawn up after much deliberation and consultation, in the name of the Church, by orthodox men, with reference to certain articles of faith, so that the members of the orthodox Church might be removed from the ignorance and heretical wickedness of infidels, and be preserved in the proper profession of the faith. (Hollaz, in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p100)

In regard to obligation to the Symbolical Books, HOLL. remarks (59): "He who is a living member of the Church, and designs to fill the office of public teacher in it, may be bound by the superior magistrates to subscribe under oath, the Symbolical Books: in order that, as he is publicly to teach in the Church; he may be required to adhere to the universally acknowledged profession, exposition and defense of the common doctrine." (Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p102)

The Symbols, or Confessions, of the orthodox Church are simply its affirmation of the Scriptural doctrine over against the denial of it by heretics... Walther writes in his *Pastoraltheologie*, p52: "The minister who is called by a congregation must obligate himself to teach according to God's Word and the Church's Confession; he owes this to the congregation as a guaranty that he will not dispense his own wisdom, but will preach publicly and privately the pure Christian doctrine and not attempt to be master of their faith." (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p354).

Pastors and teachers, following in the footsteps of Christ and his apostles, will preach and teach God's word faithfully, for only thus can they glorify God. That means they will also preach and teach in complete conformity with the confessions, where these have spoken, and that because they have accepted the confession on a *quia* basis [because they agree with God's word], not on a *quatenus* basis [in so far as they agree with God's word], namely, because the confessions themselves agree with the word of God. (Harold Wicks, "What is Doctrine According to the Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," *Our Great Heritage*, p85)

It has been said that... everything in the Confessions which has not been "historically occasioned" must be regarded as not belonging to the substance of the Confessions. It is plain that this conception of the Symbols lets the subjective judgment of the individual decide how much of the Symbols he will accept as "historically occasioned..." Again, there are those who are ready to subscribe to the Confessions with the understanding that they be interpreted "according to Scripture," or "correctly." In this sense, Reformed theologians, including Calvin, have signed the Unaltered Augsburg Confession... By subscribing to the Symbols a man does not declare his readiness to interpret them "according to the Scriptures," but the minister or candidate in question makes the solemn declaration to the congregation that he has already discovered what Scripture teaches and he find the Lutheran Confessions to be the expression of his own faith and confession. (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatic*., Vol. I, p355,356)

The Confessions define a hermeneutic by which Lutherans interpret Scripture to establish all doctrine.

It is true that the orthodox Lutherans read the Scripture: with certain presuppositions and in the light of the Lutheran Confessions. This is also what C.F.W. Walther did in our country. And this is what it means to be Lutheran, that one recognizes the claim of the Confessions that they are the church's normative exposition of Scripture. (Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, p37)

That the confessions find it useful to apply certain rules to the interpretation of the Bible is based upon certain important presuppositions. In principle, the meaning of Scripture is clear, and what it intends to say can be formulated in comprehensible statements. When there is some doubt about the meaning of a given passage, such a passage must be understood in the light of those whose meaning is clear. In interpreting the Bible, one must hold to the clear Word of the apostles, and not simply refer to their example. Other rules governing the interpretation of Scripture could be set forth, but we shall now summarize the most important ones in the following 10 points. 1. Scripture is the highest authority in questions related to faith and doctrine. The Confessions do not state the extent of the canon of Scripture, but they use both the canonical and the apocrypha books of the Old Testament, together with the New Testament canon. 2. The meaning of Scripture is unambiguous, and its message is everywhere the same. There is nothing to hinder the quotation of an Old Testament saying alongside one taken from the New Testament. 3. Unclear Scripture passages must be interpreted by those whose meaning is obvious. 4. Christ is the center of the entire Bible. All of the prophets bear witness to him. 5. Only the words of the apostles, and not their example, can be cited in the interpretation of Scripture. 6. The principle of Law and Gospel provides the proper understanding of what Scripture says about justification, faith, and good works. 7. Of the three sections of the Mosaic law, only the Moral Law or the Decalog is binding on Christians. 8. The Biblical *mandatum* contains positive instructions concerning God's will. 9. Those Biblical injunctions which cannot be identified as mandate lack significance for the Christian. 10. The Christian's vocation in this world has God's special *mandatum*. (Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, p41,42)

II. The Limitations of the Confessions

The Confessions do not establish doctrine.

Doctrines are not established by the confession, nor by Lutes, nor by his associates. The Confession itself says: "It is undeniable that many topics of Christian doctrine whose existence in the church is of the greatest moment have been brought to view by our theologians and explained" (AC, Melancthon's Greeting,

Triglotta 103:17; *Tappert* 99:17) ... “To bring to view” is however, not “to devise.” ...If we then want to know what doctrine is, that is, what we are to teach, we must go to Scripture. (Hard Wicke, “What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions?”, *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p73,74)

But for the most part the Lutheran dogmatics was worked out without any subordination to the Confessions. Although the terminology is often the same, the Confessions are rarely cited in most of the works in systematic theology, not nearly as often as Luther and the church fathers. It is only when the Confessions have been misunderstood or misinterpreted that they are discussed to any extent, e.g., in the sections on man’s freedom of the will and the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. In other words, there is a deliberate attempt, while never departing from the spirit or theology of the Lutheran Symbols, to work independently of them in producing dogmatics. (Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post Reformation Lutheranism*, p39)

Confessions are the underframework of the Church—the spars and the ribs of the ship, resting upon and extending from the center of strength, the Word, to give protection to any point in the circumference, the Church, where there may be weaknesses and consequent possibility of wreck. Confessions are the rails; and, let us understand well, not the roadbed or the solid rock on which the ecclesiastical trains run. The bed is Scripture and the rock is Christ, and they determine the direction; but the rails are of human workmanship, condensing the roadbed to an effective point, and giving guidance, protection, and impetus to the moving train. (Theodore Schmauk, *The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church*, General Council, 1911).

No, our confessions do not have the last word when it comes to determining what we are to teach. That belongs to Scripture. When, therefore, the matter of the inspiration of Scripture becomes a contested doctrine in the church, as it has, God expects us to state what Scripture states. It is not necessary to call a council of all Lutherans to determine what the Lutheran stand will be: Scripture has already settled that. We are not restricted to those doctrines laid down in our confessions. (Wicks, “What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions?”, Harold Wicks, *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p84)

The Confessions do not treat all articles of doctrine.

The Holy Scripture adequately contains all that is to be believed and practiced; no Symbolical Book embraces fully all the doctrines and moral precepts (Hollaz, in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p101)

As to schisms in matters of faith, however, which have occurred in our time, we regard as the unanimous consensus and declaration of our Christian faith and confession, especially against the Papacy and its false worship, idolatry, superstition, and against other sects, as the symbol of our time, the first, Unaltered Augsburg Confession. (FC, *Triglotta*, p777)

But the other symbols and writings cited are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living, and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned. (AC, “Summary,” *Triglotta*, P770)

In every article of doctrine the Confessions say less than the Scriptures say. The confessions do not clarify Scriptures. They do not expand where Scripture is silent.

However, doctrine is not restricted to that which is laid down in the confessions. Whatever Scripture states is that which we may and must teach. Paul writes, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4). (Harold Wicks, “What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions,” *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p86,87)

The Holy Scriptures, by virtue of their divine, canonical authority, constitute an *infallible rule* whereby true doctrines are distinguished from false. The Symbolical books have *ecclesiastical authority*, and by virtue of this are called a rule, namely, with regard to the public profession of faith, by which we declare the unanimous consent of the Church in doctrine. (4) The Holy Scriptures adequately contain all that is to be believed and

practiced: no Symbolical Book embraces fully all the doctrines and moral precepts. (Hollaz, in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p101)

We are not restricted to those doctrines laid down in our confessions. (Harold Wicks, "What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p84)

A *quia* subscription to the Confessions binds us to their doctrine, not to their exegesis of every passage.

When we bind ourselves to the Confessions of our church, we bind ourselves to all the articles of faith contained therein, but not to all historical, archaeological, literary remarks, not even to every exegesis, and just as little to certain exegetical methods employed, nor always to consider every passage as proof in the very way in which this is carried out in the Confession. (Adolph Hoenecke, *Quartalschrift*, Vol. I, p113)

On the other hand, since the Symbols were never intended to be anything else but confessions of faith and doctrine, the confessional pledge does not cover things which do not pertain to doctrine. As little as he who unconditionally signs the Symbols of the Church, his Symbols, thereby declares them to be the norm of German or Latin orthography or of a perfect style, so little does his signature pertain to things which belong to the domain of the human sciences... This applies also to the interpretation given in the Symbols to individual Scripture passages. (C.F.W. Walther, cited by Pieper in *Christian Dogmatics*, p357).

III. Use of the Confessions in Controversy

Scripture, not the Confessions, are the first recourse in controversy.

But the other symbols and writings cited are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living, and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned. (AC, "Summary," *Triglotta*, p770)

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. (FC,TD, "Summary," *Triglotta*, p851)

To show the relation between Holy Scripture and the Symbols of the orthodox church, the following terms have been used: *norma* and *norma normata*, *norma primaria* and *norma secundaria*. Both terms express the truth that the Symbols are a norm, but not by themselves (*absolute*), but only in certain *respect (secundum quid)*, namely, a derived norm, because the doctrine confessed in our Symbols are taken from Scripture. The purpose of the Symbols is brought out in the terms *norma decisionis* and *norma discretionis* (deciding norm and distinguishing norm). Scripture alone decides which doctrine is true, which is false; but from the attitude which one takes toward the Symbols of the Lutheran Church we learn whether he knows and accepts the Scripture doctrine or does not accept it (*norma discretionis discernit orthodoxos ab heterodoxis*). (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p3 58)

Against the Roman doctrine the *sola Scriptura* principle was articulated with ever increasing clarity and precision. And the orthodox Lutherans were fully aware that this principle was the principle of the Lutheran Symbols themselves. To place the Confessions above Scripture was a repudiation of the Confessions. Time and again the Lutherans maintained that Scripture was the source of all tradition and of all confession. Scripture is the *norma normans* of theology, tradition and the Symbols a *norma normata*. In controversy the appeal must be made from the Symbols to the higher authority of Scripture... The Lutheran Syncretists George Calixt, John Laternmann, Christian Dreier, and Conrad Horneius taught that the consensus doctrines of the first five centuries could be considered apostolic and a secondary source of doctrine; they believed that because of the confusion caused by heretics a person could not always be convinced by Scripture alone but required the testimony of the church. Such a view was roundly condemned by the orthodox Lutherans as Romanistic... There are three fundamental distinctions to be made between the Confessions and Scriptures, according to Hutter. First, Scripture is the infallible rule of faith, and all confessions must be based on and judged by Scripture. Second,

Scripture is the judge in all controversy in the church; the Confessions are only a witness to this judge. (Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, p38)

We apply the Confessions as a limited standard to judge those doctrines which they directly or incidentally addresses. The Lutheran Symbols distinguish Lutherans from non-Lutherans. They do not distinguish orthodoxy from heterodoxy among Lutherans in matters not defined in their articles.

We should have a unanimously accepted, definite, common form of doctrine, which all our evangelical churches together and in common confess, from and according to which, because it has been derived from God's Word, all other writing should be judged and adjusted as to how far they are to be approved and accepted. (FC,TD, Summary, *Triglotta*, p855)

Although such a convinced and empathic acceptance of the Confessions will serve to unite all orthodox Lutherans, there is no indication that the Confessions were used as a club. Even in the controversies with Calixt and the Syncretists we find that the Symbols could not be appealed to as often as the orthodox party might have liked, and this because the Confessions did not touch on many of the issues under debate (e.g., the inspiration of Scripture; the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament) except in passing. (Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, p39).

We still need to ask: Are the Confessions adequate for our day? Despite Vatican II our Confessions meet the needs. In fact, many of today's problems have been answered in the Confessions incidentally, if not directly. There is no need for a wholesale revision or drastic overhaul. It may, of course, be necessary to enlarge upon areas where the Confessions have not spoken directly in the form of proposed articles of faith. The former Synodical Conference did that very thing in its *Statement on Scripture*. Disagreement may make this necessary. It would be spiritual folly simply to declare that all doctrines which have not been expounded in the Confessions explicitly remain open questions. Some have suggested that. Carried to its logical conclusion, this can only provide cover for heretical opinions. Further statements have often been necessary, and will continue to be. (Harold Wicks, "An Evaluation of the Lutheran Confessions," *WLQ* Apr 67, p126)

Doctrine includes everything in holy Writ, for holy Writ is God's word—all of it in every particular profitable for doctrine. Our doctrinal statements are summaries of that which Scripture states on the points in questions. These may be fundamental or non-fundamental—both are binding inasmuch as they are God's word. Scripture doctrine never changes; doctrinal statements have changed. They are valid only if they accurately reflect Scripture. Which doctrinal statements are to be included in our public confessions is determined chiefly by two points: the necessity of confessing the saving truths of Scripture, and the necessity of defending God's word against the attacks of reason and unreasonable men, also Satan himself. However, doctrine is not restricted to that which is laid down in the confessions. Whatever Scripture states is that which we may and must teach. (Harold Wicks, "What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confession?", *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. 1, p86,87)

The same *Quia* subscription that does not "historically limit" the Confessions will not historically expand them either. Study of history and church fathers cannot expand the confessional standard beyond its explicit and implicit doctrine.

Often these phrases and statements took on a special coloring on account of the specific error over against which they were to assert God's truth most emphatically. There is the danger that we may simply repeat and retain the phrases and statements and let the truths themselves slip away. There is also the danger that, being no longer conscious of the errors they were designed to refute, we make the statements say something which they were never meant to say and which God's word does not say. There is only one protection from the false authority of such traditionalism, namely this, that we personally search the Scriptures and for ourselves draw out of them all the blessed truths of faith and life. then we will also be enabled to express them anew and in a fitting way over against the particular problems and errors of our day. Then we will likewise be able to understand more fully the expressions and statements of our fathers. (Carl Lawrenz, "The Absolute Authority of the Word of God in Matters of Faith and Life," *Our Great Heritage*, p35)

The introduction to the Formula of Concord had stated that no writings could be regarded as having equal authority with Scripture. But with the advent of the Syncretists there was added reason why the orthodox theologians should oppose any authority being given to tradition. Calixt taught that early and reputable Christian tradition could be considered Apostolic. Hornejus held that tradition could rightly be called the Word of God. Dreier made tradition a secondary source of theology. Such a view, which they branded the 'double source theory,' was intolerable to the orthodox dogmatists. Scripture is the source of all true tradition and of all Church confession. Scripture is the *norma normans* of doctrine, the symbols and tradition a *norma normata*. The position of the Syncretists destroyed both *sola Scriptura* and the perfection and clarity of Scripture. (Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture*, p133).

In controversy among Lutherans, *quia* subscription limits debate to matters not addressed or defined by confessional articles. Still, the Lutheran hermeneutic explicit in the confessions must guide exegetical study of these debated issues.

Although such a convinced and empathic acceptance of the Confessions will serve to unite all orthodox Lutherans, there is no indication that the Confessions were used as a club. Even in the controversies with Calixt and the Syncretists we find that the Symbols could not be appealed to as often as the orthodox party might have liked, and this because the Confessions did not touch on many of the issues under debate (e.g., the inspiration of Scripture; the doctrine of the Trinity in the Old Testament) except in passing. (Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, p39).

And we add this: the Confessions may serve as a model for Scripture proof in that they employ little "exegesis"—as this term is usually understood—but, to speak with Luther, are satisfied to let the nude Scripture, without much explanation, speak for itself. (Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p3 56)

IV. Application of the Confessions to the Present Controversy

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the inspiration of Scriptures controversy.

No, our confessions do not have the last word when it comes to determining what we are to teach. That belongs to Scripture. When, therefore, the matter of the inspiration of Scripture becomes a contested doctrine in the church, as it has, God expects us to state what Scripture states. It is not necessary to call a council of all Lutherans to determine what the Lutheran stand will be: Scripture has already determined that. We are not restricted to those doctrines laid down in our confessions. (Harold Wicks, *Scripture is the Course and Norm for the Christian's Faith and Life*, *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p84)

If we were restricted to the doctrines presented in the Book of Concord, we would, of course, have no doctrine of inspiration, nor could we say that any particular form of this dogma must be unacceptable to us. But then we would really be at a loss to determine what Scripture says or does not say, for we would first have to determine what is Scripture, what is God's word. (Harold Wicks, "What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p83)

Of late, however, voices have been raised against this doctrine as it is set forth in the Brief Statement, so that it has become necessary for our Synod in convention assembled repeatedly to reaffirm the Brief Statement as its official position, to which it expects all its pastors, teachers, and professors to conform. We are told, on the other hand, that this is not a doctrine on which we can demand unanimity in the Lutheran Church, since there is no article in the Lutheran confessions which deals with this matter, and that therefore the verbal inspiration of the Holy Bible is an open question, on which each individual Lutheran is free to believe as he will. (Siegbert Becker, "The Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Jan 64, p6)

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the predestinarian controversy.

(Cf. Robt. Preus, "The Doctrine of Election as Taught by the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmatists," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. III, p93,94)

We are not restricted to those doctrines laid down in our confessions. This is the very procedure followed in the confessions themselves. The Augustana did not restrict itself to those points treated in the Apostles' Creed. The Formula of Concord [1577], in turn, did not restrict itself to those doctrinal statements found in the Augustana [1530], the Apology [1531], or the Smalcald articles [1537]. It went beyond them, because the framers of these documents considered it wise to do so. This is especially true of its Article on God's Eternal Foreknowledge and Election. (Harold Wicks, "What is Doctrine According to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. I, p841

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the moment of presence controversy.

(Cf. Arnold Koelpin, "The Sacramental Presence in the Theology of the Synodical Conference," *Our Great Heritage*, Vol. III, p28ff)

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the church fellowship controversy.

The statement of the Overseas Committee notwithstanding, Scripture defines how much of Scripture must be held for orthodoxy.

The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines, as judged by the confessions, have been used to argue for levels of church fellowship.

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the objective justification controversy.

(Note Vernon Harley's use of the Confessions to limit exegetical conclusions in his "Exegetical Study of Scripture Passages Generally Used to Teach 'Objective' or 'Universal' Justification" 1984, p8) "This is basically why they contend so strongly for 'objective' justification and go a step further than our Lutheran Confessions insisting that Objective Justification is the Chief article of the Christian Faith, while our Confessions give that honor to justification by grace through faith" (*Formula of Concord*, S.D. III, 6, p. 540 in Tappert).

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the male and female role controversy.

(Note how an appeal to the sole authority of the pastoral office, supposedly granted in the Confessions, has been used to justify women voters, women elders, and women synodical delegates.)

Appeal to the Lutheran symbols did not resolve the current hermeneutical question.

Note Marquardt's response in 1993 Free Conference exchange: "The Catholics go to the pope; the evangelicals go to the Bible; Lutherans go to the Confessions."

Since the Confessions do not resolve issues they do not address, they can not resolve many of the current differences on Church and Ministry:

The priesthood-Predigtamt/Article V-XIV/abstract-concrete conundrum.

The myriad attempts at explanation and reconciliation of these concepts (E.g.: Teigen's listing in *Logia* I,1,pp13,14) prove only that the Confessions reflect Scripture's own sufficient silence on the matter.

See the attempt to define Augsburg V through fathers instead of through exegesis (Marquardt p124ff, *The Church*).

Cf. Ken Schurb, "Melancthon on Church and Ministry," *Concordia Journal*, October 89, p459: [Melancthon's teachings] "constitute the glory of his stance on church and ministry, for it takes into account the various Biblical data without artificially streamlining the jagged areas where the responsibilities of the universal priesthood and the office of the ministry overlap."

Cf. Klug, "Augsburg V: Intent and Meaning of the Confessors on 'Ministry,'" *Concordia Journal*, January 1991.

Apostolic succession;

Cf. Tom Hardt's derivation of the institution of public ministry through the apostolic office (*Confessional Lutheran Research Society Newsletter*, Epiphany 1988) to Fagerberg's synopsis of Confessional hermeneutical principles: "3. Unclear Scripture passages must be interpreted by those whose meaning is obvious... 5. Only the words of the apostles, and not their example, can be cited in the interpretation of Scripture. Those biblical injunctions that cannot be identified as mandate lack significance for the Christian... 10. The Christian's vocation in this world has God's special *mandatum*. (Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, p41,42)

The necessity and conference of Ordination;

(Cf. David Scaer, *Ordination: Human Rite or Divine Ordinance*, Concordia Theological Press, Fort Wayne, 1983, p13-17.)

The local pastorate only form of ministry.

See Marquart's exclusion of elementary Lutheran school teachers from ministry by extrapolation of the Confessions and Reformation era history, *The Church*, p142.

"But it is certainly a questionable undertaking to try to establish a divine command, and hence a positive moral precept, by means of circumstantial evidence." (John Schaller, 'The Origin and Development of New Testament Ministry,' *WLQ*, Spring 1982)

Cf. Oswald Riess, "What does the Bible Say?" He makes the statement without saying where the Bible says it.

See Harold Wicks, "Is the Pastorate in the Congregation the Only God-Ordained Office in the Church?" *WLQ*, April 1971.

The local congregation only visible form of the church.

See Cad Lawrenz, "An Evaluation of Walther's Theses on the Church and Ministry," *WLQ*, Spring 1982.

Yet the Confessions must play a distinctive role for Lutherans who seek to resolve church and ministry questions among themselves:

The Confessions provide a starting point for the debate.

The Confessions clearly witness the areas of agreement on the basis of Scripture. 1) God instituted the office of ministry, proclaiming the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. 2) God gave this office of the keys to his Church, to all believers. 3) God specifically ordained the public ministry to administer the keys publicly. 4) No one may serve in the public ministry without a call.

In the current controversy, the Confessions do not define 1) what forms of representative service to the Church may be labeled the public ministry of the Word; 2) the extent to which the office of ministry is conferred to public ministers directly by God and/or indirectly through the priesthood of all believers; 3) the exact nature of calling bodies and the calling process.

The Lutheran Confessions provide a model for resolving controversy. They begin with Scripture, apply Scripture to the controversy at hand, and witness their agreement with formal confessions.

The early confessors faced a myriad of hermeneutical oddities: Roman, Reformed, Anabaptist, Socinian. Their approach was not to abandon Scripture, but to continue to proclaim it with their Lutheran hermeneutic. So we must not address our frustration over the lack of hermeneutical integrity (Church Growth, Roman, Reformed, Historical Critical) by abandoning Scriptures, but by reestablishing a biblical hermeneutic drawn from the Confessions.

Our Confessions provide the basic principles of biblical hermeneutics for Lutherans. We will not reach agreement on contemporary church and ministry questions until we reaffirm our Symbolic hermeneutic principles.

Two Lutheran hermeneutic presuppositions have a special bearing on current church and ministry issues: 1) The Bible is clear (perspicuous). Unus simplex sensus: What the Bible says is what the Bible means. Clear passages explain the less clear. Doctrine is to be drawn from clear passages and with direct conclusions. Precedent and example are not precept. 2) The Bible is sufficient: Where the Bible is silent, the Christian is free.

What is not clear many times in the present debate is the extent to which Scripture may be extrapolated. What are legitimate conclusions, illegitimate ones? When may precedent be interpreted as divine institution?

The devil must love this. The more time we spend arguing the office, form, function, and titles of gospel ministry, the less we will have to proclaim the gospel. This in no way argues for abandoning the fight for truth. It urges, instead, the setting of ground rules, so we can get on with it for the glory of God.