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The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary

Lief Grane

translated by John H. Rasmussen

Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987

255 pp. with bibliography and index, \$20.95

Leif Grane, professor of church history at the University of Copenhagen, has established a reputation among historians of Reformation theology as a solid and careful interpreter of Luther. This English translation of the 1981 edition of his *Confessio Augustana* (first edition, 1959) shows that this reputation is well deserved and that Professor Grane's care and erudition extend also to the Lutheran Confessional writings.

In writing *The Augsburg Confession*, Grane's aim was to produce a book which would serve as a useful companion to the *Augustana* for theological students and lay people interested in the Lutheran doctrinal tradition. For each article there is the text of the Confession (For this English translation the Tappert edition is used.), notes on the text, and a commentary on the historical and theological setting and the doctrinal content of the article. The goal in each case is to be introductory rather than comprehensive.

Grane's point of view is that the Augsburg Confession is an occasional writing with a very specific context. When produced it was not necessarily intended to be a doctrinal authority. The *Augustana* should be interpreted and understood within its context, not as a document outside of history. Thus Grane is careful to relate each article to the specific Reformation issue addressed, to Luther's statements on the subject, to Melanchthon's other writings, to the Confutation of the Roman party, and to the Apology. Often he will also discuss some issues in the later development of theology.

The result is an excellent historical and theological study of the Augsburg Confession. Grane's commentary deals with the material completely enough to answer most questions but not so comprehensively as to become pedantic. The translator has rendered the work into English so well that it seems not to be a translation.

There is one minor irritant: Since the Danish edition was written as a companion to *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Heinrich Bornkamm, ed., numerous notes in Grane's work make reference to the editorial notes of this critical edition of the *Book of Concord*. While there are many readers who will have access to this work and can read the notes in German, most will not and cannot. If the references are important enough to include in the translation, why not make the text of the notes available in translation?

Perhaps the most significant statement which Grane makes to contemporary Lutheranism is found in his commentary on the conclusion to the doctrinal articles:

On the other hand, it is clear that the concern of the Reformation is valid only if it occurs in the conviction that this is the church's

concern, the same church which had now existed for 15 centuries. If the main concern of the Reformation were not the protest of the church, and thus also of the gospel, against the errors of the papacy and its abuses of power, then it would be nothing but an unfortunate mistake. The merits of this position will not be discussed here, but it must be noted that, no matter how many modifications are deemed necessary, the basic viewpoint of the AC is the only tenable one for any adherence to the reformers' confession. If one accepts these conditions, one must draw the necessary consequences. The cause of the Reformation must not be allowed to be reduced to confessionalism (210).

Do the Lutheran confessions remain for us the protest of the Gospel against ecclesiastical abuses or have we reduced ourselves to mere confessionalism?

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The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation
Alister McGrath
Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987
203 pp., \$68.95

In this expensive volume Alister McGrath has undertaken to unravel the historiographical web which entangles the intellectual origins of the Reformation. McGrath's particular emphasis is the impact of the scholastic and humanist movements on the nascent ideas of the Reformers. A daunting enormity of an emphasis, to be sure, but McGrath's chosen task is the big picture, *la longue durée* of intellectual mutation. The epic proportions aside, the book is a survey of pertinent issues and a reflective summation of the debate.

McGrath's analysis is organized around four broad themes: the medieval precedents of the Reformation; the relationship between the Renaissance and the Reformation; the influence of late medieval theology upon the Reformation; and the apparent anomaly of Reformation scholasticism. Given these foci, McGrath's reading of the issues is one which seeks to establish similarities and homologies between the Reformation and the intellectual climate of the late middle ages. McGrath insists that there is a continuity of humanist and Reformation textual interests, shared in the quest *ad fontes*. The discontinuity emerges in hermeneutical principles employed, that is to say, the Reformation concern to encounter and apply in Scripture the living Word of God. Within the Reformation McGrath traces different pedigree lines to the Lutheran and Reformed traditions.