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# Counseling and Confession: The Role of Confession and Absolution in Pastoral Counseling

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## BOOKS IN REVIEW

### *COUNSELING AND CONFESSION*

*The Role of Confession and  
Absolution in Pastoral Counseling*

WALTER KOEHLER

Printed by Concordia Publishing  
House, St. Louis, 1982, 91 pp.

The appearance of Koehler's book, *Counseling and Confession*, gives cause for both celebration and caution.

Celebration — in that the author's thesis reflects a rather recent and welcome trend in the discipline to re-establish and ground pastoral care in some of the classic teachings and practices of the church; (but)

Caution — in that Koehler may be too ready to dismiss much good from the profound influence that secular therapeutic schools have had on the church's modern ministry of pastoral care.

If one is looking for a conservative, partisan, 'confessionally Lutheran' treatment of pastoral care (as it seeks to relate to sin, guilt and forgiveness) this book provides helpful resource. If, however, one is inclined to believe that there is nothing distinctively Lutheran about pastoral care, the treatise may sometimes disappoint.

This reviewer believes in Lutheran distinctives and affirms our confessional tradition. There are times when distinctives and tradition can provide strength and identification. There are times when such distinctives and tradition can becloud the issues and limit our ministry. Thus, this reviewer is reticent to totally endorse the kind of 'confessionally-based' counseling the book advocates. He is too appreciative of at least some of the 'humanistic psychotherapeutic influence' the author deprecates throughout the text.

Koehler provides an historic outline of the modern pastoral counseling movement. He rightly states that many faddish, contemporary psychotherapies have been snapped up and assimilated uncritically by often harried and too naive pastors of the church. Too frequently has the theological and liturgical heritage of the church been ignored and undercut.

The author suggests a rediscovery of the church's 'cure of souls' tradition and a new grounding in a distinctively Christian approach to pastoral care.

To that end, we are provided with a valuable review of the traditional Lutheran understandings of confession and absolution. The presentation is concluded with

creative suggestions to aid the pastoral counselor in a ministry of personal confession and absolution with the counselee.

There is something attractive about a new emphasis on private confession and absolution. It is a powerful resource in the ministry pastors have with those gripped by sin and guilt. Koehler rhetorically poses the question well: "Does the church have an uneasy grasp of its true treasure?" The honest answer, of course, is yes—at least at present.

There is a difference between mere counseling and *pastoral* counseling. Koehler moves us ahead, at least one step, in the ministry of 'leading the counselee to a new and sustained life in Jesus Christ'.

Wayne A. Holst

## THE SENDING OF GOD

ROLAND E. MILLER

Printed by Concord Canada,  
Calgary, 1980, 147 pp.

*The Sending of God* comprises four of the author's papers on a variety of mission themes. Miller deals with the biblical basis of mission; the Gospel and the church's mission task; a theology of mission to native Canadians and projections on the future of missions.

There is an obvious dearth of creative writing on Canadian mission issues. Equally lamentable is the fact that few Canadian Lutherans have the background to write in this genre. One can therefore rejoice in the appearance of this volume. While it is printed in this country it focuses on both global and national themes.

William Hordern makes a significant point in the Foreword. He implies that a greater focus on our missionary task might serve to draw attention away from many of our insularities and parochialisms. This could lead us to a greater degree of Lutheran consensus than presently exists. That is a hopeful statement!

A biblically-based and Gospel-centred theology of mission is essential to any responsible encounter with this primary task of the church. In general, Miller writes with clarity and care. His "missions tomorrow" material is marked by some rather important commentary on the difference between mission and missions as the central focus of the church. For too long, he says, the church's emphasis on mission (an umbrella phrase to cover all that it does) has blunted the impact and much potential support for a rich plethora of mission activity.

The author believes that the creative linkage between evangelization and social justice in missionary activity is now very necessary and beginning to happen.

For me, the most significant essay of the foursome is the one dealing with mission to our native Canadian brothers and sisters. "A relevant theology of mission must be rooted in the soil of a particular people" says the author. (p. 70) We must affirm the