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A Brief Statement

Guidelines and Helps for Study—

I. EXEGETICAL ASPECTS

DOCUMENTS such as *A Brief Statement* are functional; they are intended to perform a service and have validity and worth because, and insofar as, they do perform a service. As Lutherans, who receive and embrace the Holy Scriptures as the pure fountains from which the people of God must drink to live, we live in the conviction that the one functioning power in the life of the church is the Word of God. The exegetical basis and the exegetical substance of a functional document are therefore of critical import; they must be the objects of perpetual and prayerful scrutiny, continually under review. Such a review must, in the nature of things, go beyond the question of the “correctness” or “incorrectness” of the exegesis of cited passages, important and necessary as that question is. Such a review must go on to ask whether the voice of God in the Scriptures has been heard and transmitted adequately, that is, it must ask: Is the exegetical base broad enough? Is the witness of Scripture full enough, to be really functional, to do the work of God for the people of God in these last days? Such a review must go one step further. It must ask: Is our document letting Scripture speak on its own terms? Is it Scripturally structured, and does it present the functioning truth of Scripture in Scriptural perspective? In submitting *A Brief Statement* to such a threefold scrutiny and review we are doing what our Lutheran Confessions and our Lutheran conscience compel us to do. The following paragraphs are

intended, of course, to be illustrative of the kind of work The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should be doing on *A Brief Statement*; they do not constitute in themselves the necessary exegetical scrutiny and review.

A

Is the Exegesis of *A Brief Statement* Correct?

Our answer to that question is yes; but it cannot be an unqualified yes. And it is not a lack of piety toward our fathers in Christ that makes us qualify that yes; the gratitude of dutiful sons who have learned of their fathers to bow to the authority of the Scriptures compels us to examine anew the Scriptural basis of *A Brief Statement*¹ and thus to qualify our answer. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the nature and the extent of our reservations in assenting to the exegesis of our fathers.

1. In par. 211 Rom. 3:2 is cited in support of the statement that “the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures . . . is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures.” Now the words “unto them were committed the oracles of God” are eloquent witness to the divine origin of the revelation entrusted to Israel; but do they actually make a “direct statement” on the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures?

2. In paragraph 214, 1 Cor. 12:3 is

¹ In this article the references to the paragraphs of *A Brief Statement* follow the numbers given to them in *Doctrinal Declarations: A Collection of Official Statements on the Doctrinal Position of Various Lutheran Bodies in America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), pp. 43—57.

cited in support of the statement, "The Triune God is the God who is *gracious* to man." That thought is implicit in the verse certainly, but it is not the main thrust of the passage. Why not use a passage which is both outspokenly Trinitarian and redolent with grace — 2 Cor. 13:14?

3. In paragraph 236, the statement that "the Christian Church on earth is *invisible*" is supported by a reference to Luke 17:20. This exegesis suffers from a double weakness. It equates "kingdom of God" with "Christian Church," something that the New Testament does not do; and it assumes that the key words ἐντὸς ὑμῶν mean "within you," something that is by no means certain. Many good, learned, and pious scholars are convinced that the words mean "in your midst."²

This sampling is designed to indicate the kind of work that must be done. Other passages that need to be reexamined are, e. g., Hos. 13:9 (par. 225), Heb. 12:28 (par. 256), 1 Cor. 15:19 (par. 257). We must make certain that our *certae Scripturae* are certain and that our *clarae Scripturae* are clear; clear, that is, for the purpose for which they are being used.

B

Is the Exegetical Basis of *A Brief Statement* Adequate?

A functional document like *A Brief Statement* is a picture of the confessional countenance which a church body turns toward the church and the world. The lineaments of that face must not only be clearly drawn — a caricature is clear, to the point of cruelty — it must be drawn in

such fullness and detail that it adequately conveys the character of the confessor. That is why we must ask the question which is the heading of this section. Do men see in the face with which we confront them a genuinely *sola Scriptura* face?

1. *A Brief Statement* opens with the article *Of the Holy Scriptures*. In the face of today's situation (the revival of Biblical theology and the current debate on the authority of the Scriptures) this section ought certainly to have a broad and massive exegetical base. The seven passages cited in pars. 211 and 212 can hardly be said to constitute such a base. An adequate base should, for instance, include passages which illustrate more fully the attitude of our Lord and His apostles toward the Scriptures (e. g., Matt. 4:1-11; 15:6; 22:43-46; Rom. 1:2; 4:2, 3) and passages which speak explicitly of the efficacy and authority of the *written* New Testament Word (e. g., John 20:30, 31; 1 John 1:3, 4; Rev. 1:11; 2:1, 7).

2. The article *Of Justification* is warmly and eloquently stated, with trenchant antitheses. But five Scripture passages (a total of nine verses) constitute a rather narrow exegetical base for this central statement. Not that a mere heaping up of passages inevitably gives greater theological or confessional weight; our Confessions are rather sparse in express citations of Scripture. But in the face of the fact that the statement is still heard that "justification" is merely one of a number of Pauline images for God's redeeming act in Christ (and not necessarily the most important one), a fuller marshaling of the evidence would be desirable. And Phil. 3:9 is a welcome, indeed an indispensable, commentary

² Cf. the article "Luke 17:20-21 in Recent Investigations," CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXII (Dec. 1951), pp. 895—908.

on what Paul means by "of God" when he speaks of "the righteousness of God."

3. The article *Of Good Works* is likewise in need of exegetical enrichment. A Lutheran witness today needs to be very explicit on this head, and very explicitly exegetical. Should we not cite and treat such monumental passages as Rom. 8:3,4; 12:1,2 (not only 12:1); Gal. 5:6; and Eph. 2:8-10? If we deal adequately with these and similar passages, we may even make bold to cite James 2:14-26.

C

Is the Exegetical Substance of *A Brief Statement* Presented in Scriptural Perspective?

With this question we enter debatable ground; we raise the question of the relationship between exegesis and systematics. But the question is worth raising in any case, and a thoroughgoing conversation between the systematians and the exegetes might prove to be a very salutary by-product of a reconsideration of *A Brief Statement*. Two questions in this area may serve to illustrate the problem.

1. Should *Of the Holy Scriptures* be separated from *Of the Means of Grace*? In a scholarly work on systematic theology the Holy Scriptures may for good and valid reasons be treated in the Prolegomena; the theologian is stating his presuppositions. But is not the case different when a church is speaking its deepest convictions for all men to hear? Shall we not give more eloquent witness to the Scripturalness of our confession by speaking of Scriptures as the Scriptures speak of themselves? Must we not speak of the Scriptures first and foremost in terms of their power (2 Tim. 3:15), their "usefulness" (2 Tim. 3:16),

their inspired capacity to create faith (John 20:30,31), to bring men into communion with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3,4), to keep the church under the judicature and the blessing of her Lord (Rev. 2:1,7)?

2. Should *Of Justification* be separated from *Of Redemption* and the immediately antecedent article *Of Man and Sin*? The article *Of Justification* itself aligns justification very closely with "forgiveness of sins," "salvation," and "reconciliation," and that is as it should be. Paul speaks thus, and our Confessions are similarly free. Are we not jeopardizing the very thing we want to safeguard, the centrality of justification, if we give justification a markedly separate place in our utterance, without warrant from the Scriptures?

II. "A BRIEF STATEMENT" AND THE LUTHERAN SYMBOLS

The intention of the authors of *A Brief Statement*³ to conform its contents to the Symbols of the Lutheran Church hardly needs demonstration. The instructions of the River Forest Synod of 1929 directed them to formulate theses which would "present the doctrine of Scripture *and the Lutheran Confessions* in the shortest and simplest manner" [emphasis added]. Further, each author was committed without qualification, personally and professionally, to the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Symbols. Finally, *A Brief Statement* devotes its 19th and final article (par. 260 to 264) to "the Symbols of the Lutheran

³ The Symbols are abbreviated A[ugsburg] C[onfession]; Ap[ology]; S[malcald] A[rticles]; Tractatus [on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope]; S[mall] C[atechism]; L[arge] C[atechism]; F[ormula of] C[oncord], Ep[itome] and S[olid] D[eclaration].

Church." In the first paragraph of this article the authors of *A Brief Statement* accept as their own all the Symbols of the Book of Concord of the year 1580.⁴

Altogether there are nine references to the Symbols and 10 quotations from them in *A Brief Statement*.⁵ Every one of the

⁴ This specification of the German edition presumably intends to do no more than to establish the Symbolical canon, since the Symbols themselves appeal to the Latin originals of such documents as the Apology. In keeping with its own purpose *A Brief Statement*, in the par. 260, assigns to the Symbols an exclusively polemical role ("a confession of the doctrines over against those who deny these doctrines") without pointing out the positive functions of the *Book of Concord*, as a criterion of teaching and of administering the sacraments, as a mark of mutual identification among Lutherans, as a constitutive factor of the Lutheran Church as a denomination, as a formulation that is to inform the church's theology, as a witness to the way in which the authors of the Symbols as well as their spiritual posterity understood and interpreted the Sacred Scriptures, and as a classic expression of the grateful confessional response of each generation of Lutherans to the divine revelation. At the same time the authors of *A Brief Statement* deserve commendation for their insistence (pars. 262—264) on a "because" (*quia*) subscription to the Symbols' total doctrinal content but thereto only. Likewise, in setting forth the relationship of the Symbols to the Sacred Scriptures they have not used the designations *norma normans* and *norma normata*, which are not used in the Symbols and may be misleading unless properly defined.

⁵ References: Par. 212, Ap XXVII 60; par. 244, Tractatus 70; par. 247, FC SD XI 5, 8, 23; par. 253, AC XXVIII 51-60 (includes a 10-word quotation); par. 254, AC XXVIII 51-53, 60, LC Decalog 83, 85, 89, AC XXVIII 53-56; par. 255, AC XVII; par. 258, Tractatus 39-41, 45. Quotations: par. 215, SC Creed; par. 218, SC Creed (source not given); par. 222, FC SD II 88 (source not given); par. 225, FC SD XI 57-59, 60, 62, 63; par. 235, Ap VII 16; par. 248, FC SD XI 8; par. 252, FC SD XI 26, 9, 12 (three separate quotations); par. 258, SA-II IV 10. We find reminiscences of FC SD Von dem summarischen Begriff 9 in par. 212 and

Lutheran particular Symbols is cited or quoted. Of the first 18 articles of *A Brief Statement* 10 are buttressed with Symbolical documentation. The eight which are not are the articles of God (2), man and sin (4), faith in Christ (6), justification (8), good works (9), the means of grace (10), church and state (13) and open questions (18).

The questions that we shall address to *A Brief Statement* are four in number: (1) Are the passages of the Symbols that it cites apposite and correctly understood? (2) Does it contradict the Symbols? (3) Does it go beyond the Symbols? (4) Does it omit any significant emphasis of the Symbols in its treatment of a given issue?

A

To the first question we must answer that in almost all instances *A Brief Statement's* citations of the Symbols are apposite. The following possible exceptions may be noted.

Par. 212 asserts: "With the Confessions of our Church we teach also that the 'rule of faith' (*analogia fidei*), according to which the Holy Scriptures are to be understood, are the clear passages of the *Scriptures themselves* which set forth the individual doctrines." Thereupon it appeals to Ap XXVII 60. The terms "rule of faith" and *analogia fidei*, however, do not occur at this place in the Apology or anywhere else in the Symbols.

Again Tractatus 70 is cited in par. 244 to demonstrate that "ordination is not a divine but a commendable ecclesiastical ordinance." Is this passage in its context

of Ap I 2 in par. 214. — The quotation attributed to Martin Luther in par. 252 actually reproduces the counsel of Johann von Staupitz (WA 43, 461, 12-13).

sufficient to prove this assertion, and does it explicitly say that the ordination itself was merely a human ordinance? In this particular section the Smalcald Articles merely call attention to the fact that at some time in the past ordination differed in two points from the 16th-century Western practice. First, instead of having the pope choose and/or confirm a bishop or pastor, the people elected him, and a bishop of the same or a neighboring diocese ordained him. The latter's action served to ratify the choice of the people. Second, ordination was a simple procedure in the primitive church and consisted only in a laying on of hands by the ordaining bishop; the proliferation of ceremonies that had made ordination a two-hour rite in the 16th century did not begin until the era of Pseudo-Dionysius (now dated A. D. 500). Furthermore, ought not Tractatus 70 be read in conjunction with Tractatus 65 and 72, which declare that the choosing of pastors and other ministers and their ordination by available clergymen are the prerogative of the church by divine right (*iure divino*)?

B

In view of the commitment of the authors of *A Brief Statement* to the Symbols contradictions between the two documents are not to be expected. There are at most occasional differences in emphasis or in terminology, as the following selected instances will show.

When par. 218 declares that "the eternal Son of God was made man by assuming . . . a human nature like unto ours, yet without sin," it departs from the Symbols at a point where they follow the ancient church. In the thought and language of the era which devised the basic Christological

formulations, our Lord assumed not "a human nature" like, yet by that token separate from, our human nature, but "human nature" (*natura humana, humanitas*), that is, the very nature that is present in us and that makes us human beings (Athanasian Creed 33; AC III 1 Latin; Ap III; FC SD VIII 6, 7).

In rejecting the error that good works precede faith and that the Law can produce them, par. 230 declares "that the only means by which we Christians can become rich in good works . . . is unceasingly to remember the grace of God." Does not this statement restrict the source of good works too exclusively to the subjective remembrance of God? The operation of the Holy Spirit certainly deserves mention in this connection as it is mentioned in FC Ep IV 15.

When par. 242 in Article 12 defines the public ministry as "the office by which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered *by order and in the name* of a Christian congregation," should not *A Brief Statement* with the Symbols also stress the point that the clergy function not only in the name of men but primarily in the name of Christ (Ap VII 47)? This accent is present at best by implication in *A Brief Statement* when par. 243 states: "It is the duty of Christians to yield unconditional obedience to the office of the ministry whenever and as long as the minister proclaims to them the Word of God." The distinction which Ap XXVIII 13 makes between the *potestas ordinis* and the *potestas iurisdictionis* may be useful in this connection.

C

We now need to ask: Does *A Brief Statement* contain emphases which are not

found in the Lutheran Symbols? In answering this question we must again recognize that in addressing itself to the particular theological issues of late 19th-century and early 20th-century German and American Christianity, *A Brief Statement* could not appeal to the Symbols for specific mention of these problems in support of positions which it sets forth.

Thus, while the Symbols teach that the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures are in all their parts God's Word, the technical term "verbal inspiration" (par. 211) is not in the vocabulary of the Symbols.⁶ Again, while the argument from silence is notably precarious, still the reticence of the Symbols regarding the statements of Scripture on "historical, geographical, and secular matters" (in an age when scientific questions were already warmly debated) may give us cause to ask whether all the accents of paragraphs 211, 215, and 216 — such as the view that human beings in the state of integrity "had a truly scientific knowledge of nature" — really belong to the essential substance of the church's confession.

In the polemic of par. 233 against the doctrine that "the grace and the Spirit of God are communicated not through the external means ordained by Him but by an *immediate* [ital. original] operation of grace," the phrase "infused grace" (quotation marks original) can be understood only if its "fictitious" and proper use are defined as is done in Franz Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1917—24), I, 27; II, 8 ff.

⁶ The Symbols make very restricted use of the prooftexts which our dogmatic tradition conventionally cites for the inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. John 10:35 is not explicitly quoted at all.

Par. 258 states: "As to the Antichrist *we teach* [ital. added] that the prophecies concerning the Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 John 2:18, have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his dominion." In citing Tractatus 39—41 and SA-II IV 10 in support of this teaching, the Symbols, it may be noted, do not appeal to 1 John 2:18 in this connection. Furthermore, the application of Scripture passages to the papacy as the basis of what "we teach" seems to have become the Sacred Scriptures' own explicit identification of the papacy as the Antichrist, since par. 259 insists that "the doctrine . . . of Antichrist" (presumably as defined in the preceding paragraph) is "clearly defined in Scripture."

D

With reference to our last question: Does *A Brief Statement* omit significant emphases of the Symbols in its treatment of the respective issue? we must observe that an 8,000-word document, like *A Brief Statement*, cannot, even with its restricted scope, be expected to be as comprehensive in its treatment of a subject as a quarter-of-a-million-word document, like the *Book of Concord*, can afford to be. Nevertheless some regrettably omitted emphases, of which the items now to be cited are examples, can be catalogued.

Formally par. 220 of *A Brief Statement* appears to use the term *conversion* in a narrower way than the Symbols do. In the latter, conversion may include "a change, new motions and movements in the intellect, will, and heart" as well as "good, spiritual thoughts, having Christian purpose and diligence, [and] fighting against the flesh" (FC SD II 70). In *A Brief Statement* conversion is defined as, and re-

stricted to, "being brought to faith in the Gospel" (par. 220), whereas good works are treated separately in Article 9 (par. 230).

One might wish that the authors of *A Brief Statement* would have let the Symbols' description of the effective scope of Baptism and the Holy Communion come through more fully than is the case in par. 231 ("Baptism . . . is applied for the remission of sins and is therefore a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost"; "the object of the Lord's Supper . . . is *none other than* the communication and sealing of the forgiveness of sins" [emphasis added]). In the Symbols the thesis of the Small Catechism that "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation" is extensively spelled out. Baptism receives us into the Christian church; it bestows life; it imparts the entire Christ and the Holy Ghost with all His gifts; it gives us victory over death; it delivers us from the jaws of the devil; it endows us with a liberated will; it illumines us; it kindles and effects in us a beginning of the true knowledge of God; and it delivers to us a medicine which utterly destroys death, preserves all men alive, saves them, and gives them eternal life both in soul and in body (LC Baptism 2, 27, 41, 43—46, 83; SC Baptism 5; FC SD II 15, 16, 67). The Sacrament of the Altar, according to the Symbols, comforts our straitened consciences; it teaches us to believe God and ask of Him all that is good; it strengthens our faith; it imparts the vitalizing benefits of Christ; it assures us of incorporation into Him; it functions as a remedy against sin, flesh, devil, world, death, danger, and hell; it bestows life, Paradise, heaven, Christ, God, and every-

thing good; it safeguards us against death and misfortune; it nourishes and strengthens the new man; it consoles overburdened hearts; it acts as an antidote against the poison of weakness; it provides an altogether wholesome, comforting medicine which helps us and gives us life both in soul and in body; and it furnishes an occasion for the holy community to offer its sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. (AC XXIV 7; Ap IV 210; XXII 10; XXIV 33, 72; SC Preface 23; LC Sacrament of the Altar 22—24, 27, 66, 68, 70; FC SD VII 16)

In Article 11, "On the Church" (par. 234 to 241), the doctrine of the church lacks the scope and the balance of the ecclesiology of the Lutheran Symbols.

At the outset of the discussion of this article it might well be observed that the use of "in the proper sense" in pars. 235 and 236 and of "in an improper sense" in par. 238 can easily give the impression that it is correct ("proper") to use the term "church" to designate the spiritual entity and that it is somehow incorrect ("improper") to use "church" to designate the empirical community, specifically the empirical local community. It must be remembered that the two phrases "in the proper sense" and "in an improper sense" are justifiable only if they are understood in the philosophically technical sense respectively of "speaking narrowly" and of "speaking broadly." The Symbols do not use the term *improprie*; instead they take over from medieval canon law the term *large*, "broadly" (Ap VII 10).⁷ In con-

⁷ Also on the basis of medieval canon law the same passage, describing those whom the church embraces, distinguishes bad people who are in the church *nomine tantum non re* and good people who are in the church *re et nomine*.

trasting the church *proprie dicta* and the church *large dicta*, the emphasis in the Symbols is on the antithesis between the universal spiritual community and the universal empirical community.

When par.235 describes the members of the church simply as Christians or as believers, does it tend to encourage a static conception of the church, which thinks of membership in terms of being on a roster? In the Symbols the dynamic character of the church is stressed. She is active as well as the passive subject of God's grace. She is proclaiming the Gospel; she is administering sacraments through her clergy; she is teaching and applying the Word of God; she is obeying her Lord; she is confessing, reaching out, praying, choosing and ordaining pastors, and exercising discipline. This aspect is at best merely implied in *A Brief Statement*.

The declaration of paragraph 235 that "no person in whom the Holy Ghost has wrought faith in the Gospel . . . can be divested of his membership in the Christian Church" is correct as a denial of the effectiveness of unjust excommunications, but one looks in vain for the no less important stress on the other aspects of the issue, that faith functions in the worshiping community and that they who fail to participate in this worship life divest themselves of membership (LC Sacrament of the Altar 42; cf. 49—54).

Again, the exclusive stress on the church in the strict sense of the term, that is, on the spiritual aspect of the church, may unintentionally lend support to the thrust toward individualism and Platonic idealism in ecclesiology that the Symbols are at great pains to disavow. (Ap VII 20)

The one-for-one equation of the church

with the kingdom of God implied by the quotation of St. Luke 17:20 in par.236 overlooks the fact that in the Symbols the church is called the kingdom of Christ only to the degree that it is the embodiment in time of the eschatological and eternal kingdom still to be revealed. (Ap VII 16—19)

In this connection it may be pointed out that the term "invisible church" does not occur in the Symbols. They describe the church as "covered up" (*rectam*) by the multitude of bad people and assert that as an outward society it has a *species*, an empirical aspect. (Ap VII 19)

Article 14 of *A Brief Statement*, "Of the Election of Grace" (pars. 247—252), also deserves somewhat more detailed attention in this connection, both because it is the longest article in the document and because it appeals more extensively to the Symbols than any other.

The Symbolically obligated reader of *A Brief Statement* will note with agreement and appreciation (1) the stress on the monergism of divine grace; (2) the deliberate and explicit exclusion of the idea that God, in addition to His grace and the merit of Christ, found in us something good that prompted Him to elect us; (3) the decided rejection of a predestination to damnation; (4) the emphasis on the universality of the love of God and of His gracious will; (5) the recognition that the individual Christian can and should be certain of his election; and (6) the emphatic disavowal of contrary wills in God.

At the same time the Symbolically obligated reader might wish that some further emphases of the Symbols had found more explicit expression.

For instance: Although the idea is

faintly adumbrated by the reference to FC SD XI 23 in par. 247 of *A Brief Statement*, and referred to negatively in par. 251, one might wish that the eight points of FC SD XI 15-22 might have been specified, so that the reader would see that for Lutherans predestination comprised God's counsel and purpose (1) to redeem mankind and to reconcile all men with God through Christ's innocent obedience, suffering, and death; (2) to communicate these merits and benefits of Christ to us through His Word and sacraments; (3) to be present with His Holy Spirit through the Word preached, heard, and meditated on, and to be active in us to convert us to true repentance and to enlighten our hearts with genuine faith; (4) to justify all those who accept Christ in true repentance through genuine faith and to receive them into grace as sons and heirs of eternal life; (5) to hallow in love those whom He thus justified; (6) to protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world and their own flesh, direct them in His ways, raise them up when they stumble, and comfort and preserve them in cross and affliction; (7) to confirm and increase the good work that He began in them and preserve it in them until their life's end, provided that they adhere to God's Word, pray diligently, remain in God's goodness, and make faithful use of the gifts they have received; and (8) finally to make eternally blessed and glorious in the life everlasting those whom He has chosen, called, and justified in this life.

Absent from *A Brief Statement* is the seventh point, paralleled by the words "if we ourselves do not turn away" (FC SD XI 32. Cf. the citation of St. John 6:37 in

FC SD XI 68 and of Heb. 3:6, 14 in FC SD XI 32).

This condition is to be brought together with the insight of FC SD II 67, that baptized believers have an *arbitrium liberatum* and that as soon as the Holy Ghost has begun His work of rebirth and renewal in us, we can and must cooperate with Him with the powers that He confers (FC SD II 65). FC Ep XI 14 and SD XI 73 quote the admonition of the Second Epistle General of St. Peter (1:10) zealously to confirm our call and selection. (Cf. the citation of Luke 13:23, 24, in FC SD XI 33 and of 2 Peter 2:20 in FC SD XI 42, 83).

The stress on the sacraments is weaker in *A Brief Statement*, with its single passing reference in par. 251, than in the Symbols. The Formula of Concord emphasizes that Christ does not arrange to have the promise of the Gospel offered to men only in general, but has appended the sacraments as seals of the promise, and thereby confirms every single believer individually (SD XI 37). God, the Epitome says, has asseverated our election with an oath and has sealed it with the sacraments (XI, 13; cf. SD XI 71, 72, 76; LC Baptism 43, 44).

The question also remains whether *A Brief Statement* intends to concern itself—as the Formula of Concord does (SD XI 10—12)—with the acute pastoral problem of the temptations confronting those who see others apostatize and wonder whether they themselves will persevere.

Finally, though *A Brief Statement* is effective in setting forth the Gospel side of this whole issue, it appears to be less so in setting forth the Law side. It attempts valiantly to indicate how an individual can obtain personal assurance of his election and escape despair; it does not speak with

equal force against complacency. The conditional clause of the seventh point has as its obverse the possibility of eternal loss, in the spirit of a St. Paul, who though conscious that he is a σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς (Acts 9:15; cf. Gal. 1:15), is still concerned that he who preached the Gospel to others might himself become ἀδόκιμος (1 Cor. 9:27). He warns his readers in the very next chapter, "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (10:12). Our call according to God's purpose, which, in the words of the Formula of Concord, cannot fail or be overthrown, protects us even against the weakness and malice of our own flesh (FC SD XI 45, 90), so that no one can tear us out of the Good Shepherd's hand and no creature can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Yet Judas Iscariot stands as a reminder of the fact that even one whom God's own Son chose to be an apostle possesses the awful power to say a final no to God. 2 Tim. 2:19, cited in FC SD XI 90, affirms both the Gospel and the Law aspect: "God's firm foundation stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'"

To summarize: The desire of the authors of *A Brief Statement* to be loyal to the Lutheran Symbols is past doubt. Their citations of the Symbols are apposite almost throughout. Differences between the Symbols and *A Brief Statement* are largely differences in emphasis and formulation. At some points *A Brief Statement* goes beyond the express formulations of the Symbols in its concern with current issues, and there are other points at which Symbolical emphases might well have been incorporated in *A Brief Statement*.

III. THE FUTURE OF *A Brief Statement*

From its very beginning the Christian church has found it necessary to express its faith in creedal and confessional statements. One may say that the path of the church is marked with such statements. Also Lutheranism has throughout its history produced a goodly number of doctrinal and confessional declarations. During the last 50 years American Lutheranism brought into being such documents as the *Madison Agreement* (1912), the *Washington Declaration* (1920), the *Minneapolis Theses* (1925), the *Chicago Theses* (discussed but not approved by our Synod in 1929), *A Brief Statement* (1932), and the *Common Confession* (adopted by the former American Lutheran Church and by the Missouri Synod in 1950 and 1953, but set aside "as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies" by the Missouri Synod in 1956).

It is noteworthy that many confessional and doctrinal statements which appeared at some time or other in the history of the church and may have been necessary and relevant in their day, had little, if any, normative influence on the church of Jesus Christ in subsequent ages. In the course of time they became hardly more than historical records and landmarks of the church's reactions to issues which at one time or another disturbed the church. This fact does not in itself detract from the significance attached to them by the generation of Christians which produced and approved them. Some of these statements are still worthy of study, at least by historians and systematicians, since they radiated

forth the truth of God's Word and may have done so very effectively.

But there are some confessional and doctrinal statements approved by the church which, though they came into being centuries ago, have withstood the ravages of time and have remained perennially fresh and youthful. They are the so-called Ecumenical Creeds, particularly the Nicene Creed, and the Lutheran Symbols. These Creeds and Symbols came into existence at supremely crucial junctures in the history of the church. The formulations of the Ecumenical Creeds reflect an era when the church was engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the preservation of the orthodox faith. The Lutheran Symbols originated in another critical period of the church, the century of the Reformation.

There are other factors which contribute to the peculiar significance of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols. The former spell out the Scriptural truth regarding the Triune God and the person of Jesus Christ not only for the early but also for all centuries. The Lutheran Symbols articulate not only for the 16th but also for succeeding centuries the incomparable importance of the doctrine of justification by faith and identify it as the center of God's revelation in Scripture. Furthermore, these Creeds and Symbols state the truth of Scripture with unique precision, great clarity, and astounding comprehensiveness. Countless Christians to this day acknowledge the singular value of the Ecumenical Creeds, and many Lutherans the world over subscribe also to the Lutheran Symbols and declare both Creeds and Symbols to be true expositions of the prophetic and apostolic Word of Scripture.

Addressing ourselves for a moment specifically to the Lutheran Symbols, we note that these do not and cannot refer or speak directly to all issues that currently affect the life of the church. But their thrust, emphases, and theological statements are related, and can be applied, to most of these issues. Furthermore, Lutherans value these Symbols in particular because they find in them the true key to Holy Scripture, namely, the revelation by God's Spirit of man's justification in the sight of God by faith, through God's grace, and because of the merits of Jesus Christ. Therefore Lutherans have also discovered in these Symbols reliable criteria enabling them to discern and reject unorthodox teachings regardless of the new dress or form in which they happen to appear. Finally, these Symbols have over and over again served Lutherans well as a basis for discussing the issues of unity and fellowship. Thus the Lutheran Symbols, together with the Ecumenical Creeds, are among the great blessings which God bestowed on the Lutheran church.

The above tribute to the Lutheran Symbols does not imply that these are necessarily God's final gift to the Lutheran church and that He intended, to the end of time, to guide and preserve Lutheranism by means of them. Nor are they inspired. If God so desired, He could provide Lutherans with entirely new confessional statements which might replace in course of time one or all the 16th-century Lutheran Symbols, even Luther's Small Catechism, or which might be added to them as new Symbols. How God might do this, which times, places, and occasions He might choose to execute His plan, no generation can foretell. But we should

recall that both the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols came into being in severely critical periods of the church's existence. Is our age, even though some have labeled it the post-Christian era, really comparable to those periods? Are we living in an age which, even though it is largely indifferent and even hostile to Scripture, constitutes so critical a juncture in the history of the church as to compel our church to create and promote a new or existing confessional statement to the status of authority enjoyed at the present time only by the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols? Is American Lutheranism really being coerced by blind but aggressive atheism, or by heretical theologians, or by inimical state authorities to declare its doctrinal position in a new or current formulation? We might ask: Is the Lutheran church really facing another Nicaea or another Constantinople or another Augsburg? These questions deserve most careful and searching thought.

But another question may be asked. It is this: Has not our Synod time and again adopted doctrinal statements in addition to those found in the Lutheran Symbols? The answer is: Most certainly. The historical path also of the Missouri Synod is marked with such statements. Furthermore, Synodical and District conventions have formally or tacitly approved many essays dealing with such basic doctrinal matters as justification, sanctification, Christology, the means of grace, Scripture, creation, predestination, and others. A mere glance into the marginal references of Ernst Eckhardt's *Homiletisches Reallexicon* provides sufficient evidence that our Synod has been most zealous throughout its history to state and restate its doctrinal position and to

take issue again and again with teachings contrary to the faith. But is it not true that many of these doctrinal statements of a past day found in the official literature of Synod no longer speak to concerns disturbing the church of our day? Again, although such a worthy publication as *The Abiding Word* attempts to gather up at least some of the doctrinal affirmations of our church, many others remain unmentioned and in part unknown to the present generation, especially because they are couched in the German language of our synodical fathers.

What shall we say about the doctrinal statement known as *A Brief Statement*? Adopted by Synod almost 30 years ago and reaffirmed by later synodical conventions, this confessional statement reflects and deals with issues that confronted our church not only in 1932 but also almost 40 years previous to 1932 (see Carl S. Meyer, "The Historical Background of *A Brief Statement*" in the July, August, and September 1961 issues of this journal). During this period American Lutheranism had been divided on such basic doctrines as conversion, faith, predestination, and Scripture. The reasons for the drafting of *A Brief Statement* are summarized by Carl S. Meyer in the article referred to and by Erwin L. Lueker in his "Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements" in the May 1961 issue of this journal.

But in the past 30 years much has happened which makes *A Brief Statement* in some respects a dated document. On the external side, the American Lutheran Church, which was organized in 1930, no longer exists as a separate body but has, since 1961, become merged with other Lutheran groups which have adopted the

name of American Lutheran Church. In future meetings, which will probably be held with the American Lutheran Church as well as with the Lutheran Church in America, which is coming into being this year, Synod's Committee on Doctrinal Unity may wish to submit a doctrinal statement as a basis for discussion. Which will it be? If it proved desirable for Synod to have doctrinal statements prepared for the express purpose of employing them when conferring with representatives of the former American Lutheran Church (*Doctrinal Affirmation, Common Confession*), Synod might again think it expedient to have a confessional statement drafted for the express purpose of meeting the issues when its committee confers with representatives of the present American Lutheran Church and with representatives of the soon-to-be-realized Lutheran Church in America. We believe that such meetings will eventuate.

Again, Synod cannot escape taking cognizance of two vast ecumenical organizations that have come into existence since 1932: the Lutheran World Federation (1947) and the World Council of Churches (1948). Of course, if our Synod decides not to assume any responsibility to these two organizations as well as to the American Lutheran Church and the forthcoming Lutheran Church in America, the drafting of further doctrinal and confessional statements may not be necessary. But if such meetings and negotiations are to be carried on, what role is *A Brief Statement* likely to play?

In other areas much has happened in the church since 1932. Though Karl Barth's first famous book, his *Römerbrief*, had appeared as early as 1918, the movement

initiated by him and known by a variety of names was in its infancy when *A Brief Statement* was adopted by Synod. Again, the first volume of Gerhard Kittel's monumental *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, which was intended to incorporate and make accessible the findings of recent New Testament research, did not appear until 1932/33. Since that time five additional huge volumes have been published, the seventh is on its way, and important articles in Kittel's work have appeared in English. Furthermore, though Rudolf Bultmann of Marburg had been rocking the faith of many Christians since the early twenties, his influence on American theological thought cannot be said to have been widespread and pervasive by 1932. Again, the undeniable impact of recent Old Testament and Near Eastern studies on the present generation could only dimly be visualized by the committee which drafted *A Brief Statement*. In calling attention to these few briefly sketched developments, our intention is not to minimize the significance of *A Brief Statement* or to suggest that its doctrines should be changed to conform to modern unscriptural views. Our only purpose is to have our Synod become increasingly mindful that it must seriously attempt to address itself to the contemporary scene and to face up to present opportunities and dangers. It must do so not only in its preaching and teaching and in its theological and educational publications but also in its doctrinal statements.

In the light of the above analysis we ask: What will be the future of *A Brief Statement*? Is it destined (1) for some kind of quasi-immortality, that is, to become a confessional statement of the Missouri

Synod equal to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols? Or is it destined (2) to appear in a revised, enlarged, and up-dated edition? Or is it destined (3) to retain its present function and position? Or is it destined (4) for gradual but eventual retirement from the scene, i. e., will it share the fate of other confessional statements which mark the path of the church, such as the *Doctrinal Affirmation* and the *Common Confession*?

Since these questions are agitating the minds of many members of the Missouri Synod, we venture to suggest that Synod take under advisement at its forthcoming convention courses of action such as these:

1. To appoint a representative committee, possibly the proposed Commission on Theology, whose responsibility it will be to review thoroughly *A Brief Statement* from the exegetical, symbolical, dogmatic, historical, and practical points of view, with special attention also to its adequacy and relevancy for our day, and to submit its report at a future convention of Synod.

2. To consider most carefully at synodical conventions specific issues which are currently engaging the attention of the church, to formulate its findings in clear and simple statements, and to make these known to the entire membership of Synod as its position.

3. To remain conscious that our Synod is in the tradition of the "one, holy, Christian, and apostolic church," and that, for this reason, Synod

a) make the doctrinal content of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols accessible in popular language in inexpensive editions;

b) encourage in every possible way the study of her Creeds and Symbols in conferences, seminars, retreats, and in all our secondary and higher schools for answers to modern questions of theology;

c) to encourage the theological faculties of the seminaries in St. Louis and Springfield to study specific problems disturbing the church and to publish their findings in the official organs of Synod.

4. Since, however, neither the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Symbols nor other doctrinal and confessional statements adopted by Synod can fully express the inexhaustible riches of God's Word as found in the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments, that Synod seek to stimulate anew all its members to become more faithful and systematic students of the Holy Scriptures and thus grow, under God, into theologically better informed and doctrinally more firmly grounded disciples of the Lord of the church, Jesus Christ.

The "Editorial Comment" on p. 197 f. should not be overlooked as a foreward to this article.