

The Function of Doctrine ¹⁴ and Theology in Light of the Unity of the Church

A Report
Plus 15 Papers From an Official Study
Conducted by the Division of Theological Studies,
Lutheran Council in the USA,
During 1972-77

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Quotations from **The Book of Concord**, unless otherwise noted, are from: Theodore G. Tappert, ed., **The Book of Concord** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959). Abbreviations used with the quotations, following the first reference in each paper, are: AC—The Augsburg Confession, Ap—Apology of the Augsburg Confession, SA—The Smalcald Articles, Tr—Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, SC—The Small Catechism, LC—The Large Catechism, and FC—Formula of Concord.

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Part 2

Definitions of Gospel, Theology, Doctrine, and Consensus

As Used in the LCMS

By Roland A. Hopmann

Sources of the following definitions are: "Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary" (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1953); "Triglot Concordia, The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church" (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921); Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, "A Review of the Question, 'What Is a Doctrine?'" (Saint Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 1965); and "Lutheran Cyclopedia" (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954).

GOSPEL

—"1. Glad tidings; esp., the good news concerning Christ, the Kingdom of God, and salvation; hence, the teachings of Christ and the apostles; the Christian faith, revelation, or dispensation" (Webster's Dictionary).

—"We, on the other hand, call consciences away from the Law to the Gospel, and from confidence in their own works to confidence in the promise and Christ, because the Gospel presents to us Christ, and promises freely the remission of sins for Christ's sake. In this promise it bids us trust, namely, that for Christ's sake we are reconciled to the Father, and not for the sake of our own contrition or love.

For there is no other Mediator or Propitiator than Christ. Neither can we do the works of the Law unless we have first been reconciled through Christ. And if we would do anything, yet we must believe that not for the sake of these works, but for the sake of Christ, as Mediator and Propitiator, we obtain the remission of sins" (Triglot Concordia — Apology, Article XII, V).

—"IV. **Of the Gospel.** We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich [and liberal] in His grace [and goodness]. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached

[He commands to be preached] in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, Matt. 18, 20: 'Where two or three are gathered together,' etc." (Triglot Concordia—Smalcald Articles, Part III).

—"Now, when we consider this dissent aright, it has been caused chiefly by this, that the term 'Gospel' is not always employed and understood in one and the same sense, but in two ways, in the Holy Scriptures, as also by ancient and modern church-teachers. For sometimes it is employed so that there is understood by it the entire doctrine of Christ, our Lord, which He proclaimed in His ministry upon earth, and commanded to be proclaimed in the New Testament, and hence comprised in it the explanation of the Law and the proclamation of the favor and grace of God, His heavenly Father, as it is written, Mark 1, 1: 'The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' And shortly afterwards the chief heads are stated: 'Repentance and forgiveness of sins.' Thus, when Christ after His resurrection commanded the apostles 'to preach the Gospel in all the world,' Mark 16, 15, He compressed the sum of this doctrine into a few words, when He said, Luke 24, 46. 47: 'Thus it is written, and thus it behooved

Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations.' So Paul, too, calls his entire doctrine the Gospel, Acts 20, 21; but he embraces the sum of this doctrine under the two heads: 'Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.' And in this sense the **generalis definitio**, that is, the description of the word 'Gospel,' when employed in a wide sense and without the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel, is correct, when it is said that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and the remission of sins. For John, Christ, and the apostles began their preaching with repentance, and explained and urged not only the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins, but also the Law of God. Furthermore the term 'Gospel' is employed in another, namely, in its proper sense, by which it comprises not the preaching of repentance, but only the preaching of the grace of God, as follows directly afterwards, Mark 1, 15, where Christ says: 'Repent, and believe the Gospel' " (Triglot Concordia—Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, V).

—" . . . the Gospel is properly a doctrine which teaches what man should believe, that he may obtain forgiveness of sins with God, namely that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the curse of the Law, has expiated and paid for all our sins, through whom alone we again enter into favor with God, obtain forgiveness of sins by faith, are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and eternally saved.

"For everything that comforts, that offers the favor and grace of God to transgressors of the Law, is, and is properly called, the Gospel, a good and joyful message that God will not punish sins, but forgive them for Christ's sake" (Triglot Concordia—FC, TD, V).

—"Christ, in the last chapter of Luke, 24, 47, commands 'that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name.' For the Gospel convicts all men that they are under sin, that they all are subject to eternal wrath and death, and offers, for Christ's sake, remission of sin and justification, which is received by faith" (Triglot Concordia—Ap, IV, II).

—"But we say that contrition is the true terror of conscience, which feels that God is angry with sin, and which grieves that it has sinned. And this contrition takes place in this manner when sins are censured by the Word of God, because the sum of the preaching of the Gospel is this, namely, to convict of sin, and to offer for Christ's sake the remission of sins and righteousness, and the Holy Ghost, and eternal life, and that as regenerate men we should do good works. Thus Christ comprises the sum of the Gospel when He says in the last chapter of Luke, v. 47: 'That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in My name among all nations' " (Triglot Concordia—Ap, XII, V).

—“5. But since the term ‘Gospel’ is not used in one and the same sense in the Holy Scriptures, on account of which this dissension originally arose, we believe, teach, and confess that if by the term ‘Gospel’ is understood the entire doctrine of Christ which He proposed in His ministry, as also did His apostles (in which sense it is employed, Mark 1, 15; Acts 20, 21), it is correctly said and written that the Gospel is a preaching of repentance and of the forgiveness of sins” (Triglot Concordia—FC, Epitome, V).

—“But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but it is originally a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts. [The Christian Church consists not alone in fellowship of outward signs, but it consists especially in inward communion of eternal blessings in the heart, as of the Holy Ghost, of faith, of the fear and love of God]; which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. [Namely, where God’s Word is pure, and the Sacraments are administered in conformity with the same, there certainly is the Church, and there are Christians.]” (Triglot Concordia—Ap, VII, VIII).

DOCTRINE

—“2. That which is taught; a principle, or body of principles, in any branch of knowledge; tenet; dogma; principle of faith . . . **Doctrine**

implies acceptance of a principle as taught by a body of believers or of adherents to a philosophy, a school, or the like” (Webster’s Dictionary).

—“Since for thorough, permanent unity in the Church it is, above all things, necessary that we have a comprehensive, unanimously approved summary and form wherein is brought together from God’s Word the common doctrine, reduced to a brief compass, which the churches that are of the true Christian religion confess, just as the ancient Church always had for this use its fixed symbols; moreover, since this [comprehensive form of doctrine] should not be based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches which pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion, we have declared to one another with heart and mouth that we will not make or receive a separate or new confession of our faith, but confess the public common writings which always and everywhere were held and used as such symbols or common confessions in all the churches of the Augsburg Confession before the dissensions arose among those who accept the Augsburg Confession, and as long as in all articles there was on all sides a unanimous adherence to [and maintenance and use of] the pure doctrine of the divine Word, as the sainted Dr. Luther explained it” (Triglot Concordia—FC, TD, Comprehensive Summary).

—“We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119, 105: ‘Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.’ And St. Paul: ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed,’ Gal. 1, 8.

“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” (Triglot Concordia—FC, Ep, Of the Summary Content).

—“. . . we would submit the Articles of our Confession for our side on next Wednesday, therefore, in obedience to Your Imperial Majesty’s wishes, we offer, in this matter of religion, the Confession of our preachers and of ourselves, showing what manner of doctrine from the Holy Scriptures and the pure Word of God has been up to this time set forth in our lands, dukedoms, dominions, and cities, and taught in our churches” (Triglot Concordia—Augsburg Confession, Preface).

—“A doctrine is an article of faith which the church in obedience to

her Lord, and in response to her specific needs, derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching" (CTCR Report).

THEOLOGY

—"1. Knowledge of God and the supernatural; religious knowledge and belief, esp. when methodically formulated. 2. The critical, historical, and psychological study of religion and religious ideas. 3. A system of religious theory or observance; as, Calvinistic **theology**" (Webster's Dictionary).

—"Theology. In the abstract or narrow, that is, proper, sense a practical, God-given quality, by which a person may understand, accept, expound, impart to others, and defend, the truth of Scriptures as containing the way of salvation. In its wider, concrete sense the entire body of knowledge pertaining to the understanding and exposition of the Bible. This knowledge is commonly divided into four groups: 1) exegetical theology, which includes Biblical isagogics and the history of the canon and translation, hermeneutics and textual criticism, exegesis of the Old

and the New Testament, and a study of modern translations; 2) systematic theology, which embraces dogmatics or doctrinal theology, the study of the Symbolical Books, moral philosophy and Christian ethics, and often also apologetics and polemics; 3) historical theology, which includes church history and archaeology and its various periods, the history of dogma and confessions, and patristics; 4) practical theology, with subdivision of pastoral theology and church polity, catechetics, homiletics, diaconics and missions, liturgics and hymnology, and Christian art and architecture" (Lutheran Cyclopedia).

CONSENSUS

—"Agreement in matters of opinion, testimony, etc.; accord; also, loosely, the convergent trend, as of opinion" (Webster's Dictionary).

—"As to the 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, delivered to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the great Diet, together with its Apology, and the Articles composed at Smalcald in the year 1537, and subscribed at that time by the chief theologians" (Triglot Concordia—FC, Ep, Of the Summary Content).

—"Our adversaries cry out that they are the Church, that they are following the consensus of the Church [what the Church catholic, universal, holds]. But Peter also here cites in our issue the consensus of the Church: "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins," etc. The consensus of the prophets is assuredly to be judged as the consensus of the Church universal. [I verily think that if all the holy prophets are unanimously agreed in a declaration (since God regards even a single prophet as an inestimable treasure), it would also be a decree, a declaration, and a unanimous strong conclusion of the universal, catholic, Christian, holy Church, and would be justly regarded as such.] We concede neither to the Pope nor to the Church the power to make decrees against this consensus of the prophets" (Triglot Concordia—Ap, XII, V).

—"For Peter clearly cites the consensus of the prophets, and the writings of the apostles testify that they believe the same thing" (Triglot Concordia—Ap, XII, V).