

Adopted by the Commissioners of The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

November 22 and 23, 1964; April 19 and 20, 1965

Preface to Documents on "Sola Gratia" and "Sola Scriptura" Studies

Pursuant to resolutions passed by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod (1959) and The American Lutheran Church (1960 and 1962) conversations looking toward pulpit and altar fellowship between these two church bodies were begun in November of 1964. The Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches joined these conversations in April of 1965.

The representatives of these church bodies were agreed that the necessary consensus in Lutheran teaching and practice should find expression in a series of study documents on central themes of Lutheran theology. The aim of these documents is to explicate the content of the Lutheran Confessions themselves; they are not to be understood as new or supplementary confessions.

The first two of these study documents are herewith presented to members of the churches for study and discussion, with the suggestion that joint conferences be

arranged at the local level for this purpose. The implementation of this suggestion is left to the Presidents and District Presidents of the respective church bodies.

The first study proposes to sketch in broad outline the significance of the grace of God for the life of the church and to point up, in a series of antitheses, the relevance of this central Lutheran teaching for the life and work of the church in our day.

The second study, dealing with the Scriptures in the light of the Lutheran Confessions, presents a summary of the confessional views regarding the purpose, content, and interpretation of the Scriptures. The essay demonstrates that the confessional commitment to the Scriptures is made from the perspective of the Gospel.

A third study, *The Lutheran Confessions and the Church*, dealing with the nature, mission, and function of the church, is in preparation and will be available in 1966.

What Commitment to the "Sola Gratia" of the Lutheran Confessions Involves

The Lutheran Reformation was a rediscovery of the meaning of the grace of God manifested in Jesus Christ and proclaimed by the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is fitting, therefore, that Lutheran church bodies who are moved by the Spirit to share the God-given gift of church fellowship should express their common response to this gift by witnessing together to their understanding of the grace of God.

I. The God of All Grace

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jer. 31:3)
Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal. 4:6)

No human wisdom can comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone. Therefore the Ten Commandments do not by themselves make us Christians, for God's wrath and displeasure still remain on us because we cannot fulfill His demands. *But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us upright and pleasing to God. Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see that God gives Himself completely to us, with all His gifts and His power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all His works, the Holy Spirit all His gifts.*

Large Catechism, The Creed, 67—69
(Tappert, p. 420);

cf. Augsburg Confession, XX, 24 (Tappert, p. 44)

God the Creator is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Men moved by the Holy Spirit speak of God the Creator in adoration, as "the Creator, who is blessed forever" (Rom. 1:25). The grace of the Creator is remembered in the praise (Ps. 89) and the petitions (Ps.

74) of God's ancient people. God is praised for the grace of His continuing creation—"The earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord" (Ps. 33:5-9; Ps. 104:15-17). The things that God has made invite man's praise and thanksgiving (Rom. 1:20-21; cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:25). The New Testament witness to God's grace crowns this worship of the Creator by attributing to Jesus Christ (God's grace in person) a part in the act of creation (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2-3). Both the Old Testament and the New witness to creation as an act of grace by putting creation into direct relation with the saving activity of God. (Gen. 1 and 12; Is. 42:5; 43:1; 44:24-28; 54:5; Rev. 4 and 5; 2 Cor. 4:6)

The grace of the Creator is manifested in the creation and care of man. Every detail of the account of the creation of man testifies to God's unique, creative love for the creature whom He has made in His own image and likeness and has crowned with glory and honor (Gen. 1:26—2:3; 2:7-25; cf. Ps. 8). The self-giving will of the Creator is that man shall live of His grace, in personal and responsive communion with his Creator.

Man's basic sin is that he refuses to live in dependence upon this Creator-grace of his God; man's fall was that he willed to be "like God," independent of the grace of God (Gen. 3). Thereby man has cut off his life at its source; in refusing grace, he has forfeited life and called down upon himself the wrath of God. Man is at dead end, under the reign of death (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12, 17, 21; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13). For mankind, united in revolt against the grace of the Creator, there is no way back to

man's true home, the garden of the Creator's grace. Fallen man ignores God's continued manifestation of Himself in the things that He has made, turns to idolatry, and is held fast under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18-32). The coming-in of the Law only intensifies the situation created by one man's disobedience. (Rom. 5:18-20; cf. 7:5, 7-24)

Only the grace of God, God's never-to-be explained and inextinguishable love for His disobedient creature, can restore man to his faithful Creator. The reign of sin in death succumbs only before the grace of God, which reigns "through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21), "who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Here grace is seen in its full essential sense as the undesired and undeserved favor of God, love to the loveless shown.

The New Testament puts the hallmark of "grace" on every phase, stage, and aspect of the Reconciler's work. It is grace all the way, from God's election before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6), from the promise by which man lived until the fullness of time when God sent His Redeemer Son (Rom. 4:16; 1:10), to the last, complete fulfillment in the world to come (1 Peter 5:10; 2 Thess. 2:16-17). When the great reconciling act of God is proclaimed, His grace is proclaimed: Christ tastes death for everyone "by the grace of God" (Heb. 2:9); it is grace that brings Christ down into man's beggary, that man may become rich (2 Cor. 8:9). Justification is by grace (Rom. 3:24; Titus 3:7); salvation is by grace, by grace alone without any contribution of man (Acts 15:11; Eph. 2:5; 2 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:11). Man under the reign of death is made heir to "the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7; cf. Rom. 6:23). God's reconciling act in Christ is the gift of grace (Rom. 5:15), the royal reign of grace (Rom. 5:21). The work of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is a work of grace; through Him the love of God, manifested in the cross of Christ, is poured into the hearts of men (Rom. 5:5-11). The "Spirit of grace" brings the Son of God into the lives of men and makes men beneficiaries of His covenant-blood (Heb. 10:29). By His gifts the life of the church is nurtured and sustained; these gifts can be called "gifts of grace" or "gifts of the Spirit" interchangeably (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:1,4). The grace and truth that came, once for all, through Jesus Christ lives on and works on in the gracious working of the Spirit of truth. (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15)

Peter can sum up the whole riches of the Gospel proclaimed in his First Letter with the words: "This is the true grace of God" (1 Peter 5:12). God's gift of the new birth, the living hope, the imperishable inheritance (1:3-5), the ransoming with the precious blood of Christ (1:18-21), the creation of the new Israel that lives in God's marvelous light (2:9-10), the healing of God's people by the Servant's wounds, the return of the straying sheep to the Shepherd, and Guardian of their souls (2:24-25), "the grace of life" (3:7), the call to God's blessing (3:9), being brought to God by the death of the

Righteous One (3:18), the sure hope of sharing in the glory of Christ (4:13), the presence and power of the Spirit of God (4:14) — all this is "the true grace of God."

The term "grace" is not used everywhere in the New Testament; but the fact is present everywhere. For instance, the word does not occur in the Gospel According to St. Matthew; but the same unearned reconciling favor of God is being proclaimed when Matthew portrays the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee as the dawn of a new creation upon men in the valley and shadow of death; when Jesus pronounces a beatitude on the poor in spirit and on men who hunger and thirst for righteousness, when He becomes the friend of sinners and eats with them; when He performs His mighty deeds only to help others, never for Himself; when He invites the weary and heavy-laden, when He describes His disciple as a debtor freed from a crushing debt; when He describes His mission as a ministry which culminates in the giving of His life as a ransom for many; when He gives Himself bodily in the bread and wine to the Twelve; when He, the one obedient Son of God, cries out, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?"; when the Risen One calls the disciples who had failed Him in Gethsemane and had abandoned Him at His arrest "My brethren" and sends them on their apostolic mission with the promise, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." And what lies beyond the close of the age is grace, crowning grace: The Son of Man gathers His elect and at the judgment welcomes His own with the words: "Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

II. The Word of Grace

Hear that your soul may live . . . My word . . . shall not return to Me empty (Is. 55:3,11).

This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him (Matt. 17:5).

Our gospel came to you . . . in the power and in the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:5).

We shall now return to the Gospel, which offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in His grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin (the peculiar function of the Gospel) is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the Holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of the keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren. Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered," etc.

Smalcald Articles, III, iv, (Tappert, p. 310)

Commitment to the *Sola Gratia* of our confessions means that we hear the Word of grace in the promise of the prophets and the proclamation of the apostles as God's miraculous Nevertheless over against the Law. It means receiving the Word of grace as light shining out of darkness. (2 Cor. 4:6)

God's reconciling act of grace lives on and works in the inspired word of the chosen witnesses to that act, the apostles (2 Cor. 5:18-19; 1 Cor. 2:12-13). The apostles proclaim the reconciling act of God as taking place "according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4), as an act to which the Law and the Prophets continue to bear wit-

ness (Rom. 3:21); the apostolic Gospel is "the gospel of God which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scripture." (Rom. 1:1-2)

The apostle is a creation of the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:9-10; Gal. 1:13-15; Eph. 3:2-10; 1 Tim. 1:12-16); and empowered by the promised Spirit he becomes the chosen vessel of the grace of God (John 20:22-23; Acts 9:15). The apostolic Word is therefore the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). As such, it is the Word of grace (Acts 14:3; 20:32), the Gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). When it is accepted, it absolves with divine authority; when it is refused, it binds with the same divine authority (Matt. 16:19; John 20:22-23; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). For to refuse the grace of God is to invoke death.

The divine act of grace lives and works in the concrete, personal, enacted word of the sacraments. Here the effectual word of God appears as the Word of His grace in singular clarity. Here God is at work, independently of any worth of man; the grace of the sacrament does not depend on the quality of the person who administers it and is not conditioned by any merit in the person who receives it. In Baptism man does not act; God deals with man—He saves us by the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5-8). It is by the gracious action of God that we are buried with Christ and rise with Christ in Baptism (Rom. 6:4-5). In the Lord's Supper the Lord Jesus Christ is the Giver, and He gives nothing less than Himself, His body given for us, His blood shed for us. The sacraments are pure Gospel, clear grace.

III. The People of Grace

I will be your God, and you shall be My people (Lev. 26:12).

I will build My church (Matt. 16:18).

By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13).

It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. . . .

Augsburg Confession, VII, 1-2 (Tappert, p. 32)

Commitment to the *Sola Gratia* of our confessions means that we live, work, and witness far and near in the world as the people of grace, a people created and controlled by the Word of grace, who put their trust wholly in the grace of God and confidently await the new world which God's grace will create.

This people of grace is the company of believers; "grace" and "faith" correspond to one another. The God of grace is the God who freely gives; the believer is the man who freely receives. Only faith, produced in man by the working of the Holy Spirit, can behold and trust the God of all grace; for only faith can endure the intolerable verdict of the Law and so hear the Gospel as what it is, God's word of pure grace and absolute giving.

The word of grace is a call, an invitation and a summons; it gathers the people of God (Gal. 1:6; 2 Tim.

2:9). The very existence of the church can be called "the grace of God"; when Barnabas saw the church gathered by the Word in Antioch, he beheld the grace of God (Acts 11:20, 23). To be in the church is to have been ushered into the presence of the grace of God and to stand therein (Rom. 5:2). The continued existence of the church depends on continuing in the grace of God (Acts 13:43, cf. 1 Peter 5:12). Apostolic letters to churches therefore regularly begin and close with the invocation of grace upon the people of God; by the grace of God the church can enjoy the peace of God.

Like the apostle, the apostolic church is what it is by the grace of God (1 Cor. 15:10). The church is "under grace," as under a beneficently controlling power (Rom. 6:14-15). The grace of God which has appeared for the salvation of all men is a grace which "trains" men (Titus 2:11-12) and puts their lives under the yoke of Christ (Matt. 11:30), who gave Himself for men in order to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:14)

"Grace" is inscribed upon the whole life and work of the church. The church commits its missionaries to the grace of God (Acts 14:26; 15:40). To participate in the apostolic mission and its sufferings is to be a partaker of grace with the apostle (Phil. 1:7). The ministries of the church are the grace of God in action (Eph. 4:7; 1 Cor. 4:7; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Peter 4:10). The Word that goes from brother to brother is to be a vehicle of grace (Eph. 4:29). The prayer of the church is a drawing-near to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). The songs of the church are sung "in grace" (Col. 3:16). The church finds steadfastness and security over against false teaching in grace (Heb. 13:9; cf. Acts 20:29-32). Even so down-to-earth a thing as a collection for the poor can be called "grace" (1 Cor. 16:3; 2 Cor. 8:1, 4, 6, 7, 19); in it the grace of God takes on concrete form.

The reign of grace is an absolute monarchy. The church risks its very existence if it compromises the grace of God in any way. To modify grace by making it dependent on the keeping of the Law is to nullify it and lose it (Gal. 2:21; 5:4; cf. Gal. 1:9). And a church which misuses the freedom which grace bestows in order to effect a compromise with the world has received the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. 6:14-7:2). The reign of grace is intolerant toward both legalism and libertinism.

Under the reign of grace the church has a strength which need not compromise. The people of grace have the sure stamina of hope. The God who loved them has given them "eternal comfort and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). The God of all grace, who has called us to His eternal glory in Christ, Himself ever and again restores, establishes, and strengthens us. (1 Peter 5:10)

The people of grace look for and strain toward the day when the God of all grace shall declare: "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people . . . He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor

pain any more" (Rev. 20:3-4). Then He shall crown His work of creation and reconciliation with the gracious word: "Behold, I make all things new." (Rev. 20:5)

ANTITHESES

Commitment to the *Sola Gratia* of our confessions involves an articulate rejection of all that calls the grace of God into question.

I. The God of All Grace: Antitheses

1. The grace of God the Creator is called into question when the church grows suspicious and timid over against the creaturely blessings of God and seeks to circumscribe the Christian's free use and enjoyment of them by "human precepts and doctrines." (Col. 2:21-22; Matt. 15:2, 7-9)

2. The grace of God the Creator is called into question when men forget that the creaturely blessings are to be received with thanksgiving from the Creator's hand and lose themselves in a secular enjoyment and an in-temperate use of these blessings.

3. The grace of God the Creator is called into question when the church withdraws from and is indifferent toward the needs of men within the social structures of this world. The people of God under the grace of God is equipped for every good work, for ministry to all mankind.

4. The grace of God the Reconciler is fundamentally the "favor of God whereby He accepts us by forgiving our sins and making us righteous freely for Christ's sake" (Luther). The grace of God is misunderstood and called into question when it is equated with the bestowal of secular security and material blessings. Under the reign of grace the church has the power to rejoice in the Lord and to joy in the God of her salvation even when all secular security is withdrawn and all material blessings are withheld.

5. The grace of God the Reconciler is called into question when the church loses itself in merely secular endeavors at individual and social betterment, without applying the grace of God in Christ Jesus as its motivation and power; all the works of the church must testify to their origin in the grace of God.

6. The grace of God the Reconciler is costly grace; it cost the life of God's Son. The grace of God is called into question when it is received "in vain," when men make a cleavage between the grace of God which "has appeared for the salvation of all men" and the grace which trains us "to renounce irreligion and worldly passions and to live sober, upright, and godly lives." The grace by which we are saved and the grace by which we live is one grace, received as one or despised and rejected as one. The life of the people of grace has in it both the holy fear which trembles at the thought of presuming upon God's costly grace and the high confidence which the free and lavish grace of God in Christ Jesus inspires.

7. The grace of God the Sanctifier is called into question when the people of grace creates or tolerates divisions which obscure the free, universal, exceptionless

character of the grace of God. It is likewise called into question when the people of grace creates or tolerates connections and coalitions which obscure or deny the uncompromising character of the grace of God, or looks to bonds and mechanisms of unity which do not employ the grace of God at all.

8. The grace of God the Sanctifier is called into question when the people of grace seeks other sources of strength or other guarantees for its continued existence and success than the grace of God, present and working in the Gospel.

9. The grace of God is called into question when the people of grace no longer has the confidence that this grace of the Creator, Reconciler, and Sanctifier is sufficient to overcome modern man's sense of futility. It is likewise obscured when Christians themselves use the grace of God as an excuse to lapse into a passive, or even a negative, attitude toward their present problems and obligations—when the thought that grace is sufficient and the power of God is made perfect in weakness is construed to mean that the power of God is made perfect in the church's inactivity. In the power of the Spirit the people of God can bring the Gospel of grace into the lives of all men, can become all things to all men and by all means save some.

10. God has done what the Law could not do; of His free grace He has sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering and has thus condemned sin in the flesh, "in order that the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:3-4). This grace of God is called into question when the church attempts to accomplish by force of Law what only the gracious leading of the Spirit by the Gospel can do. This grace of God the Reconciler is also called into question when a vague and permissive "ethic of love," divorced from God's love in Christ, is thought to be the impulse for Christian action.

11. The grace of God is called into question when the church in these last days, when God has spoken by His Son, divorces the grace of God from God's act in Christ and substitutes for it a vague and general divine beneficence. "Grace alone" means "Christ alone."

II. The Word of Grace: Antitheses

1. The Word of grace is designed by God the Reconciler to master us, to bring about the obedience of faith, to bring us and keep us under the reign of grace. The grace of God is called into question when the Christian interpreter (scholar, expositor, preacher, catechete) seeks to master the Word of grace instead of letting the Word master him. "We are beggars, that is true." (Luther)

2. The grace of God is called into question when the church in its teaching, preaching, and practice forgets or ignores the covenant grace of God in Baptism or obscures the gracious action of God in the sacrament by insisting on human qualifications for Baptism or by emphasis on the rite of confirmation. The grace of God in

Baptism is appreciated and praised when the proclamation of the church relates it to the daily life of the Christian and to his participation in the Supper of our Lord.

3. The grace of God is called into question when the church in its interpretation of the Lord's Supper obscures the pure grace of our Lord's self-giving in this sacrament. The grace of our Lord is obscured when the forms of worship and practices of piety in the celebration of the Supper are construed to be a sacrificial contribution on man's part which somehow supplements the divine grace of the one-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God.

The Lutheran Confessions and "Sola Scriptura"

Introduction

The church that is committed to the Lutheran Confessions acknowledges the Triune God as the sovereign Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of life. The God who by His omnipotence and love has created all things and all men and continues to be creatively active in their preservation is also the God who by His grace has redeemed the fallen and rebellious creature through the redeeming act of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He is also the God who through the Holy Spirit brings man into a new and living relationship with Himself. Thus the Lutheran Church confesses that God by His unmerited grace is the sole Author and Giver of every blessing for this life and the life that is to come (*Sola Gratia*). Not only does the Lutheran Church confess the *Sola Gratia* (or its synonyms, *Solus Christus*, Justification, Gospel, the righteousness of faith) as the "chief article," but she also views all of Christian theology from this perspective. All articles of the Christian faith are informed, controlled, and given direction by this article. All theology that receives its dimensions and contours from this guiding principle is pure and true. Conversely, the theology that ignores, abridges, or vitiates this central affirmation is corrupted and false. *Solus Deus* (Let God be God!) is the confession of the Lutheran Symbols, and of the church committed to them, with respect to the church's origin, life, work, destiny, and authority. Any teaching concerning God, man, sin, salvation, sanctification, and judgment that does not take *Sola Gratia* into account fails to do justice to the core of the Biblical and confessional witness. This is true also of the Lutheran teaching concerning the Sacred Scriptures. Only from the perspective of *Sola Gratia* can one properly speak of *Sola Scriptura* in the sense of the Lutheran Symbols.

What happens when we view the Scriptures from the perspective of *Sola Gratia*? What happens to the Scriptures when they are taken captive to the central article of the Christian faith — informed, controlled, and given direction by *Sola Gratia*? The confessions say that when we apply the principle of *Sola Gratia* to the Scriptures we are led to make the following affirmations:

1. The Scriptures are God's address to man, revealing His grace in Jesus Christ, His Son.
2. The Scriptures are the authoritative source of the church's proclamation and the norm by which that proclamation is tested.

III. The People of Grace: Antitheses

The grace of God is free grace; it costs man nothing. The Gospel is the unconditional promise and proffer of grace in Christ Jesus, to be received in the beggary of faith. Faith, too, is the creation and the gift of God. The grace of God is therefore called into question when faith, or its fruits, is thought of as supplementing, or contributing to, the free grace of the God who justifies the ungodly.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER
EDWARD C. FENDT
MARTIN H. FRANZMANN
WILLIAM H. WEIBLEN

3. The Scriptures are the means by which the church lives and fulfills her mission. The church is the redemptive community in which the Holy Spirit is at work through the Word to bring men to faith, to build up the body of Christ, and to carry the Word to the ends of the earth.

4. The same principle which governs the Scriptures themselves governs all interpretations of the Scriptures.

I

The church committed to the Lutheran Symbols believes, teaches, and confesses that the Scriptures are the Word or address of God to sinful man for the purpose of revealing His grace in His Son, Jesus Christ.

That the Scriptures are so regarded is apparent from the fact that the acting subject of the very first statement of the preface to the entire Book of Concord is "almighty God [who] in His immeasurable love, grace, and mercy toward mankind has permitted the pure, unalloyed, and unadulterated light of His holy Gospel and of the Word that alone brings salvation to appear." (Preface, Book of Concord, Tappert Edition, p. 3)

In the Bible man is confronted by none other than God Himself in His judging and pardoning activity. "These are the two chief works of God in men, to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the Law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin; the other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. The promise is repeated continually throughout Scripture; first it was given to Adam, later to the patriarchs, then illumined by the prophets, and finally proclaimed and revealed by Christ among the Jews, and spread by the apostles throughout the world. (Apology, XII, 53)

In this twofold activity of God it is the revelation of grace in His Son, Jesus Christ, that is His proper work, His primary concern. The Law serves only to convince the sinner of his alienation from God and of his condemnation under the judgment of God. "Christ was given to us to bear both sin and penalty and destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know His blessings unless we recognize our evil." (Apology, II, 50)

"Through this means (namely, the preaching and the hearing of His Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the

Law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel." (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, II 54)

"The content of the Gospel is this, that the Son of God, Christ our Lord, Himself assumed and bore the curse of the Law and expiated and paid for all our sins, that through Him alone we reenter the good graces of God, obtain forgiveness of sins through faith, are freed from death and all the punishments of sin, and are saved eternally. For everything which comforts and which offers the mercy and grace of God to transgressors of the Law strictly speaking is, and is called, the Gospel, a good and joyful message that God wills not to punish sins but to forgive them for Christ's sake." (Solid Declaration, V, 20-21)

"Properly speaking, the Gospel is the command to believe that we have a gracious God because of Christ. 'God sent the Son into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him; he who believes in Him is not condemned,' etc. (John 3:17-18). So whenever mercy is spoken of, faith in the promise must be added. This faith produces a sure hope, for it rests on the Word and commandment of God." (Apology, IV, 345 f.)

The purpose and goal of the revelation of God's grace are that through the Gospel there may be "imparted not bodily but eternal things and gifts, namely eternal righteousness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life." (Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 9)

"To this end, in His boundless kindness and mercy, God provides for the public proclamation of His divine eternal law and the wonderful counsel concerning our redemption, namely, the holy and only saving Gospel of the eternal Son, our only Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Thereby He gathers an eternal church for Himself out of the human race and works in the hearts of men true repentance and knowledge of their sins and true faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And it is God's will to call men to eternal salvation, to draw them to Himself." (Solid Declaration, II, 50)

"The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed." (Large Catechism, II, 38)

"All Scripture, inspired by God, should minister not to security and impenitence but 'to reproof, correction, and improvement' (2 Tim. 3:16). Furthermore everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that 'by steadfastness, by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4)." (Solid Declaration, XI, 12)

God's purpose in the revelation of His grace, however, is not exhausted by the bestowal and the maintenance of the new relationship. He also looks toward the fruits of the new life in Christ, as is clear from the following citations: "By the blessing of God, the priests in our churches pay attention to the ministry of the Word, they teach the Gospel of the blessings of Christ, and they show that the forgiveness of sins comes freely for Christ's sake. This teaching really consoles consciences. They add to it the teaching of the good works which God commands." (Apology, XXIV, 48; cf. Apology, IV, 266)

"God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies all things. By it all the saints themselves have been sanctified. At whatever time God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work are sanctified by it, not on account of the external work but on account of the Word which makes us all saints. Accordingly, I constantly repeat that all our life and work must be guided by God's Word if they are to be God-pleasing or holy." (Large Catechism, I, 91-92)

Far from neglecting the Christian life the Lutheran emphasis on the soteriological purpose of the Scriptural revelation serves to unfold the full riches of sanctification. "In our churches . . . all sermons deal with topics like these: penitence, the fear of God, faith in Christ, the righteousness of faith, comfort for the conscience through faith, the exercise of faith, prayer and our assurance that it is efficacious and is heard, the cross, respect for rulers and for all civil ordinances, the distinction between the kingdom of Christ (or the spiritual kingdom) and political affairs, marriage, the education and instruction of children, chastity, and all the works of love." (Apology, XV, 43; cf. Apology, XII, 174)

"We do not overthrow the Law, Paul says (Rom. 3:31, but uphold it; for when we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the Law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit gradually increase." (Apology, XX, 15)

"Of course, good works are necessary. We say that eternal life is promised to the justified, but those who walk according to the flesh can retain neither faith nor righteousness. We are justified for this very purpose, that, being righteous, we might begin to do good works and obey God's law." (Apology, IV, 348)

II

The church committed to the Lutheran Symbols believes, teaches, and confesses that the Scriptures as the Word of God are the sole authority in the church, both as the source of the church's message and the norm of the content of the church's message.

"We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 3; cf. Epitome, Rule and Norm, 1)

In conformity with this pledge it was to the Scriptures that the Lutheran confessors appealed when they wrote, ". . . we are certain of our Christian confession

and faith on the basis of the divine, prophetic, and apostolic Scriptures and have been adequately assured of this in our hearts and Christian consciences through the grace of the Holy Spirit." (Preface, Book of Concord, Tappert Edition, pp. 12 f.)

It is well known that the Lutheran Reformation proceeded very cautiously and conservatively. The Lutheran Symbols frequently demonstrate a very high appreciation of church tradition, especially the tradition crystallized in the ancient ecumenical creeds and the writings of the early church fathers. However, in addition to their conservative approach to tradition, the confessions also exercised a strong critical function. Whatever in the extra-Biblical tradition proved useful in the service of the Gospel was gratefully retained and, if necessary, purified in the light of the Gospel. Whatever could not be made to conform to this criterion was rejected. While the Lutherans were quick to acknowledge tradition in corroboration of this understanding of the Scriptures, they at no time granted tradition the place of authority in the establishment of the church's doctrine, or in making it a matter of conscience for the free man in Christ. No conciliar or hierarchical authority was allowed to dictate to the church. "Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned." (Epitome, Rule and Norm, 8)

"Here [Luther] expressly asserts by way of distinction that the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it." (Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 9)

The principle of *Sola Scriptura* was concretely enunciated by Luther in the following statement concerning the relation of tradition to the Scriptures: "Only when they have abolished their traffic in purgatorial Masses (which St. Augustine never dreamed of) shall we be ready to discuss with them whether statements of St. Augustine are to be accepted when they are without the support of the Scriptures. . . . It will not do to make articles of faith out of the holy Fathers' words or works. Otherwise what they ate, how they dressed, and what kind of houses they lived in would have to become articles of faith — as has happened in the case of relics. This means that the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel." (Smalcald Articles, II, ii, 14-15)

This same affirmation of the sole authority of the Scriptures is found in all the Lutheran Symbols. *Augsburg Confession*: "St. Augustine also writes in his reply to the letters of Petilian that one should not obey even regularly elected bishops if they err or if they teach or command something contrary to the divine Holy Scriptures" (XXVIII, 28). *Apology*: "Clearly this transference to the dead cannot be proved from the Scriptures, and it is not safe to institute services in the church without the authority of Scripture" (XXIV, 92). *Treatise*:

"This is to say that neither Peter nor the other ministers should assume lordship or authority over the church, nor burden the church with traditions, nor let anybody's authority count for more than the Word . . ." (11). *Small Catechism*: "What is this Word of God?" "Where is this written?" (IV, 3, 13). *Large Catechism*: ". . . the name spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God" (I, 158). "Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God" (IV, 53). ". . . at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you . . ." (V, 76). *Formula of Concord*: "Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses . . ." (Epitome, Rule and Norm, 2). ". . . it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced" (Solid Declaration, II, 8). "Here we take our intellect captive in obedience to Christ, as we do in other articles also, and accept this mystery in no other way than by faith and as it is revealed in the Word." (Epitome, VII, 42)

III

The church committed to the Lutheran Symbols believes, teaches, and confesses that the Scriptures as the Word of God provide the church with the adequate, reliable, and efficacious means for her work among her members and for her mission to the world.

Because they discern in the Scriptures the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd (Smalcald Articles, III, xii, 2) and speak of them as "the clear Scripture of the Holy Spirit" (Apology, Pref., 9; cf. Augsburg Conf., XXVIII, 49; Apology, IV, 108) and "the Holy Scriptures of God" (Preface, Book of Concord, p. 12) the Lutheran Confessions have no difficulty calling the Scriptures the Word of God just as they have none in calling our Lord the Word of God (Augsburg Confession, III, 1, Latin) or the proclamation of the Gospel the Word of God (Large Catechism, II, 38, 52; V, 31; Epitome, II, 13; Solid Declaration, II, 50-52). That the Lutheran Confessions take for granted that the Scriptures are the Word of God is manifest in the great many passages where the two are used interchangeably in the same context. "They quote many Scripture passages to give the inexperienced the impression that this idea has authority in Scripture. . . . May God destroy these wicked sophists who so sinfully twist the Word of God to suit their vain dreams" (Apology, XII, 122, 123; cf. Apology, XXI, 10, 12, 17, 18; Augsburg Confession, XXIII, 18, 19; Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 6, 7; I, 60, 61). (One should also note the free interchange between "Scripture" and "Word of God" in the German and Latin texts.) Although the Lutherans did not attempt to define the limits of the Biblical canon (beyond reference to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments), and although they did not offer a formal *locus "De Scriptura,"* nor try to explain the process of inspiration, they did accept the Scriptures as divinely inspired.

However, the Lutheran Symbols are far more interested and explicit in stressing the dynamic character of the Scriptures here and now as the vehicle of the *Deus Loquens* ("God speaking") than in the accepted fact of the *Deus Locutus* ("God who has spoken"). There is a truly massive emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Scriptures. Without attempting to shackle the power of God or impose limitations on His work, the confessions affirm that God has, so far as we are concerned, bound Himself to the Word as the channel of His power in spiritual matters. There is no promise of any activity of God in this realm apart from the Scriptures or from proclamation based on them and conforming to them. Therefore no claim can be made for such divine activity in man apart from the Word of God. "For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel" (Augsburg Confession, V, 2; cf. also Small Catechism, II, 6; Large Cat., II, 62; Solid Decl., XI, 33, 40, 44, 76, 77). "In these matters, which concern the external spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one His Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before." (Smalcald Articles, III, viii, 3; cf. also Apology, XIII, 13; Smalcald Articles, III, viii, 7, 10; Large Catechism, V, 31; Epitome, II, 13)

"For Christ wants to assure us, as was necessary, that the Word is efficacious when it is delivered by men and that we should not look for another word from heaven." (Apology, XXVIII, 18)

"On the other hand, when we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, new pleasure, and a new spirit of devotion, and it constantly cleanses the heart and its meditations. For these words are not idle or dead, but effective and living." (Large Catechism, I, 101; cf. also Apology, XXIV, 32; Smalcald Articles, II, ii, 24; Small Catechism, VI, 6; Large Catechism, Longer Preface, 10, 11)

"But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from the heart. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God" (Augsburg Confession, XVIII, 2, 3; cf. also Large Catechism, II, 38, 43—45, 52; III, 53—54; Epitome, II, 4, 5; Solid Declaration, II, 52, 55—56; XI, 69). Through the Word the Holy Spirit creates faith. This faith "does not signify merely knowledge of the history (such as is in the ungodly and the devil), but it signifies faith which believes not only the history but also the effect of the history, namely, this article of the forgiveness of sins—that is, that we have grace, righteousness and forgiveness of sins through Christ" (Augsburg Confession, XX, 23, Latin). "... faith is not merely a knowledge of historical events but is a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of His promises." (Augsburg Confession, XX, 25, German)

The confessors, however, are not only aware of the many blessings that have come to men by the ministry

of the Holy Spirit through the Word. They are also convinced that through that same Word the Holy Spirit has led them to see their responsibility toward that Word, namely, "to do and to continue to do everything that is useful and profitable to the increase and expansion of God's praise and glory, to the propagation of that Word of His that alone brings salvation . . ." (Preface, Book of Concord, p. 13).

As the address of God to men and as the vehicle of the Holy Spirit's ministry, God and the Scriptures are often so intimately related as to involve identification. As a consequence, things are ascribed to the vehicle which, strictly speaking, belong only to God. Thus, because God uses the Scriptures, all that He is and has—His power, His faithfulness, His saving grace—are involved in His address to mankind with the result that the Scriptures are said to be powerful, faithful, saving.

While, however, this relationship does involve identification, it never involves identity. The Scriptures are always the Word, the vehicle, and God is always the subject, the actor. Thus, while on the one hand it is true that God has chosen to identify Himself with the Scriptures, even to bind Himself to them, it is also true on the other hand that He is always the Lord of the Scriptures and that they are always His servant. Whatever the Scriptures are and effect, they are what they are and do what they do because of God's presence in and operation through them. Both of these aspects are frequently reflected in the confessions, as, for example, in the following citations, in which the equation "God is completely reliable—the Scriptures are completely reliable" is carried through. "We know that God does not lie. My neighbor and I—in short, all men—may err and deceive, but God's Word cannot err" (Baptism—Large Catechism, IV, 57). The Scriptures "will not lie to you" (Lord's Supper—Large Catechism, V, 76). "The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie" (Real Presence, Lord's—Epitome, VII, 13). "The sacraments are signs of the promises." The communicant "should accept this by faith, comfort his troubled conscience, and believe that the testimonies are not false but as certain as though God by a new miracle promised His will to forgive" (Sacraments—Apology, XIII, 20). "Especially are we to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us" (Election of Grace—Epitome, XI, 14). "We should not regard this call of God which takes place through the preaching of the Word as a deception, but should know certainly that God reveals His will in this way and in those whom He does call He will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved" (Election of Grace—Solid Declaration, XI, 29). The Scriptures are the "pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God." (Preface, Book of Concord, p. 8)

It should be noted that while the confessions do not deny the infallibility of the Scriptures as a whole, they make explicit reference to this attribute in contexts that are associated specifically with the Gospel, as all citations above but the last indicate. Also the statement

from the preface of the Book of Concord is involved with the evangelical perspective of the Augsburg Confession.

IV

The church committed to the Lutheran Symbols believes, teaches, and confesses that the Scriptures as the Word of God must be interpreted in conformity with the purpose of God expressed in the Scriptures, that is, in careful distinction of Law and Gospel, with clear recognition of the primacy of the Gospel, and with a view to enabling men to proclaim the Word of God to save the sinner, edify the believer, and provoke and empower him to love God and his neighbor.

Just as all doctrines, including the doctrine concerning the Scriptures, are given their dimension and direction from the Gospel, so also the interpretation of the Scriptures is to be undertaken from this perspective. Any interpretation of Scripture that does not take this into account rests on false principles, is misleading, heretical, disruptive, irreverent, and irrelevant. This is true of the interpretation of both Old and New Testaments. Proper interpretation is an expression and exercise of faith in Jesus Christ and, like faith, is a gift of the illuminating Holy Spirit. Through Holy Baptism received in infancy we have by God's grace "been given the power to interpret the Scriptures and to know Christ, which is impossible without the Holy Spirit." (Large Catechism, IV, 49)

"Those who consider the appointment of Sunday in place of the Sabbath as a necessary institution are very much mistaken, for the Holy Scriptures have abrogated the Sabbath and teach that after the revelation of the Gospel all ceremonies of the old law may be omitted." (Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, 58; cf. also XXVI, 20)

"With the abrogation of Levitical worship, the New Testament teaches that there should be a new and pure sacrifice; this is faith, prayer, thanksgiving, confession, and proclamation of the Gospel, suffering because of the Gospel, etc." (Apology, XXIV, 30)

"Therefore, as we discern the shadow in the Old Testament, so in the New we should look for what it represents and not for another symbol that seems to be a sacrifice." (Apology, XXIV, 37)

"These passages and all others like them where works are praised in the Scriptures must be taken to mean not only outward works but also the faith of the heart, since the Scriptures do not speak of hypocrisy but of righteousness in the heart and of its fruits. Whenever law and works are mentioned, we must know that Christ, the Mediator, should not be excluded." (Apology, IV, 371; cf. also Apology, IV, 183, 184; XXVII, 60)

"This is what we condemn in our opponents' position, that by interpreting such passages of Scripture in either a philosophical or a Jewish manner they eliminate from them the righteousness of faith and Christ, the Mediator." (Apology, IV, 376; cf. also Apology, XII, 75—76)

In addition to linguistic competence all commentaries must be evaluated and judged on the basis of their fidelity to the soteriological purpose of the Scriptures. If "other good, useful, and pure books, such as interpreta-

tions of the Holy Scriptures," are "in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations. Our intention was only to have a single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine which all our Evangelical churches subscribe and from which and according to which, because it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated." (Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 10)

This purpose is achieved only when the interpreter approaches the Scriptures in the stance of one who places himself under the God of the Scriptures and allows himself to be judged and comforted by Him. "The distinction between Law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly. We must therefore observe this distinction with particular diligence lest we confuse the two doctrines and change the Gospel into Law. This would darken the merit of Christ and rob disturbed consciences of the comfort which they would otherwise have in the holy Gospel when it is preached purely and without admixture, for by it Christians can support themselves in their greatest temptations against the terrors of the Law." (Solid Declaration, V, 1; cf. also Apology, IV, 5, 6 and Smalcald Articles, III, iii, 2—8)

The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ is not only the *praecipuus locus doctrinae christianae* ("main doctrine of Christianity"), but it also determines the interpretation of all Scripture. "It leads in a preeminent way to the clear and proper understanding of all of Scripture, it alone points the way to the inexpressible treasure and right knowledge of Christ, and it alone opens the door into the whole Bible. Without this article no poor conscience can have a proper, constant, and certain comfort or discern the riches of Christ's grace." (Apology, IV, 2, German; cf. also Apology, XII, 2 f.)

Where this soteriological concern is present, exegesis, whether it deals with a single article of faith or with Scripture as a whole, will lead to basically the same application. "Hence if anyone so sets forth this teaching concerning God's gracious election that sorrowing Christians can find no comfort in it but are driven to despair, or when impenitent sinners are strengthened in their malice, then it is clearly evident that this teaching is not being set forth according to the Word and will of God but according to reason and the suggestion of the wicked devil. For the apostle testifies that 'Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom. 15:4). But it is certain that any interpretation of the Scriptures which weakens or even removes this comfort and hope is contrary to the Holy Spirit's will and intent." (Solid Declaration, XI, 91 f.)

CHARLES S. ANDERSON
GEORGE AUS
ROBERT W. BERTRAM
HERBERT J. A. BOUMAN

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

Essay Adopted by the Commissioners of The American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod

It is a truism that in general the great confessions of the church have been occasioned by heresies that the church for its own purity and safety had to meet. This is true also of our Lutheran Confessions. However, it is also true, as Edmund Schlink reminds us, that "Heresy is given too much credit if it is regarded as the real cause of the origin of a Confession and as the justification of its existence. A Confession is praise of grace. Heresies come and go, but the Gospel remains."¹ This is true in a preeminent sense of the Lutheran Confessions, which from beginning to end are concerned to set forth the Gospel as that which the church believes, teaches, and confesses and therefore also defends when it is attacked or endangered.

The Lutheran Confessions understand themselves as exposition of Scripture, yes, as the summary of Holy Scripture, whose heart they understand to be the Gospel.

The Confessions "retain the marks of their particular origin as far as their proportions, illustrations, and terminology are concerned."² This does not prevent them from being authoritative for the church in later ages and relevant to contemporary problems. This is true in a preeminent sense with respect to the doctrine of the church.

It is well known that the very first specifically Lutheran confession, the Augsburg Confession, sought to effect a reconciliation between the party that held with the teachings of Martin Luther and the group that upheld the established church which had banned Luther. The unity of the church was therefore one of the main objectives of this document.

Representatives of The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches are here participating in an endeavor to overcome divisions within the Lutheran Church. We believe that the Augsburg Confession, together with the other Lutheran Confessions which explain and amplify the Augsburg Confession, sets forth the principles that are to guide us in reestablishing and maintaining the unity of the church.

These Confessions grew out of serious and widespread efforts in the 16th century to cleanse the church of error and to restore it to a pure proclamation of the Gospel. They say what needed to be said in their day. Later centuries, especially the 20th century with its vastly expanded ecumenical interest, have given rise to additional concerns. In order that we may understand the Confessions on their own terms and against their own background, we must be familiar with generally held views concerning the church which were opposed by the Augsburg Confession.

Students of the history of dogma tell us that, strictly speaking, there was no ecclesiastically fixed and pre-

scribed doctrine (dogma) of the church until the Lutheran Confessions were written and accepted by their proponents. There was, to be sure, a Christological dogma since the fourth century and a Trinitarian dogma since the fifth or sixth century; these doctrines had been set forth in the Nicene and the Athanasian Creed. However, though both the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed include reference to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, they make no attempt to provide a formal definition of the church.

Yet there were within Roman Catholicism a number of distinct views concerning the nature and structure of the church that were gradually developed during the Middle Ages and quite generally accepted and defended in the 16th century. It is to these views that Article VII of the Augsburg Confession addressed itself and in opposition to which it offered an understanding of the church that conformed to the teaching of the Lutheran Reformers.

When Article VII of the Augsburg Confession was attacked by the Roman Catholic response known as the Roman Confutation, Melancthon felt compelled not only to defend the doctrine of the church as set forth in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession but also to show what was in fact the understanding of the church then held by many advocates of papal power. He says:

Perhaps our opponents demand some such definition of the church as the following. It is the supreme outward monarchy of the whole world in which the Roman pontiff must have unlimited power beyond question or censure. He may establish articles of faith, abolish the Scriptures by his leave, institute devotions and sacrifices, enact whatever laws he pleases, excuse and exempt men from any laws, divine, canonical, or civil, as he wishes. From him the emperor and all kings have received their power and right to rule, and this at Christ's command; for as the Father subjected everything to Him, so now this right has been transferred to the pope. Therefore the pope must be lord of the whole world, of all the kingdoms of the world, and of all public and private affairs. He must have plenary power in both the temporal and the spiritual realm, both swords, the temporal and the spiritual.

Melancthon adds somewhat sarcastically: "Now, this definition of the papal kingdom rather than of the church of Christ has as its authors not only the canonists but also Dan. 11:36-39."³

The Lutherans believed that the Roman church of their time had become a largely externalized structure controlled by the Roman pope, who claimed complete power over both church and state. Moreover, it was evident to the Reformers that the church was under the domination of the Law rather than permeated by the Gospel, that works demanded by the church were held to be meritorious and therefore crowded out trust in the gracious promises of God. Furthermore, it was clear that many of the works and ceremonies imposed by the church on its members went beyond, even contravened, the commandments of God. Against this background the

Augsburg Confession describes the nature of the church and shows what is necessary for the true unity of the church.

It is also taught among us that the one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as St. Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."⁴

I. The Essence of the Church

In the above words from Article VII of the Augsburg Confession the Christian church is defined according to its essence. It is "the assembly of all believers." The church is here defined from the standpoint of the Gospel which calls for faith, that is, trust in the promise of the Gospel. The church is therefore the assembly of all those who have this faith.

This definition is repeated in Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession: "Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints. . . ." However, Article VIII also takes cognizance of the form of the church in the world when it says that "in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly. . . ."

Here the church is not *defined* according to its essence, but *described* according to the form in which men see it.

This concept of the church—that it is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints—recurs in the later Lutheran Confessions.⁵

II. The Marks of the Church

The church, which is not the powerful external, hierarchical kingdom which the advocates of papal power believed it to be, is known by certain signs: the pure preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments according to the Gospel. Article VII of the Augsburg Confession says: "This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel."

The pure preaching of the Gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments are an integral part of the doctrine of the church. The church comes into being and is maintained in no other way than through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the holy sacraments. Because the Gospel in Word and sacrament effectively creates and preserves faith, the church will be found wherever the Gospel is preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. The proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments are therefore the marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).

III. The Function of the Church

The Confessions indicate clearly what they consider the function of the church to be. The territories and cities that accepted the Lutheran Reformation declare it to be their understanding of the function of the church as restored by the Gospel

to do and to continue to do everything that is useful and profitable to the increase and expansion of God's praise and glory, to the propagation of that Word of his that alone brings salvation, to the tranquillity and peace of Christian schools and churches, and to the needed consolation and instruction of poor, misguided consciences.⁶

The following statements indicate a similar understanding of the church's function:

We are not dreaming about some Platonic republic, as has been slanderously alleged, but we teach that this church actually exists, made up of true believers and righteous men scattered throughout the world. And we add its marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. This church is properly called "the pillar of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15), for it retains the pure Gospel and what Paul calls the "foundation" (1 Cor. 3:12), that is, the true knowledge of Christ and faith.⁷

The Gospel requires of those who preside over the churches that they preach the Gospel, remit sins, administer the sacraments, and, in addition, exercise jurisdiction, that is, excommunicate those who are guilty of notorious crimes and absolve those who repent.⁸

It is also made clear that these functions belong to the entire church and are not to be regarded as the exclusive prerogative of the hierarchy:

Consequently, when the regular bishops become enemies of the Gospel and are unwilling to administer ordination, the churches retain the right to ordain for themselves. For wherever the church exists, the right to administer the Gospel also exists.⁹

This Gospel-related function of the church is likewise emphasized in the following statements from the Large Catechism:

He [the Holy Spirit] has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it he illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it.

Therefore everything in the Christian church is so ordered that we may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and through signs appointed to comfort and revive our consciences as long as we live. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are in the Christian church, where there is full forgiveness of sin. God forgives us, and we forgive, bear with, and aid one another.

But outside the Christian church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness.¹⁰

Thus the function of the church to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments is taken for granted throughout the Lutheran Confessions.

IV. The Structure of the Church

For many centuries Roman Catholicism had emphasized the importance of the church's structure. Originally the bishops were looked upon as stewards and guardians of apostolic doctrine. However, this estimate of their function was gradually neglected and by the 16th century the accent was placed largely on hierarchical organization, a structure in which the bishops

exercised strong external control over their dioceses and in which the bishop of Rome claimed to be the head of the church on earth.

While the Lutheran Confessions are by no means indifferent to good order in the church, their principal emphasis lies on the functional character of the church's ministry. On "Order in the Church" the Augsburg Confession says: "It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call."¹¹

The Roman Confutation approved this article, provided that the Lutherans employ canonical ordination as observed in the Roman Catholic Church. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession responds: "On this matter we have given frequent testimony in the assembly to our deep desire to maintain the church polity and various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, although they were created by human authority."¹²

Thus the Lutheran Confessions acknowledged the episcopal polity as valid and useful but at the same time considered it to be of human origin and not something essential to the structure of the church, as Roman Catholics had come to regard it (cf. Treatise, 66, cited above). What is essential for the church is the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

The clerical office is brought into direct connection with justifying faith: "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."¹³

Or, expressed in another way, the structure of the church is significant only in relation to the function of the church. The Confessions affirm that "according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments."¹⁴

V. The Unity of the Church

Having set forth the true nature and function of the church, the Augsburg Confession is in a position to specify the requirements for true unity in the church. The Lutherans were unable to accede to the demands of the Roman Catholic Church that uniformity in ceremonies must be maintained to establish or preserve the church's unity. To such demands the Confession says: "It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places."¹⁵

On the basis of the Scriptures the confessors believed that the church is created and preserved by means of the Gospel and the sacraments and therefore drew the conclusion that "it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."¹⁶

Although this statement sounds deceptively simple as a formula for church unity, a careful study of the words will demonstrate that the formula does in fact include all that is necessary.

As the statement indicates, the first requisite for the true unity of the church is "that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it." It is not sufficient that the Gospel is correctly stated in the church's official confession. It must actually be proclaimed in the pulpits and taught in the church. This does not mean insistence on an externally pure church. The confessors are aware of human weakness and of the presence of "unprofitable opinions" in the church. But because the people holding these unprofitable opinions "do not overthrow the foundation, these are forgiven them or even corrected."¹⁷ Therefore occasional or incidental aberrations in teaching do not destroy the unity of the church, especially where such aberrations are dealt with in a patient and constructive manner. Unfortunately, not all that bears the name "Gospel" within Christendom is in truth the Gospel of Christ. For this reason the Confession asserts that the Gospel is to be preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it."

Since the Lutheran Confessions look upon the sacraments simply as specific forms of the Gospel (cf. Smalcald Articles, Part III, IV), they are quite consistent when they include in their requirements for the unity of the church an administration of the sacraments "in accordance with the divine Word."

Although church government played a prominent role in Roman Catholic definition (as summarized by Melancthon in Apology VII & VIII, 23), the Lutheran Confessions do not regard it as essential.

A comparison of the German and Latin texts of Augsburg Confession, Article VII, might suggest at first glance that there is a discrepancy between them with regard to the requirements for true unity in the church. While the German says that "it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it," the Latin has the wording: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel. . . ." ¹⁸ The latter might appear to assert that there must be an intellectual consensus with respect to the doctrine of the Gospel or that a consensus in written documents is sufficient. However, the context indicates that the term "teaching" (*doctrina*) must be understood in an active or dynamic sense of public preaching and teaching. Hence there is no substantive difference between the two texts.

When the Lutherans speak of the Gospel as being preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" they compel us to ask about the meaning of both "pure" and "Gospel." The word "pure" signifies freedom from any element that would vitiate the Gospel, in this case particularly every form of work righteousness. Regarding the word "Gospel" the Formula of Concord, an interpreter of the Augsburg Confession, makes some careful distinctions. It states that

when the word "Gospel" means the entire doctrine of Christ which he proclaimed personally in his teaching ministry and which his apostles also set forth (examples of this meaning occur in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:24), then it is correct to say or write that the Gospel is a proclamation both of repentance and of forgiveness of sins.

But when law and Gospel are opposed to each other, as when Moses is spoken of as a teacher of the law in contrast to Christ as a preacher of the Gospel, then we believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel is not a proclamation of contrition and reproof but is, strictly speaking, precisely a comforting and joyful message which does not reprove or terrify but comforts consciences that are frightened by the law, directs them solely to the merit of Christ, and raises them up again by the delightful proclamation of God's grace and favor acquired through the merits of Christ.¹⁹

It is instructive to examine the Augsburg Confession itself from this point of view. The Gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Christ Jesus; it is evident that Article I of the Augsburg Confession witnesses to the God of the Gospel, the God who in Christ loved and saved the world. It is the God who is confessed in the three Ecumenical Creeds, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Without this article the Gospel cannot be preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it." Article II treats of original sin. This article is not in any way a part of the Gospel but belongs to that other doctrine of which the Scriptures and the Confessions speak, namely, the Law.²⁰ Yet the Law and the Gospel, though radically different from each other, must be preached together even when they are properly distinguished.²¹ The Biblical Gospel apart from the Law would be pointless. Therefore the doctrine of sin must be proclaimed if the Gospel is to be preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it."²²

Here belongs also what Article XVIII says of "Freedom of the Will." A widely held view of man's free will in Roman Catholic circles minimized the seriousness of original sin. The Lutherans therefore believed that such an understanding conflicted with the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it."

Article III treats of "The Son of God." Through Him and His work the Gospel has become a reality. Where the Son of God is not known or the deity of Christ and His atoning work is denied, there can be no Gospel, and therefore the Gospel cannot under such circumstances be preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it."

Article IV treats of "Justification." This article tells us that forgiveness of sins and righteousness before God are given us by God by grace, for Christ's sake, and are received by faith. Justification, as Luther tells us in the Smalcald Articles,²³ is the chief article of the Christian faith, and it is simply not possible to preach the Gospel purely if this teaching is corrupted.

Article V treats of "The Office of the Ministry," which stands in direct causative relationship to faith. "To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry." The Confession makes it clear that the office or work of the ministry is nothing else than preaching or teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments. Through them, as through means, God "gives the Holy

Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel."²⁴

Article VI treats of "The New Obedience." This subject, which deals with the Christian life, is of the utmost importance if the Gospel is to be preached "in conformity with a pure understanding of it." In Roman Catholicism at the time of the Reformation, the new obedience was said to be necessary for the sinner's justification and was, in fact, made a cause of justification. The Lutherans regarded this as a complete perversion of the Gospel. The Confessions teach that "this faith is bound to bring forth good fruits and that it is necessary to do the good works commanded by God."²⁵

The doctrine of the church, set forth in Articles VII and VIII, is likewise presented in conformity with a pure understanding of the Gospel. From this perspective the church is not an external kingdom under a hierarchical government, nor an association of people bound together by ceremonies and human ordinances, but rather a fellowship of people who believe the Gospel.

Article XI deals with private confession, which the Lutherans regarded very highly and wished to have retained. For them confession had its value because of the absolution which proclaims and imparts the forgiveness of sins and is therefore the very voice of the Gospel. However, the Augsburg Confession denies the necessity of enumerating all sins as was commonly required, since such an enumeration is impossible. Moreover, such a requirement militates against a pure understanding of the Gospel because it stresses what man must do and it may therefore easily promote work righteousness.

Article XII defines repentance as "nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ). . . ." Thus this teaching too is in conformity with a pure understanding of the Gospel.

Similarly all other subjects treated in the Augsburg Confession can be shown to set forth the church's teaching from the evangelical perspective.

Articles XXII—XXVIII speak about matters in dispute and give an account of the abuses that have been corrected. Certain Roman Catholics in our time have expressed an awareness of some of the "abuses" enumerated in the Augsburg Confession and are concerned about their correction. At the time of the Reformation, many of the practices in question were, as a rule, not regarded as abuses. In fact, they were often vigorously defended.

In the correction of abuses the Augsburg Confession takes the same stance as in matters of doctrine. It asks how these abuses affect the teaching of the Gospel. Forbidding priests to marry, compelling people to go to confession and to recount their sins in detail, forbidding the eating of certain foods at certain times as though such abstention could merit grace and make satisfaction for sins, judging monastic vows to be meritorious — all

these are rejected as militating against the pure preaching of the Gospel.

In addition to the purely preached Gospel as necessary for the true unity of the church, the Augsburg Confession also requires "that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word." The necessity and benefit of Baptism are set forth in Article IX, the essence of the Lord's Supper in Article X, and the use of the sacraments as means of grace in Article XIII.

In stressing that the sacraments must be administered in accordance with the divine Word, the Lutheran Confessions are critical of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Sacramentarians, a name applied to those who denied the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. Article XXII condemns withholding the cup from the laity and carrying the sacrament around in procession as being "contrary to the institution of Christ." The errors of both Roman Catholics and Sacramentarians are enumerated and rejected in the Formula of Concord, Epitome VII, 21—42.

With respect to Baptism there was less dispute than with respect to the Lord's Supper. However, the Lutheran Confessions repeatedly and clearly reject the Anabaptist denial of infant Baptism, as well as the Anabaptist denial of the power of Baptism.²⁶

From all this it is evident that the Augsburg Confession is very serious about preaching the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" and the administration of the sacraments "in accordance with the divine Word." This commitment calls for fidelity in all matters that are either a part of the Gospel or necessary background for the Gospel (e.g., the doctrine of sin) or a necessary consequence of the Gospel (e.g., the doctrine of good works).

The Confession also recognizes that the Gospel cannot long be proclaimed purely where the church is indifferent to abuses that rest on a misunderstanding, if not a denial, of the Gospel, like many of the abuses to which the 16th-century Reformation objected.

In this presentation we have not emphasized the source and norm of doctrine. Any reading of the Lutheran Confessions will show that they are firmly committed to the Holy Scriptures as the fountain and norm of all teaching.²⁷

LESSONS FROM THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS FOR CHURCH UNITY IN OUR TIME

Lutheran bodies engaged in endeavors to overcome their divisions need to be guided by the principle enunciated in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession: "It is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."

Guided by these words of our Confession, we must test all articles of faith taught in the church to determine whether they serve the pure preaching of the Gospel. Any teaching that is contrary to the Gospel impairs the

true unity of the church. Moreover, Articles XXII—XXVIII demonstrate that practices in the church that militate against the Gospel likewise impair the true unity of the church.

Churches endeavoring to establish or preserve unity in the church need earnestly to raise these questions in the course of their mutual endeavors. They need to apply themselves in love to a correction of errors that conflict with a pure proclamation of the Gospel. They need also to concern themselves with the cleansing of practices that endanger the purity of the Gospel message.

Where Lutheran bodies have discovered or have been granted a genuine consensus in the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" and in the administration of the sacraments "in accordance with the divine Word," they not only may but should enter into pulpit and altar fellowship.

THE COMMITTEE

ALVIN ROGNESS, *Chairman*
FRED MEUSER
FRED KRAMER
STEPHEN MAZAK, SR.
LORMAN PETERSEN

NOTES

¹ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehnke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 22.

² Schlink, p. xix.

³ Apology VII & VIII, 23—24. We quote the Confessions from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. and ed. Theodore G. Tappert in collaboration with Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, Arthur C. Piepkorn (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

⁴ Augsburg Confession VII.

⁵ Apology VII & VIII; Smalcald Articles, Part III, XII; Large Catechism II, 47—48.

⁶ Preface to the Book of Concord, p. 13.

⁷ Apology VII & VIII, 20.

⁸ Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 60.

⁹ Ibid., 66—67.

¹⁰ Large Catechism II, 42, 55—56.

¹¹ Augsburg Confession XIV.

¹² Apology XIV, 1.

¹³ Augsburg Confession V, 1—2.

¹⁴ Ibid., XXVIII, 5.

¹⁵ Ibid., VII, 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., VII, 2.

¹⁷ Apology VII & VIII, 20.

¹⁸ "Et ad veram unitatem ecclesiae satis est consentire de doctrina evangelii. . ."

¹⁹ Formula of Concord, Epitome V, 6—7.

²⁰ Apology IV, 5—7.

²¹ Ibid., 256—57.

²² Ibid., II, 33—34, 50; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II.

²³ Smalcald Articles, Part II, I, 1—5.

²⁴ Cf. also Augsburg Confession XXVIII, 8.

²⁵ Augsburg Confession VI, 1 (Latin); cf. also XX, 27—30.

²⁶ Ibid., IX; Apology IX, 2; Smalcald Articles, Part III, V; Large Catechism IV, 47 ff.

²⁷ Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, 5; Apology IV, 107—108; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Summary Formulation, 3.

JOINT STATEMENT AND DECLARATION

of the Representatives of The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to Their Respective Church Bodies

The American Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches acknowledge that the Spirit of God has led them in their common loyalty to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions to seek closer affiliation with each other within the unity of faith and similarity of church life that prevail among the pastors and congregations of their respective church bodies.

Recent consultations of the representatives of the several churches have revealed consensus and mutual trust in their understanding of the following: What commitment to the "Sola Gratia" of the Lutheran Confessions involves; the Lutheran Confessions and "Sola Scriptura"; on the doctrine of the church in the Lutheran Confessions. The published articles on these themes are joint products written by representative theologians of each church acting together. They were reviewed and revised by the plenary intersynodical committee in joint session, unanimously approved by all the members and consultants present at the meetings, and submitted to their respective church bodies for study and discussion. No objections to these documents have come to the attention of the official intersynodical committee.

It should be remembered that the consultations that led to the indicated consensus are not a recent innovation. A number of the bodies now comprised in the participating churches were at one time in full fellowship with each other. It is true that some of these ties were later broken. Yet there have been repeated and sincere efforts at reconciliation and reunion. In the early years of the 20th century a number of attempts were made to restore the broken fellowships. In the 30s, 40s, and 50s serious and extended official conferences between the former American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod led to a series of documents and resolutions culminating in the *Common Confession*, a document to which the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches also subscribed. During the latter part of this period the former American Lutheran Church, along with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the Lutheran Free Church conducted meetings which led to the formulation of the *United Testimony on Faith and Life*.^{*} This document formed the basis for the union of these bodies and the creation of The American Lutheran Church. In its 1959 convention The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod invited the new church body, to be organized in 1960, to participate in consultations with a view to establishing pulpit and altar fellowship.

The most recent consultations are therefore a continuation of a long line of earnest endeavors to be truly

united in a common commitment to, and confession of, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and have led the intersynodical committee to the judgment that the time has come for the participating churches to consider action on a declaration of pulpit and altar fellowship with each other.

The theme of the first published essay is the grace of God. Without denying the reality of divine wrath and judgment in Scripture and in human history, the members of the committee unanimously affirmed that the Triune God in every activity and attitude regarding man is the God of all grace. His grace is abundantly revealed in the creation, redemption, and sanctification of man. As members of His church, "a people created and controlled by the Word of grace, who put their trust wholly in the grace of God and confidently await the new world, which God's grace will create," we are obligated to reject everything that conflicts with this grace of God in either doctrine or life.

Further consensus was expressed in affirming that the Scriptures are the Word or address of God to man for the purpose of revealing His grace in His Son, Jesus Christ. The Scriptures as the Word of God are the sole authority in the church, both as the source of the church's message and the norm of its content. The Scriptures as the Word of God provide the church with the adequate, reliable, and efficacious means for her work among her members and for her mission to the world. The Scriptures as the Word of God must be interpreted in conformity with the purpose of God expressed in the Scriptures, that is, in careful distinction of Law and Gospel, with clear recognition of the primacy of the Gospel, and with a view to enabling men to proclaim the Word of God to save the sinner, edify the believer, and provoke and empower him to love God and his neighbor.

Furthermore, consensus was expressed in the understanding of the Biblical doctrine of the church as witnessed in the Lutheran Confessions. It was affirmed that in conformity with the Confessions all teaching in the church must be tested to determine whether it conforms to the pure teaching of the Gospel. Any teaching that is contrary to the Gospel impairs the true unity of the church. Likewise, practices in the church that militate against the Gospel impair the true unity of the church.

Churches recognizing unity of faith, established by the Holy Spirit, and endeavoring to preserve that unity in the life of the church must in the testing of doctrine and in the ordering of church practice submit to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, who has promised to lead the church into all truth.

The members of the committee are unanimous in asserting that where Lutheran bodies have been granted and have discovered a consensus in the preaching of the Gospel "in conformity with a pure understanding of it" and in the administration of the sacraments "in accord-

^{*} The Augustana Lutheran Church also participated in the writing of the *United Testimony of Faith and Life* but did not become a constituent member of The American Lutheran Church.

ance with the divine Word" (A. C. VII), they not only may but should enter into pulpit and altar fellowship.

According to the Scriptures the people of God are to confess their common Lord with one mind and one voice and to live together in unity and mutual assistance. Where people disagree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel, they cannot make common cause in their witness to the Gospel. Conversely, where Christians share a wholehearted consensus in their understanding and proclamation of the Gospel, it is sinful separatism for them to erect or maintain barriers to fellowship.

When churches establish pulpit and altar fellowship, they acknowledge their oneness of faith and their agreement in the doctrine of the Gospel. Church bodies that have developed their separate traditions will always manifest certain diversities. Diversity, such as participation or nonparticipation in certain interchurch agencies and enterprises, may exist without disrupting fellowship among our churches, provided that such participation or nonparticipation does not constitute a denial or contradiction of the Gospel.

Since we believe that the Holy Spirit has led us to recognize this consensus in the Gospel, we confidently

look for further blessings and benefits upon our churches as they manifest their fellowship, even in the face of whatever new assaults from the forces of evil this very progress in fellowship may incur. On the basis of their common commitment to the Gospel, churches in fellowship will help one another to develop consistently evangelical practice regarding unchristian and antichristian associations.

Under the leading of our Lord and the illumination of His Spirit, our churches are committed to the holy Gospel. If they will permit the power of the Gospel to build up their faith, to shape the content and form of their confession, to maintain and renew the purity of their life and practice, and to direct and determine the quality of their witness in word and deed, there will be no problem or friction, no difference or divergence that cannot be dealt with and overcome in common loyalty and love.

We pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will so lead our churches that they will always be agreed in faith and life, and that a declaration of pulpit and altar fellowship will strengthen our common commitment to proclaim the Gospel of God and to live in the world as members of the body of Christ.