

**STUDY EDITION OF**

**A STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURAL  
AND CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLES**

**St. Louis, Missouri  
1972**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	5
<b>I. Christ as Savior and Lord</b>	9
<b>II. Law and Gospel</b>	12
<b>III. Mission of the Church</b>	15
<b>IV. Holy Scripture</b>	18
A. The Inspiration of Scripture	18
B. The Purpose of Scripture	20
C. The Gospel and Holy Scripture	23
D. The Authority of Scripture	26
E. The Canonical Text of Scripture	29
F. The Infallibility of Scripture	31
G. The Unity of Scripture	34
H. Old Testament Prophecy	36
I. Historical Methods of Biblical Interpretation	39
<b>V. Original Sin</b>	42
<b>VI. Confessional Subscription</b>	45
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	47



## PREFACE

When President J. A. O. Preus, in consultation with the synodical Vice-Presidents, published *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, he indicated that *A Statement* was intended to serve “as a tool to identify theological and doctrinal issues which the Synod needs to consider and resolve.” While emphasizing that *A Statement* was not intended to serve as a “new standard of orthodoxy,” President Preus encouraged the Synod to study the document, not only to understand which issues were under discussion in the Synod but to offer guidance in applying Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to those issues.

Since the publication of *A Statement*, several District conventions have urged that it receive careful and widespread study. In addition, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations commended the President for producing this document and sharing it with the church. The commission recommended that it be studied “in conferences and congregations” and expressed the desire that the use of *A Statement* would “assist the Synod in the ‘conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith.’” (Synodical Constitution, Art. III)

The overwhelming majority of responses to *A Statement* have been positive. The Central Illinois District, for example, affirmed this *Statement* “as expressing the Scriptural and confessional stance of the Synod” and recommended its use to the officials of the Synod in their endeavor to bring about a solution to our controversies and problems. The head of our sister church in Germany has recently written that *A Statement* makes our church “conscious of the traditional principles of the Missouri Synod in a clear and uncompromising manner.” Hundreds of letters from individuals, and conferences have enthusiastically endorsed the theology of *A Statement*.

But *A Statement* has its critics too, and many of them have expressed themselves in rather extreme terms. A prominent theologian of another Lutheran Church body in America has called it “a Biblicistic and confessionalistic perversion of the truth of the Gospel entrusted to evangelical Lutherans.” Within

our own Synod, the faculty of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis has claimed that *A Statement* is “inadequate theologically,” that it “makes binding dogma out of mere theological opinion,” and that it “has a spirit alien to Lutheran confessional theology.”

One recent comment on *A Statement* by a theological professor of the Lutheran Church in America is of particular interest. Although he is critical of its theology, he observes that *A Statement* contains “nothing even slightly innovative” but is only “traditional, and never retracted, solid Missourianism.” (Leigh Jordahl, *Dialog*, Autumn 1972, pp. 319-20)

The Synod thus faces some critical questions. Does this document, prepared by the Synod’s President and endorsed by thousands of its members, in fact express “the Synod’s Scriptural and confessional stance on a number of important topics,” as it claims? Or is it somehow to be regarded as a personal theology that must be characterized as un-Lutheran, unbiblical, unconfessional, and unevangelical, as its critics claim? If indeed *A Statement* is “solid Missourianism,” how can it be said to have “a spirit alien to Lutheran confessional theology” without thereby indicting the entire Synod? Answers to such questions should come only from a careful and thorough study of the Scriptures and Confessions themselves, as well as a review of what our Synod has stated as it has applied Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to a number of these issues in various statements and resolutions.

It is to facilitate that kind of study that this present study edition of *A Statement* has been prepared. It contains a number of Biblical and confessional references as well as citations from various synodical documents—all without comment—on the matters treated in *A Statement*. A list of questions is appended to each section for possible use with discussion groups. This material, which includes the documentation on which *A Statement* is based, was assembled by my office at the request of President Preus in response to a large number of requests for the Biblical and confessional basis of *A Statement*. It is shared with the church through the generosity of a number of individuals who are seeking to encourage theological

study in the Synod as a means of helping us remain faithful to the Word of God.

It should be understood that the distribution of this study edition of *A Statement* is not intended to make it a "new standard of orthodoxy" for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. As one of our District Presidents has observed, *A Statement* "carries no authoritative weight except as it demonstrates and persuades as being in keeping with Scripture and the Confessions." (Dr. Paul Jacobs, President of the California and Nevada District, in an essay to the 1972 Colorado District convention)

To echo the words of the head of our sister church in Germany, Dr. Gerhard Rost, it is my prayer that this document will "stimulate intensive study of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions" and that it will be a "means of bringing about a genuinely evangelical dialogue in a brotherly spirit."

Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann  
Executive Secretary  
Commission on Theology and Church Relations  
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod  
November 1972

## SECOND PREFACE

*In its July 6–13, 1973, synodical convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod officially adopted A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles as a "statement of belief" which "expresses the Synod's position on current doctrinal issues." The full text of the convention's action is as follows:*

### Preamble

The Formula of Concord, in the Lutheran Confessions, mentions Doctor Luther as asserting that "the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be placed on a par with it, but that everything be subjected to it." The next paragraph begins: "This, of course, does not mean that other good, useful, and pure books such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles, should be rejected. If they are in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations." (FC, SD, Summary, paragraphs 9–10)

Doctor Walther's "Thirteen Theses," which emerged during the Predestinarian Controversy in America, surely fits into this category. The first of these theses appeared in *Der Lutheraner*, 15 January 1880, and the last in the 1 May 1880 issue. The entire 13 were approved one year later by a vast majority at the synodical convention in Fort Wayne, 11–12 May 1881. (Missouri Synod *Proceedings*, 1881, pp. 35–36, 41)

Our Synod has continued to be greatly concerned with doctrine, as past convention resolutions indicate

(1950–1971). Also, in order to clarify the status of doctrinal statements, the Synod approved Resolution 5-24, "Status of Synodically Adopted Doctrinal Statements," at the Milwaukee convention, July 1971, which reads:

*Resolved*, That the Synod reaffirm the desirability of the formulation of doctrinal statements which clearly set forth the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and apply them to issues of our day; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod clearly state that such doctrinal formulations are subordinate to the Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod distinguish between resolutions concerning doctrine formulated and adopted at a convention and more formal statements of belief which are produced by officially authorized groups, and which are then presented to the congregations and clergy of the Synod for study and discussion, and which are subsequently adopted by a synodical convention; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod reaffirm the resolutions of recent conventions that the Synod "honor and uphold the synodically adopted statements as valid interpretations of Christian doctrine" (1969 *Proceedings*, p. 91); and be it finally

*Resolved*, That in the case of the aforementioned more formal and comprehensive statements of belief that the Synod declare—

- (1) its position that these statements, together with all other formulations of doctrine, derive their authority from the Word of God which they set forth from the Holy Scriptures;
- (2) its insistence that the ministry of the church regard these formulations with special seriousness and

that those who disagree with these formulations in part or in whole be held to present their objections to them formally to those officials whom the Synod has given the immediate supervision of their doctrine;

- (3) its conviction that as a result of joint study of the Word of God the Holy Spirit will lead the Synod into all truth, that possible errors in the aforementioned statements will be discovered and corrected, that instances of failure to submit to the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures will be evangelically dealt with on an individual pastoral basis, and that the Synod can speak with a voice that is Scriptural, Gospel oriented, truly Lutheran, and that we will continue to "walk together" as a true Synod.

Accordingly, the following resolution is herewith submitted.

WHEREAS, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, issued by the President of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in consultation with the vice-presidents of the Synod, 3 March 1972, addresses itself to the doctrinal issues troubling the church today; and

WHEREAS, *A Statement* presents what the Synod throughout its history has confessed and taught on these issues, as witnessed to by synodical statements, catechetical expositions, and convention resolutions; and

WHEREAS, *A Statement* is, therefore, neither a new standard of orthodoxy nor a document "based on private writings, but on such books as have been composed, approved, and received in the name of the churches which pledge themselves to one doctrine and religion" (FC, SD, Comp. Summary, paragraph 2); and

WHEREAS, The Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations has evaluated *A Statement* as follows:

We find the doctrinal content of *A Statement* to be in accord with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions and to contain nothing contrary to them. We also find the doctrinal

content of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* to be in accord with the doctrinal position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as it has been taught historically and expressed in the official doctrinal statements of the Synod [Adopted 3 November 1972];

and

WHEREAS, *A Statement*, in its entirety, has been presented to the congregations and clergy of the Synod, and during the past 16 months has been studied and discussed throughout the church, and has been approved by various synodical boards (Board of Control, Springfield; Board for Higher Education) and congregations; and

WHEREAS, The Lutheran church in the past, when confronted with doctrinal controversy and crisis, has accepted expressions of belief which are in agreement with Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions, e. g., the *Thirteen Theses of Doctor Walther*, 1881; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod declare *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, in all its parts, to be Scriptural and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions, and therefore a formulation which derives its authority from the Word of God and which expresses the Synod's position on current doctrinal issues; and be it further

*Resolved*, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod declare *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* to be a "more formal and comprehensive statement of belief" in the sense of Resolution 5-24 of the 1971 Milwaukee convention, and that the Synod further declare that *A Statement* shall hold the status defined in said resolution (Preamble, above).

**Action:** *Adopted (10).*

Resolution 3-01

1973 *Proceedings*, pp. 127–128





# I. Christ as Savior and Lord

We believe, teach, and confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord, and that through faith in Him we receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. We confess that "our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins and grace but that we obtain forgiveness and grace only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been ordained to be the mediator and propitiation through whom the Father is reconciled" (AC, XX, 9). We believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven and that all who die without faith in Him are eternally damned. We believe that those who believe in Christ will enjoy a blissful relationship with Him during the interim between their death and His second coming and that on the last day their bodies will be raised.

We therefore reject the following:

1. That we may operate on the assumption that there may be other ways of salvation than through faith in Jesus Christ;
2. That some persons who lack faith in Christ may be considered "anonymous Christians";
3. That there is no eternal hell for unbelievers and ungodly men.

## Scripture Passages

*John 4:42.* They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." *Thesis*

*1 Timothy 2:5-6.* For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. *Thesis, 1*

*John 3:16-18.* For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For 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; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. *Thesis*

*John 8:24.* I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he. *Thesis 1*

*John 14:6.* Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." *1*

*Ephesians 2:8-9.* For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. *Thesis*

*Acts 4:12.* And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. *Thesis, 1*

*John 5:28-29.* Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. *Thesis, 3*

*John 6:40.* For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. *Thesis*

*Romans 3:21-26.* But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. *Thesis*

*Galatians 2:15-16.* We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 15:42-44.* So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. *Thesis*

*Philippians 1:23.* I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. *Thesis*

*Matthew 23:33.* You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? *3*

*Luke 23:43.* And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." *Thesis*

*John 5:29.* (All who are in the tombs will) come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. *Thesis*

*John 3:18.* He who believes in him is not condemned; he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. *3*

*John 10:14, 26-27.* I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me. . . but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. *2*

*Romans 8:38-39.* For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Thesis*

*2 Corinthians 5:8.* We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. *Thesis*

*1 John 4:9-10.* By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (NAS) *Thesis*

## Lutheran Confessions

Therefore men cannot keep the law by their own strength, and they are all under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death. On this account the law cannot free us from sin or justify us, but the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification was given because of Christ. He was given for us to make satisfaction for the sins of the world and has been appointed as the mediator and the propitiator. *Ap, IV, 40: Thesis*

We begin by teaching that our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins and grace but that we obtain forgiveness

and grace only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been ordained to be the mediator and propitiation through whom the Father is reconciled. Consequently whoever trusts that he merits grace by works despises the merit and grace of Christ and seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ has said of himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). *AC, XX, 9-10: Thesis, 1*

The devil and all powers, therefore, must be subject to him and lie beneath his feet until finally, at the last day, he will completely divide and separate us from the wicked world, the devil, death, sin, etc. *LC, II, 31: Thesis*

Our churches also teach that at the consummation of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise up all the dead. To the godly and elect he will give eternal life and endless joy, but ungodly men and devils he will condemn to be tormented without end.

Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils. *AC, XVIII, 1-4: Thesis, 3*

However, it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that we are to invoke saints or seek help from them. "For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), who is the only saviour, the only highpriest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8:34). *AC, XXI, 2: Thesis, 1*

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." But only faith takes hold of the name of Christ. Therefore we are saved by trust in the name of Christ, not in our works. For "name" here means that which is cited as the cause of salvation. *Ap, IV, 40:1, 2*

God's revealed will involves both items: First, that he would receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ; second, that he would punish those who deliberately turn away from the holy commandment and involve themselves again in the filth of this world (2 Peter 2:20), prepare their hearts for Satan (Luke 11:24, 25), and outrage the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29), and that he would harden, blind, and for ever damn them if they continue therein. *FC, SD, XI, 83: 3*

Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent. And this disease or vice of origin is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit. *AC, II, 1-2: Thesis, 1, 2*

What we have shown thus far, on the basis of the Scriptures and arguments derived from the Scriptures, was to make clear that by faith alone we receive the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and by faith alone are justified, that is, out of unrighteous we are made righteous and regenerated men. One can easily see how necessary it is to understand this faith, for through it alone we recognize Christ's work and receive his blessings and it alone provides a sure and firm consolation for devout minds. *Ap, IV, 117-18: 2*

In Christ we should seek the eternal election of the Father, who has decreed in his eternal counsel that he would save no one except those who acknowledge his Son, Christ, and truly believe on him. *FC, Ep, XI, 13: Thesis, 1, 2*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

The purpose of this miraculous incarnation of the Son of God was that He might become the *Mediator* between God and men, both fulfilling the divine Law and suffering and dying in the place of mankind. In this manner God has reconciled the whole sinful world

unto Himself, Gal. 4:4-5; 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:18-19. *Brief Statement, "Redemption": Thesis*

Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of *justification*. *Brief Statement, "Justification": Thesis, 1, 2*

We teach that conversion consists in this, that a man, having learned from the Law of God that he is a lost and condemned sinner, is brought to faith in the Gospel, which offers him forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation for the sake of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, Acts 11:21; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 26:18. *Brief Statement, "Conversion": Thesis*

By His redemptive work Christ is the Propitiation for the sins of the whole world; hence forgiveness of sin has been secured and provided for all men. (This is often spoken of as objective justification.) "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation," 2 Cor. 5:19. Hence no sinner need be eternally lost on account of his sins. God offers this propitiation and reconciliation freely to all men through His means of grace. There is nothing in sinful man or in what he may do to merit God's declaring him righteous. God justifies the sinner solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness, which He imputes to the sinner through the Gospel and which the sinner accepts by faith. Such faith is wrought in man by the Holy Spirit. Through this faith we not only receive from God but also retain the blessed assurance of our righteousness in His sight for Christ's sake. *1949 Common Confession, VI: Thesis*

The church of Jesus Christ will exist and endure on earth, according to the promises of Christ, until His return for judgment. When Christ returns for judgment, He will raise up all the dead—all believers in Him to eternal life, and all others to everlasting damnation. *1949 Common Confession, XII: Thesis*

The Scriptures affirm the continued existence of all men with their personal identity intact between death and the resurrection, and thereafter. They teach that upon death believers are in the hands of God and that they are with Christ. Those who have rejected Christ will be condemned by the judgment of His Word. (John 12:48)

The Scriptures teach concerning the resurrection that "all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). Believers therefore "await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like His glorious body." (Phil. 3:20-21)

The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions compel us:

To reject the teaching that death terminates the existence of man so as to preclude the possibility of the persistence beyond death of his personal identity before God.

To reject the teaching that at death man is annihilated in such a way as to preclude even for the grace and power of God the possibility of his physical resurrection, or of his final and eternal judgment. . . .

To reject the teaching that the soul "sleeps" between death and the resurrection in such a way that it is not conscious of bliss. *CTCR, "Death, Resurrection, Immortality": Thesis, 3*

Since God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself through the vicarious life and death of His Son and has commanded that the reconciliation effected by Christ be proclaimed to men in the Gospel, to the end that they may believe it, 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Rom. 1:5, therefore faith in Christ is the only way for men to obtain personal reconciliation with God, that is, forgiveness of sins, as both the Old and the New Testament Scriptures testify, Acts 10:43; John 3:16-18, 36. By this faith in Christ, through which men obtain the forgiveness of sins, is not meant any human effort to fulfill the

Law of God after the example of Christ, but faith in the Gospel, that is, in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, which was fully earned for us by Christ and is offered in the Gospel. This faith justifies, not inasmuch as it is a work of man, but inasmuch as it lays hold of the grace offered, the forgiveness of sins, Rom. 4:16. *Brief Statement, "Faith in Christ": Thesis, 1*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

WHEREAS, Both Scripture and the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church teach that Christ is the only Way to heaven and that all who die without faith in Christ are eternally damned; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we consider a revision of Article VIII of the Bylaws of the Synod unnecessary; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we as a Synod forthrightly and firmly state that we continue to confess—

1. That Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is THE Savior of the world, John 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; and

2. That there is no other way of salvation than through faith in Christ, John 3:36; 8:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12. *1965 Resolution 2-20: Thesis, 1*

*Resolved*, That the Synod reaffirm that Jesus Christ is man's only Redeemer, the very Word of our salvation (AC, III); *1969 Resolution 2-03: Thesis*

2. That Christ has made atonement for the sins of the whole world and thus propitiated God's wrath against sin.

3. That Christ rose from the dead glorified in His flesh (*sarx*).

4. That the soul of man does not cease to exist after death and that only those who believe in Christ receive eternal life. *1967 Resolution 2-30: Thesis*

WHEREAS, Memorial 357 and items 14 and 15 of Memorial 331 call attention to public statements by members of our church on the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the flesh, which statements are unclear and may be understood to have a meaning not in accord with the teachings of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions; and

WHEREAS, Such unclear statements are particularly disturbing to our members because they tend to raise doubts concerning the end and goal of our faith, the blessedness of the dead, the resurrec-

tion of the body, and the life everlasting with our risen and triumphant Lord; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we remind all pastors, teachers, professors, and writers of the church in their presentation of these doctrines to emphasize the sure truth and comfort as clearly stated in Scripture and in the Lutheran Confessions (e. g., John 11:21-26; Luke 23:43, 46; 1 Cor. 15; Matt. 10:28; Heb. 12:23; Phil. 1:23; Luke 20:37, 38; Rom. 14:7, 8; Luther's explanation of the First and Third Articles of the Apostles' Creed; Luther's explanation of the Seventh Petition; Athanasian Creed, par. 30). *1962 Resolution 3-18: Thesis*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Does the fact that Christ died for all imply that all men will somehow enjoy eternal life, even if they don't believe in Jesus Christ? Is the view that sinners can obtain eternal life without faith in Christ as Lord and Savior compatible with the great Biblical and Reformation principle of "by faith alone," *sola fide*?

2. With regard to infants who die without receiving Holy Baptism, does Scripture allow us to say or do anything beyond committing them to God's infinite mercy? Does the case of unbaptized infants constitute an exception to the "faith alone" principle?

3. One concept utilized by the New Testament and the Lutheran Confessions to describe the work of Christ is "propitiation." What is the emphasis of this term? Why do some contemporary theologians criticize this concept?

4. How does the Biblical teaching that there is salvation only by faith in Jesus Christ affect our attitude toward other religions like Judaism or Buddhism?

5. Some people think that many contemporary churches are placing greater emphasis on man's this-worldly needs than on his need for eternal life. Do you agree with this observation? Is this a salutary emphasis?

6. Is there a conflict between Scripture passages that refer to or imply the interim state of believers after death (i. e., Philip-  
pians 1:3; Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Romans 8:38) and those that refer to the resurrection of the body (i. e., 1 Corinthians 15:42-44; John 5:28-29)? Can sound Christian teaching or pastoral care be exercised when one or the other aspect of eternal life is neglected or denied? What significance should be attached to the fact that the Scriptures place a greater emphasis on the resurrection of the body than on the interim state?

## II. Law and Gospel

We believe that the two chief doctrines of Holy Scripture, Law and Gospel, must be constantly and diligently proclaimed in the church of God until the end of the world, but with due distinction (FC, SD, V, 24). The Law, as the expression of God's immutable will, is to be used by the church to bring men to a knowledge of their sins as well as to provide Christians with instruction about good works (FC, SD, V, 17–18). The Gospel receives the primary emphasis in the ministry of the New Testament, for it is the message that "God forgives them all their sins through Christ, accepts them for His sake as God's children, and out of pure grace, without any merit of their own, justifies and saves them." (FC, SD, V, 25)

We therefore reject the following:

1. That the Gospel is any message or action which brings good news to a bad situation.
2. That the Gospel is a norm or standard for the Christian life, or that the Gospel, in effect, imposes a new law upon the Christian.
3. That what God's law declares to be sinful (for example, adultery or theft) need not be regarded as sinful in all times and situations.
4. That Christians, as men who have been freed from the curse of the Law, no longer need the instruction of the Law to know what God's will is for their life and conduct.

### Scripture Passages

#### LAW

*Romans 7:7.* What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." *Thesis*

*Romans 3:19-20.* Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. *Thesis*

*Romans 2:12.* All who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. *Thesis*

*John 14:15.* If you love me, you will keep my commandments. *Thesis*

*Romans 13:8-10.* Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. *Thesis, 4*

*1 John 2:3-4.* And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. *Thesis, 4*

*1 John 5:3.* For this is the love of God, that we keep his com-

mandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. *Thesis, 4*  
*1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.* Finally, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God; that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we solemnly forewarned you. For God has not called us for uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. *Thesis, 3, 4*

*Matthew 28:20.* . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. *Thesis, 4*

*Romans 3:31.* Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. *3, 4*

#### GOSPEL

*Romans 1:16.* For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. *Thesis, 1*

*1 Peter 1:25.* ". . . but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you. *Thesis*

*Matthew 28:19-20.* Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. *Thesis*

*Matthew 24:14.* And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. *Thesis*

*Colossians 1:5-6.* (We thank God) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 15:1-2.* Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you have believed in vain. *Thesis*

*Galatians 1:9.* As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. *Thesis, 1*

#### Lutheran Confessions

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. This 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. *AC, XII, 53: Thesis*

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." *Ap, IV, 345: 2*

This is what the beginning of true repentance is like. Here man

must hear such a judgment as this: "You are all of no account. Whether you are manifest sinners or saints, you must all become other than you now are and do otherwise than you now do, no matter who you are and no matter how great, wise, mighty, and holy you may think yourselves. Here no one is godly," etc.

To this office of the law the New Testament immediately adds the consoling promise of grace in the Gospel. This is to be believed, as Christ says in Mark 1:15, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," which is to say, "Become different, do otherwise, and believe my promise." John, who preceded Christ, is called a preacher of repentance—but for the remission of sins. That is, John was to accuse them all and convince them that they were sinners in order that they might know how they stood before God and recognize themselves as lost men. In this way they were to be prepared to receive grace from the Lord and to expect and accept from him the forgiveness of sins. Christ himself says this in Luke 24:47, "Repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations."

But where the law exercises its office alone, without the addition of the Gospel, there is only death and hell, and man must despair like Saul and Judas. As St. Paul says, the law slays through sin. Moreover, the Gospel offers consolation and forgiveness in more ways than one, for with God there is plenteous redemption (as Ps. 130:7 puts it) from the dreadful captivity to sin, and this comes to us through the Word, the sacraments, and the like, as we shall hear. *SA, III, iii, 3–8: Thesis*

We believe and confess that these two doctrines must be urged constantly and diligently in the church of God until the end of the world, but with the due distinction, so that in the ministry of the New Testament the proclamation of the law and its threats will terrify the hearts of the unrepentant and bring them to a knowledge of their sin and to repentance, but not in such a way that they become despondent and despair therein. Rather, since "the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24), and hence points and leads not away from but toward the Christ who is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4), the proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Christ will once more comfort and strengthen them with the assurance that if they believe the Gospel God forgives them all their sins through Christ, accepts them for his sake as God's children, and out of pure grace, without any merit of their own, justifies and saves them. But this does not mean that men may abuse the grace of God and sin against grace. *FC, SD, V, 24–25: Thesis*

It is Christ's command that all in common to whom repentance is preached should also have this promise of the Gospel proclaimed to them (Luke 24:47; Mark 16:15). And 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 that in those whom he thus calls he will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved. *FC, SD, XI, 28–29: Thesis*

The law of God serves (1) not only to maintain external discipline and decency against dissolute and disobedient people, (2) and to bring people to a knowledge of their sin through the law, (3) but those who have been born anew through the Holy Spirit, who have been converted to the Lord and from whom the veil of Moses has been taken away, learn from the law to live and walk in the law. A controversy has arisen among a few theologians concerning this third and last function of the law. *FC, SD, VI, 1: Thesis, 4*

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. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart. *FC, SD, II, 54: Thesis*

The Gospel is, strictly speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ. *Ap, IV, 43: Thesis, 2*

When we rightly reflect on this controversy, we find that it was chiefly occasioned by the fact that the little word "Gospel" does not always have one and the same meaning but is used in a twofold way, both in the Holy Scripture of God and by ancient and modern theologians. In the one case the word is used in such a way that we understand by it the entire teaching of Christ, our Lord, which in his public ministry on earth and in the New Testament he ordered to be observed. Here the term includes both the exposition of the law and the proclamation of the mercy and grace of God, his heavenly Father, as it is written in Mark 1:1, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." Shortly thereafter the chief parts are announced, namely, repentance and forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). Similarly when Christ after his resurrection commands his apostles to preach the Gospel in all the world (Mark 16:15), he summarizes his doctrine in a few words, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sin should be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:46, 47). Likewise, Paul calls his entire teaching the "Gospel" (Acts 20:24) and summarizes it under these heads: repentance to God and faith in Christ. And when the word "Gospel" is used in its broad sense and apart from the strict distinction of law and Gospel, it is correct to define the word as the proclamation of both repentance and the forgiveness of sins. For John, Christ, and the apostles began in their preaching with repentance and expounded and urged not only the gracious promise of the forgiveness of sins but also the divine law. In addition, however, the word "Gospel" is also used in another (that is, in a strict) sense. Here it does not include the proclamation of repentance but solely the preaching of God's grace. So it appears shortly afterward in the first chapter of St. Mark, where Christ said, "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15) *FC, SD, V, 3–6: Thesis, 1*

We unanimously believe, teach, and confess on the basis of what we have said that, strictly speaking, the law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteousness and immutable will of God, shows how man ought to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishment. For, as Luther says against the nomoclasts, "Everything that rebukes sin is and belongs to the law, the proper function of which is to condemn sin and to lead to a knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). Since unbelief is a root and fountainhead of all culpable sin, the law reproves unbelief also. But it is also true that the Gospel illustrates and explains the law and its doctrine; nevertheless the true function of the law remains, to rebuke sin and to give instruction about good works. *FC, SD, V, 17–18: Thesis, 4*

All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises. In some places it presents the law. In others it presents the promise of Christ; this it does either when it promises that the Messiah will come and promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life for his sake, or when, in the New Testament, the Christ who came promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. By "law" in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, wherever they appear in the Scriptures. For the present we are saying nothing about the ceremonial and civil laws of Moses. *Ap, IV, 5–6: 1, 2*

Believers, furthermore, require the teaching of the law so that they will not be thrown back on their own holiness and piety and under the pretext of the Holy Spirit's guidance set up a self-elected service of God without his Word and command, as it is written, "You shall not do every man whatever is right in his own eyes, but

heed all these words which I command you. You shall not add to it nor take from it" (Deut. 12:8, 28, 32). *FC, SD, VI, 20: 4*

Furthermore, we have already given ample evidence of our conviction that good works must necessarily follow faith. 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. *AC, XXI, 15: Thesis, 3, 4*

These words, therefore, ought to be received and esteemed as a serious matter to God because he himself here declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, fearfully and terribly punishing all who despise and transgress his commandments; and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them. *LC, I, 322: 3*

The Gospel, however, is that doctrine which teaches what a man should believe in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins from God, since man has failed to keep the law of God and has transgressed it, his corrupted nature, thoughts, words, and deeds war against the law, and he is therefore subject to the wrath of God, to death, to temporal miseries, and to the punishment of hell-fire. 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 re-enter 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. *FC, SD, V, 20-21: Thesis, 1*

Hence if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must by all means cling rigidly and firmly to the fact that as the proclamation of repentance extends over all men (Luke 24:47), so also does the promise of the Gospel. Therefore Christ has commanded to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name among all nations." For God "loved the world" and gave to it his only begotten Son (John 3:16). *FC, SD, XI, 28: Thesis*

First of all, there is in this article no disagreement among us concerning the following points: That it is God's will, ordinance, and command that believers walk in good works; that only those are truly good works which God himself prescribes and commands in his Word, and not those that an individual may devise according

to his own opinion or that are based on human traditions. *FC, SD, IV, 7: 4*

### LCMS Synodical Statements

The Holy Scriptures teach both Law and Gospel, but the chief content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law enters into the service of the Gospel by bringing man to a knowledge of his sins and by convincing him that he is under God's judgment because of his sins, and by telling the believer what fruits of faith he should produce. *1949 Common Confession, V: Thesis*

### LCMS Synodical Catechism

#### What is the Law?

The Law is that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us how we are to be and what we are to do and not to do. *Thesis, 4*

#### What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ. *Thesis, 1*

#### What is the difference between the Law and the Gospel?

1. The Law teaches what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches what God has done, and still does, for our salvation.
2. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God.
3. The Law must be preached to all men, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins. *Thesis*

### QUESTIONS

1. Is the Gospel properly speaking ever something that man effects or accomplishes? Should Christians be encouraged to "do the Gospel"?
2. Some people speak of the Gospel "making demands," "imposing discipline," or "serving as a norm for Christian action." Evaluate such expressions.
3. How does a believer react to the demands of the Law? How does an unbeliever react? Does a believer ever react like the unbeliever? If so, why?
4. Is there a difference between acting in true Christian love and acting in accordance with God's commandments?
5. If the believer needs the Law to tell him what is wrong, does he also need the Law to tell him what is right?
6. Does Christian freedom imply that Christians are free to disobey God's commandments? Why or why not?



### III. Mission of the Church

We believe, teach, and confess that the primary mission of the church is to make disciples of every nation by bearing witness to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Other necessary activities of the church, such as ministering to men's physical needs, are to serve the church's primary mission and its goal that men will believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We therefore reject any views of the mission of the church which imply:

That an adequate or complete witness to Jesus Christ can be made without proclaiming or verbalizing the Gospel.

#### Scripture Passages

##### *PREACH GOSPEL*

*Matthew 28:18-20.* And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." *Thesis*

*Psalms 96:2-3.* Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! *Thesis*

*Acts 1:8.* But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. *Thesis*

*Luke 24:47.* . . . and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. *Thesis*

*2 Corinthians 5:18-21.* All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. *Thesis*

*1 Peter 2:9.* But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. *Thesis*

*Romans 10:17.* So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. *Antithesis*

##### *MINISTER TO NEEDS*

*Philippians 2:15-16.* . . . that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not win in vain or labor in vain. *Thesis*

*1 John 4:21.* And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. *Thesis*

*Matthew 25:31-40.* When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them

one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." *Thesis*

*Galatians 6:10.* So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. *Thesis*

#### *PRIMARY EMPHASIS ON RELATIONSHIP TO GOD*

*Luke 12:29-31.* And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink nor be of anxious mind. For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. *Thesis*

*Matthew 6:19-21.* Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. *Thesis*

*Matthew 10:28.* And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 2:2.* For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 9:19-22.* For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. *Thesis*

*Philippians 3:7-9.* But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. *Thesis*

#### *Lutheran Confessions*

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. Therefore, all who seek to merit holiness through their works rather than through the Gospel and the forgiveness of sin have expelled and separated themselves from the church. *LC, II, 55-56: Thesis*

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. *AC, VII, 1-2: Thesis*

One can easily see how necessary it is to understand this faith, for through it alone we recognize Christ's work and receive his blessings and it alone provides a sure and firm consolation for devout minds. And there must needs be a proclamation in the church from which the faithful may receive the sure hope of salvation. *Ap, IV, 118-19: Thesis*

We are accordingly mindful of the obligation that we have by divine precept, on account of the office we bear, over against the temporal and eternal welfare of our own selves and of the subjects that belong to us, 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 tranquility and peace of Christian schools and churches, and to the needed consolation and instruction of poor, misguided consciences. *Preface, Book of Concord, p. 13: Thesis*

In the last chapter of Luke (24:47) Christ commands that penitence and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name. The Gospel declares that all men are under sin and are worthy of eternal wrath and death. For Christ's sake it offers forgiveness of sins and justification, which are received by faith. By its accusations, the preaching of penitence terrifies our consciences with real and serious fears. For these, our hearts must again receive consolation. This happens if they believe Christ's promise that for his sake we have the forgiveness of sins. *Ap, IV, 62: Thesis*

Even those who have come to faith before they were baptized and those who came to faith in Baptism came to their faith through the external Word which preceded. Adults who have attained the age of reason must first have heard, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16), even if they did not at once believe and did not receive the Spirit and Baptism until ten years later. Cornelius (Acts 10:1 ff.) had long since heard from the Jews about the coming Messiah through whom he was justified before God, and his prayers and alms were acceptable to God in this faith (Luke calls him "devout" and "God-fearing"), but he could not have believed and been justified if the Word and his hearing of it had not preceded. *SA, III, viii, 7-8: Thesis, Antithesis*

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.

Where he does not cause the Word to be preached and does not awaken understanding in the heart, all is lost. *LC, II, 42-43: Thesis*

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. *SA, III, viii, 3: Antithesis*

All who would be saved must hear this preaching, for the preaching and the hearing of God's Word are the Holy Spirit's instrument in, with, and through which he wills to act efficaciously, to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to achieve. *FC, SD, II, 52: Antithesis*

The Father wills that all men should hear this proclamation

and come to Christ, and according to his own word Christ will not turn them away, "Him who comes to me I will not cast out" (John 6:37). In order that we may come to Christ, the Holy Spirit creates true faith through the hearing of God's Word, as the apostle testifies, "Faith comes from the hearing of God's Word" (Rom. 10:17) when it is preached in sincerity and purity. *FC, SD, XI, 68-69: Thesis, Antithesis*

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. *Power and Primacy of the Pope 60: Thesis*

If a person will not hear preaching or read the Word of God, but despises the Word and the community of God, dies in this condition, and perishes in his sins, he can neither comfort himself with God's eternal election nor obtain his mercy. For Christ, in whom we are elected, offers his grace to all men in the Word and the holy sacraments, earnestly wills that we hear it, and has promised that, where two or three are gathered together in his name and occupy themselves with his holy Word, he is in the midst of them. *FC, SD, II, 57: Antithesis*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

The church continues to heed Christ's charge to go into all the world and to make disciples of all men, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

Through the means of grace, the Gospel in the Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith, and thus directs and enables it to do the will of God. Where these means of grace are in use, there God builds His church. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

Through the Word and the sacraments God constantly assures the church of its status before Him and enables it to fulfill its function in the world. The church thus enabled is commissioned by God to "show forth His salvation from day to day," to "declare His glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people," Psalm 96:2-3. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

The church, as the company of those who are born again, is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It confronts a mankind which without the gracious working of the Holy Spirit is totally corrupt in trespasses and sins, is completely blinded to the will of God, and willfully resists every endeavor of God to save it from destruction. It is the privilege of the church to proclaim in word and deed the glorious redemption of all men in Christ. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

The means of grace (the Gospel in the Word and the sacraments) are the only genuine marks of the church, and by them Christ through the Holy Spirit creates and preserves faith in the hearts of men. Through them the church manifests itself on earth. The Gospel in the Word is not to be thought of as an inarticulate possession of the truth, but as a real proclamation of the Christ for us, the declaration of God's forgiveness for the sake of Christ, our Substitute, "who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." Likewise, it is not mere knowledge about the sacraments which constitutes a mark of the church, but the actual administration of them according to the institution of Christ. Without the Gospel in preaching and sacraments it would be impossible to speak of the church, for then the church would be nonexistent. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

Since it is only through the external means ordained by Him that God has promised to communicate the grace and salvation



purchased by Christ, the Christian church must not remain at home with the means of grace entrusted to it, but go into the whole world with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments, Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16. For the same reason also the churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace. Whatever activities do not either directly apply the Word of God or subserve such application we condemn as "new methods," unchurchly activities, which do not build, but harm, the church. *Brief Statement, "Means of Grace": Thesis*

Although both church and state are ordinances of God, yet they must not be commingled. Church and state have entirely different aims. By the church, God would save men, for which reason the church is called the "mother" of believers, Gal. 4:26. By the state, God would maintain external order among men, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," 1 Tim. 2:2. It follows that the means which church and state employ to gain their ends are entirely different. The church may not employ any other means than the preaching of the Word of God, John 18:11, 36; 2 Cor. 10:4. The state, on the other hand, makes laws bearing on civil matters and is empowered to employ for their execution also the sword and other corporal punishments, Rom. 13:4.

Accordingly we condemn the policy of those who would have the power of the state employed "in the interest of the church" and who thus turn the church into a secular dominion; as also of those who, aiming to govern the state by the Word of God, seek to turn the state into a church. *Brief Statement, "Church and State": Thesis*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

The disciples at Ascension were reminded by Christ that witness-bearing stood center stage in their lives. It has not changed in the ensuing years. It still stands as the focal activity of our lives in Christ. We ought to commit our lives to this purpose. Let it be said of us that we did. *1971 Evangelism Affirmations: Thesis*

Christians minister to the needs of the whole man, not because they have forgotten the witness of the Gospel but because they remember it. They know that the demonstration of their faith in Christ adds power to its proclamation. *1965 Mission Affirmations: Thesis*

The three articles of the Christian Creed teach that God is concerned about man in his whole being, creating, redeeming, and sanctifying him for a life of service. We affirm that the church has only one ministry, centered in Word and sacraments. From this center, Christians serve their neighbors in love. *1971 Social Affirmations: Thesis*

*Resolved*, That we reconsecrate ourselves with everything we are and have to the task of witnessing Christ in deed and word to all the world, thankfully making full use also of the communication tools which God is offering to the church through science and technology for this age of the population explosion; and be it further

*Resolved*, That in the face of the great unfinished task we rejoice over all faithful Christian efforts to witness Christ to all the world. *1965 Mission Affirmations: Thesis*

How shall we as Christians have a final and meaningful effect on this world with all its ills? We are having just such an effect when we are in mission. That means we are acting as God's agents, doing God's work among His people of every nation. Being "in mission" is the primary purpose of our lives. As we put this purpose into practice, we remember that the mission is not of our making. It is His. He has set the boundaries, the direction, and the scope of Christian activity. From the first He has placed witness-bearing at the forefront of Christian activity. This witness-bearing is the public profession that we kneel in obedience before Him, accepting the completeness of what He has done for us. He called us into being through creation. He opened the way for a new way through redemption. He gives us the new life, with all it means in terms of faith and the practice of our faith, through sanctification. *1971 Evangelism Affirmations: Thesis*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any ways in which Christians can communicate the Gospel without verbalizing about Jesus Christ?

2. Do the Lutheran Confessions ever regard the work of ministering to man's physical needs as part of the Gospel (in the narrow sense)? May Christians regard ministering to man's physical needs as an optional task?

3. When the Lutheran Confessions state that God gives no one his Holy Spirit except through the "external Word," does this mean that God does not mediate His saving Gospel to men apart from the means of grace?

4. Should a congregation give greater attention to its evangelism efforts than to its social welfare program? Why or why not?

5. Should the church as such engage in humanitarian efforts (e. g., aiding the poor, helping refugees, or assisting the victims of injustice), or is it better for the church to encourage individual Christian action? Are these proper alternatives?

6. What, if anything, is distinctively Christian about the church's humanitarian actions?

7. Suggest ways in which all the various activities of your congregation can be more directly and explicitly related to bearing witness to the Gospel.

## IV. Holy Scripture

### A. The Inspiration of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true Author of every word of Scripture. We acknowledge that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness of every other form of human expression, making the Bible a unique book.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the Holy Scriptures are inspired only in the sense that all Christians are "inspired" to confess the lordship of Jesus Christ.

2. That the Holy Spirit did not inspire the actual words of the Biblical authors but merely provided these men with special guidance.

3. That only those matters in Holy Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit which directly pertain to Jesus Christ and man's salvation.

4. That noncanonical writings in the Christian tradition can be regarded as "inspired" in the same sense as Holy Scripture.

5. That portions of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ contain imaginative additions which had their origin in the early Christian community and do not present actual facts.

#### Scripture Passages

2 Peter 1:21. . . . no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. *Thesis, 1*

1 Peter 1:11. (The prophets) inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. *Thesis*

Matthew 22:31. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God? *Thesis, 2*

Hebrews 3:7. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice . . ." *Thesis, 1, 2, 3*

Hebrews 10:15-16. And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," *Thesis, 2*

2 Timothy 3:16-17. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis, 1, 2, 3*

2 Samuel 23:1-2. Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel: "The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue." *Thesis, 2*

Acts 1:16. Brethren, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus. *Thesis, 2*

Jeremiah 30:2. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you. *2*

1 Thessalonians 2:13. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from

us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. *Thesis*

Matthew 4:4. But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" *Thesis*

2 Peter 1:16. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. *5*

John 21:24. This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. *5*

Luke 1:1-4. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. *5*

Matthew 1:22. All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. *2*

1 Corinthians 14:37. If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. *Thesis, 3*

#### Lutheran Confessions

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.

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. *FC, Ep, RN, 7-8: Thesis*

If, then, bishops have the power to burden the churches with countless requirements and thus ensnare consciences, why does the divine Scripture so frequently forbid the making and keeping of human regulations? Why does it call them doctrines of the devil? Is it possible that the Holy Spirit warned against them for nothing? *Ap, XXVII, 49: Thesis, 2*

We must oppose such false imagining and thoughts with the following clear, certain, and unfailing foundation: 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). *FC, SD, XI, 12: Thesis, 2*

There is, of course, no more faithful or trustworthy interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ than the Lord Christ himself, who best understands his words and heart and intention and is best qualified from the standpoint of wisdom and intelligence to explain them. In the institution of his last will and testament and of his abiding covenant and union, he uses no flowery language but the most appropriate, simple, indubitable, and clear words, just as he does in all the articles of faith and in the institution of other covenants and signs of grace or sacraments, such as circumcision, the

many kinds of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and Holy Baptism. *FC, SD, VII, 50: Thesis, 2, 4, 5*

At the same time this concerns the article of Christian liberty as well, an article which the Holy Spirit through the mouth of the holy apostle so seriously commanded the church to preserve, as we have just heard. As soon as this article is weakened and human commandments are forcibly imposed on the church as necessary and as though their omission were wrong and sinful, the door has been opened to idolatry, and ultimately the commandments of men will be increased and be put as divine worship not only on a par with God's commandments, but even above them. *FC, SD, X, 15: Thesis, 4*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, Ep, VII, 13: Thesis, 3, 5*

Here he 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.

This, of course, does not mean that other good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles, should be rejected. If they 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. *FC, SD, RN, 9–10: Thesis*

If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do. *LC, V, 76: Thesis, 5*

It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works. Do they suppose that this is repeated so often for no reason? Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares? *Ap, IV, 107–108: Thesis, 2*

Nor can any vows or any laws abolish the commandment of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 7:2). . . . *Ap, XXVIII, 51: Thesis, 2, 3*

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." *FC, Ep, RN, 1: Thesis, 3*

Because 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. *LC, IV, 57: Thesis, 3, 5*

#### **LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents**

The authoritative Word for the church today is the canonical Word, not precanonical sources, forms, or traditions—however useful the investigation of these possibilities may on occasion be for a clearer understanding of what the canonical text intends to say. *CTCR, "Stance Document," pp. 9–10: Thesis, 4*

We believe and teach that all Scripture (that is, all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments) is given by inspiration of God and is in its entirety, in its parts, and in its very words inspired by the Holy Spirit. God revealed Himself personally and directly to such men as Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. Some of these He called to transmit His message to men orally or in

writing. Their message was thus not their own, but God's Word. They were moved by the Holy Spirit, so that He is the true Author of their every word. Inspiration means, then, that mighty act of God whereby He spoke His Word in the words of men and made them the effective and final vehicle of His revelation. *1959 Statement on Scripture, II: Thesis, 1, 2, 3*

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called "theological deduction," but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, 1–5*

Whatever cognizance needs to be taken—as indeed it must—of the connection between Biblical materials and their background in the whole complex of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious factors of their day, a clear distinction must nevertheless be maintained between the unique, divine, and revelatory character of Scripture and the sheer human and contingent character of Scripture's earthly milieu. Parallelisms between extra-Biblical materials and the form or substance of Scripture do not as such constitute causal or substantive relations. This is not in the least to deny the genuinely human and earthly dimension of Scripture itself. It is only to say that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness, explicit or implicit, of every other form of human expression. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: Thesis, 4*

We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. Inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ but also to such as may seem very remote (e. g., in the field of history, geography, and nature). For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement on Scripture II: 3, 5*

We reject the doctrine, which under the name of science has gained wide popularity in the church of our day, that Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, but in part the Word of God and in part the word of man and hence does, or at least might, contain error. We reject this erroneous doctrine as horrible and blasphemous, since it flatly contradicts Christ and His apostles, sets up men as judges over the Word of God, and thus overthrows the foundation of the Christian church and its faith. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, 3, 5*

Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures in their entirety as the inspired Word of God. His Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that His Word is true, that He will keep all His promises to us, and that our faith in Him is not in vain. *1949 Common Confession, V: Thesis, 2, 3*

#### **LCMS Synodical Resolutions**

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, and that Scripture is in all its words and parts the very Word of God, as taught in the Scripture itself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19–21) and in the Lutheran Confessions. *1962 Resolution 3–16: Thesis 2, 3, 5*

*Resolved*, That while we uphold the importance of the human authorship of the Scriptures, even though the human author of each book cannot be ascertained, we recognize that divine authorship is the dominant factor in the origin of the Bible, as the Synod emphasizes in the statement it adopted in 1959 (*Proceedings*, p. 189): "We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture" (*Statement on Scripture*, 1958). 1965 Resolution 2-35: *Thesis*, 3

*Resolved*, That we pray in this day of theological unrest and confusion that God by His mercy keep us faithful to His inspired and inerrant Word "as the only rule and norm of faith and practice" and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true and faithful exposition of that Word. 1967 Resolution 2-16: *Thesis*

WHEREAS, The Synod has been asked to clarify its stand on several doctrinal issues; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our position on the following matters of doctrine:

1. That the Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God. 1967 Resolution 2-30: *Thesis*, 5

*Resolved*, That the Synod affirm the resolutions of previous conventions (Resolution 2-16, New York convention, 1967, *Proceedings*, p. 92; Resolution 2-01, Detroit convention, 1965, *Proceedings*, p. 94) that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the verbally inspired and the infallible written Word of God, according to which all preaching, teaching, and living is to be ordered and judged (F. C., *Triglot*, p. 851, Tappert, pp. 503-504). 1969 Resolution 2-03: *Thesis*

#### LCMS Synodical Catechism

What does "by inspiration of God" mean?

"By inspiration of God" means that God the Holy Ghost moved the holy men to write, and put into their minds, the very thoughts which they expressed and the very words which they wrote. (Verbal Inspiration.) *Synodical Catechism*, "Bible": *Thesis*, 1, 2, 3

Whose word, then, is every word of the Bible?

Every word of the Bible is God's word, and therefore the Bible is without error. *Synodical Catechism*, "Bible": *Thesis*, 1, 2, 3, 5

#### QUESTIONS

1. In treating various aspects of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, is it proper to begin with the inspiration of Holy Scripture? Why or why not? Does the *sequence* in which topics are treated necessarily provide a valid basis of evaluation? If so, was it "Lutheran" for the Augsburg Confession to begin with the doctrine of God rather than with the work of Jesus Christ or justification?

2. Christological and Eucharistic analogies are sometimes employed to explain the nature of Holy Scripture as both divine and human (e. g., just as the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ while remaining true bread and wine, so also the Holy Scripture is God's Word while remaining fully human). What benefits and/or inadequacies do you find in such analogies?

3. Does inspiration refer only to the sacred penmen of the Scriptures, or does it also apply to the text? Is there any Biblical basis for maintaining that the kind of inspiration by which the Holy Spirit moved the prophets and apostles to produce the infallible Word of God would be the same as His guidance of the Christian community in every age?

4. Jesus promised to send the Comforter in order to lead His followers into all truth. Is it more in keeping with the witness of the New Testament to maintain that the Holy Spirit does this through the Biblical witness or apart from it?

5. Is it in keeping with the Holy Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions to use the content of the Gospel as a criterion for determining whether or not one must regard a given section of Scripture as inspired?

6. Is it in keeping with our conviction that God is the Author of all Scripture to suggest that portions of the New Testament (e. g., some miracle stories) might be imaginative additions of the early Christian community?

## B. The Purpose of Scripture

We believe that all Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ and that its primary purpose is to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We therefore affirm that the Scriptures are rightly used only when they are read from the perspective of justification by faith and the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Since the saving work of Jesus Christ was accomplished through His personal entrance into our history and His genuinely historical life, death, and resurrection, we acknowledge that the recognition of the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That knowing the facts and data presented in the Scripture, without relating them to Jesus Christ and His work of salvation, represents an adequate approach to Holy Scripture.

2. That the Old Testament, read on its own terms, does not bear witness to Jesus Christ.

3. That it is permissible to reject the historicity of events or the occurrence of miracles recorded in the Scriptures so long as there is no confusion of Law and Gospel.

4. That recognition of the primary purpose of Scripture makes it irrelevant whether such questions of fact as the following are answered in the affirmative: Were Adam and Eve real historical individuals? Did Israel cross the Red Sea on dry land? Did the brazen serpent miracle actually take place? Was Jesus really born of a virgin? Did Jesus perform all the miracles attributed to Him? Did Jesus' resurrection actually involve the return to life of His dead body?

#### Scripture Passages

*John 5:39*. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. *Thesis*, 1, 2

2 Timothy 3:15-17. . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis, 1, 2*

*Acts 10:43.* To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. *Thesis, 1, 2*

*Jeremiah 23:16-22.* Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to every one who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'" For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings." *Thesis*

*Romans 10:17.* So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. *Thesis*

*Romans 3:20-22.* For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. *Thesis, 1, 2*

*Luke 24:25-27.* And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. *Thesis, 2, 3*

*John 20:30-31.* Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. *Thesis, 1, 4*

*Romans 15:4.* For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. *Thesis, 3*

2 Peter 1:16-18. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. *Thesis, 3, 4*

1 Corinthians 15:17-20. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. *Thesis, 3, 4*

*Acts 26:25-26.* But Paul said, "I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. *Thesis, 3*

*Acts 26:22-23.* To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles. *Thesis, 1, 2*

*John 21:24.* This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. *Thesis, 3*

*Romans 5:19.* For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous. *4*

*Luke 1:1-4.* Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. *Thesis, 3*

*Luke 24:44.* Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." *Thesis, 2, 3*

*John 10:35.* If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken). . . . *3, 4*

*Psalms 119:160.* The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. *Thesis, 3, 4*

*Matthew 4:4.* But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" *Thesis, 3, 4*

*John 7:42.* Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? *Thesis, 2*

*Matthew 12:39-40.* But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. *Thesis, 4*

*John 3:14-15.* And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. *Thesis, 3, 4*

2 Corinthians 11:3. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. *Thesis, 4*

*Romans 5:12-14.* Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. *4*

*John 1:17.* For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. *Thesis*

*Galatians 1:8.* But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. *Thesis, 1*

### Lutheran Confessions

The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, "was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). He alone is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "God has laid upon him the iniquities of us all" (Is. 53:6). Moreover, "all have sinned," and "they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, by his blood" (Rom. 3:23-25). *SA, II, i, 1-3: Thesis*

This promise of the forgiveness of sins is not the preaching of the law, but a truly prophetic and evangelical voice which Daniel surely wanted to be received by faith. Daniel knew that the forgiveness of sins in the Christ was promised not only to the Israelites but to all nations. Otherwise he could not have promised the king forgiveness of sins. *Ap, IV, 261–62: 2*

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. This 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. *Ap, XII, 53: Thesis, 2, 3*

Paul clearly shows that faith does not simply mean historical knowledge but is a firm acceptance of the promise (Rom. 4:16): "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may be guaranteed." For he says that only faith can accept the promise. He therefore correlates and connects promise and faith. It will be easy to determine what faith is if we pay attention to the article of the Creed on the forgiveness of sins. So it is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised unless we add this article, the purpose of the history, "the forgiveness of sins." *Ap, IV, 50–51: Thesis, 1, 3*

Furthermore, we are to put forth every effort to live according to the will of God and "to confirm our call," as St. Peter says. Especially are we to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us. *FC, Ep, XI, 14: Thesis, 3, 4*

Because 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. *LC, IV, 57: Thesis, 3, 4*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, Ep, VII, 13: Thesis, 3, 4*

If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do. *LC, V, 76: Thesis, 3*

Although in the case of Adam and Eve man's nature was originally created pure, good, and holy, sin did not invade their nature in such a way that Satan created or made something essentially evil and blended this with their nature, as the Manichaeans imagined in their enthusiasm. The fact is, that Satan misled Adam and Eve through the Fall, and that by God's judgment and verdict man lost the concreated righteousness as a punishment. *FC, SD, I, 27: Thesis, 3, 4*

Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the Son of man according to his human nature is really (that is, in deed and in truth) exalted to the right hand of the omnipotent majesty and power of God, because he was assumed into God when he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb and his human nature was personally united with the Son of the Most High. *FC, Ep, VIII, 15: 4*

#### Additional References

*FC, SD, VIII, 24: Thesis, 3, 4*  
*Ap, IV, 67: Thesis, 1*  
*Ap, IV, 2–6: Thesis, 1, 2*  
*FC, SD, XI, 12: Thesis, 1*  
*FC, SD, VIII, 25–27: 3*  
*FC, SD, V, 23: Thesis, 1, 2*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

The Holy Scriptures teach both Law and Gospel, but the chief content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law enters into the service of the Gospel by bringing man to a knowledge of his sins and by convincing him that he is under God's judgment because of his sins, and by telling the believer what fruits of faith

he should produce. *1949 Common Confession, V, 4: Thesis*

Does the document leave room for a denial of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament?

No, as the document itself indicates, the commission is fully committed to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. As is well known, the Lutheran Confessions strongly affirm Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament (cf., e. g., Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 23). *Answers to CTCR, "Stance Document": Thesis, 2*

For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement on Scripture II: Thesis*

The problem of "history" needs to be handled with extraordinary sensitivity by the Christian interpreter. He cannot adopt uncritically the presuppositions and canons of the secular historian. In his use of historical techniques the interpreter will be guided by the presuppositions of his faith in the Lord of history. It is indeed true that Christian faith rightly sees in the historicalness of God's redemptive work (His entry into and participation in our *saeculum*) a divine warrant for the use of "secular" means and methods in the study of His Word, including linguistic, literary, and historical analysis of the texts. But at the same time faith recognizes that there is more to history than can ever be adequately measured by "laws" derived exclusively from empirical data and rational observation. In other words, the Christian interpreter must continually take into account "that the Scriptures, precisely in their historical character, are Holy Scriptures since they are the product of the Spirit who produces in history that which is not of this world" (cf. CTCR Statement on Inspiration, LCMS Proceedings, 1965, page 293). *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: Thesis, 3*

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." *ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," p. 8: Thesis, 3, 4*

We reject and condemn "demythologizing" as a denial of the Word of God. Where Scripture records as historical facts those events and deeds which far surpass the ordinary experience of men, that record must be understood literally, as a record of facts; the miraculous and mysterious may not be dismissed as intended to have only a metaphorical or symbolical meaning. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis, 3, 4*

Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Gen. 1 to 3, it must be understood as speaking of literal historical facts. Where Scripture speaks symbolically, metaphorically, or metonymically, as for example in Rev. 20, it must be interpreted on these its own terms. Furthermore, since God spoke in the common language of man, expressions such as sunrise and sunset, the corners of the earth, etc., must not be viewed as intending to convey scientific information. (Ps. 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19; 2 Tim. 3:15) *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis, 3, 4*

#### Additional References

*1959 Statement on Scripture, III: 3, 4*  
*Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, 3, 4*  
*ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," p. 7: Thesis, 3, 4*  
*Answers to CTCR, "Stance Document" (3): Thesis, 3*



## LCMS Synodical Resolutions

WHEREAS, The Scriptures show that God has continuously revealed and offered His grace to sinners for their comfort through faith in the promised Savior; and

WHEREAS, Many revelations of this Messiah and of His salvation are given in the Old Testament, including references to the Seed, the Servant, the Lamb, etc., which become progressively fuller and clearer throughout the Old Testament; and

WHEREAS, The fulfillment of these prophecies of the coming Savior is affirmed by the New Testament Gospel of Christ; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our belief that the Old Testament prophecies of the Savior find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. *1965 Resolution 2-26: Thesis, 2*

The heart of the New Testament message is the Good News of an event which took place in history, "under Pontius Pilate" in Palestine; this Good News concerns a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth; the validity of the apostolic proclamation and the faith of the church stand or fall with the historical reality of the event (1 Cor. 15:1-19; John 15:22-24). The Gospels therefore invite historical investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents. . . . Historical investigation here moves in the presence of the Creator, present in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth; historical investigation must reckon with the unlimited power of Him who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not. Here the miracle is not only a possibility or probability; it is *essential* to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer. Christian historical investigation must therefore beware of measuring probabilities by standards taken from a secularized conception of history; the warning uttered by the document "A Lutheran Stance Toward Biblical Studies" (Part Two, Chapter 3) is very much in place. . . .

*Resolved*, That the 1969 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod affirm the historicity of the New Testament, making this affirmation as an act of faith in the incarnation of our Lord as attested and presented in living reality by the Spirit of Truth in

words which He Himself has taught. *1969 Resolution 2-16: Thesis, 3, 4*

*Resolved*, That while we uphold the importance of the human authorship of the Scriptures, even though the human author of each book cannot be ascertained, we recognize that divine authorship is the dominant factor in the origin of the Bible, as the Synod emphasizes in the statement it adopted in 1959 (*Proceedings*, p. 189): "We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture" (*Statement on Scripture*, 1958). *1965 Resolution 2-35: 3*

### Additional References

*1965 Resolution 2-27: Thesis, 4*

*1965 Resolution 2-29: Thesis, 4*

*1967 Resolution 2-31: 4*

## QUESTIONS

1. Does Holy Scripture indicate that God intended the Bible to serve any other purpose than to make men wise unto salvation?

2. Do the Lutheran Confessions grant freedom to those under the Gospel to question the truthfulness of any section of Scripture that does not appear to be directly related to the Gospel? Do the Lutheran Confessions use the Law-Gospel principle as a criterion for judging whether or not a given section of Scripture may or may not be regarded as true?

3. Is it an improper use of Scripture to use it in order to learn God's will for Christian behavior and action? Why or why not?

4. The first antithesis in *A Statement* rejects an aspect of what is sometimes called a "fundamentalist" view of Holy Scripture. Can you give examples of individuals or groups who hold such a view?

5. Should there be a difference between Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Old Testament? Why or why not?

6. Does the fact that the Christian religion is a historical religion (i. e., it deals with God's action in history), rather than a set of ideals divorced from history, have any implications for how we regard the historicity of events recorded in Holy Scripture?

## C. The Gospel and Holy Scripture

### (Material and Formal Principles)

We believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel of the gracious justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ is not only the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture and a basic presupposition for the interpretation of Scripture, but the heart and center of our Christian faith and theology (material principle). We also believe, teach, and confess that only "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith" (SA, II, ii, 15), and that "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 1) (formal principle). The Gospel which is the center of our theology is the Gospel to which the *Scriptures* bear witness, while the *Scriptures* from which we derive our theology direct us steadfastly to the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ.

We reject the following distortions of the relationship between the Gospel and the Bible (the mate-

rial and formal principles):

1. That acceptance of the Bible as such, rather than the Gospel, is the heart and center of Christian faith and theology, and the way to eternal salvation.

2. That the Gospel, rather than Scripture, is the norm for appraising and judging all doctrines and teachers (as, for example, when a decision on the permissibility of ordaining women into the pastoral office is made on the basis of the "Gospel" rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such).

3. That the historicity or facticity of certain Biblical accounts (such as the Flood or the Fall) may be questioned, provided this does not distort the Gospel.

4. That Christians need not accept matters taught in the Scriptures that are not a part of the "Gospel."

### Scripture Passages

*John 5:39-40*. You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. *Thesis, 1*

2 *Thessalonians* 2:15. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. *Thesis*, 2, 4

*Deuteronomy* 12:32. Everything that I command you you shall be careful to do: you shall not add to it or take from it. *Thesis* 2, 4

*Luke* 24:25. And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" *Thesis*, 2, 3, 4

*Psalms* 119:160. The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. *Thesis*, 2, 3, 4

*John* 7:42. Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? *Thesis*, 3, 4

*Luke* 16:17. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void. 4

*John* 10:35. If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and Scripture cannot be broken). . . . *Thesis*, 2, 4

*Galatians* 1:8. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. *Thesis*

*Acts* 17:11. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. *Thesis*, 2

*Psalms* 19:8. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. 4

*Ephesians* 3:3-4. . . . how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ. *Thesis*

*John* 8:31-32. Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." *Thesis*, 2, 4

2 *Peter* 3:15-16. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. *Thesis*

*Romans* 1:16-17. For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." *Thesis*, 1

*Acts* 18:24, 28. Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. . . . for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. *Thesis*

2 *Peter* 1:19-21. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. *Thesis*, 4

1 *Peter* 1:10-11. The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. *Thesis*

*John* 17:17. Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. *Thesis*, 2, 3, 4

*John* 20:31. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. *Thesis*, 1

*Romans* 15:4. For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. *Thesis*, 3, 4

1 *Peter* 1:25. "But the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you. *Thesis*

1 *Corinthians* 14:37. If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. *Thesis*, 2, 4

2 *Timothy* 3:15-17. . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis*, 1, 2, 4

1 *Thessalonians* 2:13. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. *Thesis* 2, 4

*Luke* 24:44-48. Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." *Thesis*, 2, 3, 4

*John* 21:24. This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. 3, 4

*Acts* 10:43. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. *Thesis*, 1

*Romans* 3:31. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. 4

*John* 16:13-14. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. *Thesis*, 2

1 *Corinthians* 2:12-13. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. *Thesis*, 2

### Lutheran Confessions

Here we are dealing primarily with the chief article of our Christian faith, so that, as the apostle testifies, the truth of the Gospel might be preserved (Gal. 2:5). Any coercion or commandment darkens and perverts this article because the adversaries will forthwith publicly demand such matters of indifference to confirm false doctrines, superstition, and idolatry and to suppress the pure doctrine and Christian liberty, or they will misuse them and misinterpret them in this direction. *FC, SD, X, 14: Thesis*, 1

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). From this it is beyond all doubt that the true understanding or the right use of the teaching of God's eternal foreknowledge will in no way cause or support either impenitence or despair. So, too, Scripture presents this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word (Eph. 1:13, 14; 1 Cor. 1:21, 30, 31), to admonish us to repent (2 Tim. 3:16), to urge us to godliness (Eph. 1:15 ff.; John 15:16, 17, 3, 4, 10, 12), to strengthen our faith and to assure us of our salvation (Eph. 1:9, 13, 14; John 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 2:13-15). *FC, SD, XI, 12: Thesis*, 1



Since this is the way things are, and since 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, the most acute and urgent necessity demands that in the presence of so many intrusive errors, aggravated scandals, dissensions, and longstanding schisms a Christian explanation and reconciliation of all of the disputes which have arisen should come into being. Such an explanation must be thoroughly grounded in God's Word so that pure doctrine can be recognized and distinguished from adulterated doctrine and so that the way may not be left free and open to restless, contentious individuals, who do not want to be bound to any certain formula of pure doctrine, to start scandalous controversies at will and to introduce and defend monstrous errors, the only possible consequence of which is that finally correct doctrine will be entirely obscured and lost and nothing beyond uncertain opinions and dubious, disputable imaginations and views will be transmitted to subsequent generations. *Preface, Book of Concord, pp. 12-13: Thesis, 2, 4*

1. We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

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 to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. *FC, Ep, RN, 1-2; Thesis, 2, 4*

In the same way, one must not by-pass or reject a teaching of the divine Word because some people misuse and misunderstand it; on the contrary, precisely in order to avert such misuse and misunderstanding, we must set forth the correct meaning on the basis of Scripture. *FC, SD, XI, 3: Thesis, 2, 4*

Here he 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.

This, of course, does not mean that other good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles, should be rejected. If they 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. *FC, SD, RN, 9-10: Thesis, 2, 3, 4*

Furthermore, we are to put forth every effort to live according to the will of God and "to confirm our call," as St. Peter says. Especially are we to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us. *FC, Ep, XI, 14: 3, 4*

#### Additional References

*SA, II, ii, 1-5: Thesis, 1*  
*PREFACE, BOOK OF CONCORD, pp. 8, 11: Thesis, 2, 4*  
*LC, V, 76: 3, 4*  
*Ap, IV, 345-46: Thesis, 1, 3*  
*LC, II, 38: Thesis, 1, 3*  
*FC, SD, RN, 3: Thesis 2, 3, 4*  
*Ap, IV, 2-3: 1*  
*FC, SD, X, 10: Thesis*

The Holy Scriptures teach both Law and Gospel, but the chief content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law enters into the service of the Gospel by bringing man to a knowledge of his sins and by convincing him that he is under God's judgment because of his sins, and by telling the believer what fruits of faith he should produce. *1949 Common Confession V: Thesis*

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. *ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," p. 5: Thesis, 2*

We believe and teach that God has given us His Holy Scripture to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:13-17). We therefore confess Scripture to be the only, but all-sufficient foundation of our faith, the source of all our teachings, the norm of our conduct in life, and the infallible authority in all matters with which it deals. (Luke 16:29-31; Deut. 4:2; 13:1-5; Is. 8:20; Acts 26:22; John 10:35) *1959 Statement on Scripture, III: Thesis*

We reject and condemn "demythologizing" as a denial of the Word of God. Where Scripture records as historical facts those events and deeds which far surpass the ordinary experience of men, that record must be understood literally, as a record of facts; the miraculous and mysterious may not be dismissed as intended to have only a metaphorical or symbolical meaning. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: 3*

5. Since the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired source and norm of all Christian preaching and teaching, we hold ourselves committed to the diligent and unremitting study of the written Word through the responsible use of every appropriate means and method that God has provided as an aid to our understanding of the Scriptures.

6. In hearty agreement with the Lutheran Confessions we affirm that the right understanding of the Gospel (including the proper distinction of Law and Gospel as grounded in the article of Justification) is the key that finally unlocks the meaning of Sacred Scripture (Apology, IV, 2-5, German; FC, SD, V, 1). We therefore hold that all theological questions raised by any interpretation must be posed and answered with reference to this central concern of the Scriptures. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 8: Thesis, 2*

Does the commission's document regard some Biblical teachings as unimportant because they do not treat of salvation in Christ or are not related to the Gospel as such?

No, the commission's document nowhere proposes such a classification of doctrines. Rather, it tries to make clear that the Gospel has a bearing on all Biblical teachings. Furthermore, the document states that "It is clear that the writers of the Lutheran Confessions were totally committed to the Scriptures. They themselves were not indifferent to any departure from God's Word, nor did they approve of such indifference in others." *CTCR, "Answers to Stance Document": 3, 4*

We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged.—With the Confessions of our Church we teach also that the "rule of faith" (*analogia fidei*) according to which the Holy Scriptures are to be understood are the clear passages of the Scriptures themselves which set forth the individual doctrines. (Apology. Triglot, p. 441,

§ 60; Mueller, p. 284). The rule of faith is not the man-made so-called "totality of Scripture" ("Ganzes der Schrift").

We reject the doctrine which under the name of science has gained wide popularity in the Church of our day that Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, but in part the Word of God and in part the word of man and hence does, or at least, might, contain error. We reject this erroneous doctrine as horrible and blasphemous, since it flatly contradicts Christ and His holy apostles, sets up men as judges over the Word of God, and thus overthrows the foundation of the Christian Church and its faith. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, 2, 3, 4*

Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Gen. 1 to 3, it must be understood as speaking of literal, historical facts. Where Scripture speaks symbolically, metaphorically, or metonymically, as for example in Rev. 20, it must be interpreted on these its own terms. Furthermore, since God spoke in the common language of man, expressions such as sunrise and sunset, the corners of the earth, etc., must not be viewed as intending to convey scientific information. (Ps. 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19; 2 Tim. 3:15) *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: 3*

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). *ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," p. 8: Thesis 2, 3, 4*

## D. The Authority of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that because the Scriptures have God as their author, they possess both the divine power to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (causative authority), as well as the divine authority to serve as the church's sole standard of doctrine and life (normative authority). We recognize that the authority of Scripture can be accepted only through faith and not merely by rational demonstration. As men of faith, we affirm not only that Holy Scripture is powerful and efficacious, but also that it is "the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong." (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 7)

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the authority of Scripture is limited to its efficacy in bringing men to salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. That the authority of Scripture has reference only to what the Scriptures *do* (as means of grace) rather than to what they *are* (as the inspired Word of God).
3. That the Scriptures are authoritative for the doctrine and life of the church, not because of their character as the inspired and inerrant Word of God,

## LCMS Synodical Resolutions

1965 Resolution 2-27: 3

1965 Resolution 2-35: 3, 4

1967 Resolution 2-31: 3

1967 Resolution 2-16: Thesis

1969 Resolution 2-16: 3

## QUESTIONS

1. Give examples of individuals or groups that tend to make acceptance of the Bible as such the heart of Christian theology.
2. Although the terms "formal principle" and "material principle" are not used in the Lutheran Confessions, do you find these terms useful for distinguishing between the heart of our theology (Jesus Christ) and the norm of our theology (Holy Scripture)?
3. Some people argue that since the Gospel is the object of faith it should also be regarded as the norm of theology. What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of this argument?
4. If concern for the authority of Holy Scripture is motivated by concern for the pure proclamation of the Gospel, is it proper to call such concern "Biblicistic"?
5. Must all theological questions be "elevated" to "Gospel questions" in order for them to be truly Lutheran? For example, is it Lutheran to ask Holy Scripture simply whether it is God's will for children to obey their parents, or must that question somehow become a "Gospel question"?
6. Do the Lutheran Confessions, with their tremendous emphasis on the Gospel, ever call into question an event recorded in Holy Scripture? How would you account for this?
7. Are Christians free to accept or reject a clear teaching of Scripture so long as no harm is done to the proclamation of the Gospel?

but because they are the oldest available written sources for the history of ancient Israel and for the life and message of Jesus Christ, or because they were written by the chosen and appointed leaders of Israel and of the early church, or because the church declared them to be canonical.

4. That the Christian community in every age is directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore free to go beyond the doctrine of the prophets and apostles in determining the content of certain aspects of its faith and witness.

## Scripture Passages

*John 17:17.* Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. *Thesis, 2, 3*

*Romans 15:4.* For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. *Thesis*

*John 5:39.* You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. *Thesis*

*1 Peter 1:25.* "... but the word of the Lord abides for ever." That word is the good news which was preached to you. *Thesis*  
*1 Corinthians 14:37.* If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. *Thesis, 1*

2 Timothy 3:15-17. . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis, 1, 2, 3, 4*

*Romans 15:18-19.* For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. *Thesis 1*

*1 Thessalonians 2:13.* And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. *Thesis, 2, 3*

*Luke 16:29-31.* But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." And he said, "No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead." *Thesis*

*Luke 24:25.* And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" *Thesis*

*Psalms 119:160.* The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. *Thesis, 1, 2*

*John 10:35.* If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken). . . . *Thesis*

*Galatians 1:8.* But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. *Thesis*

*Acts 17:11.* Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. *Thesis, 2*

*Romans 1:16-17.* For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." *Thesis*

*1 Thessalonians 1:5.* . . . for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. *Thesis*

*Acts 18:24, 28.* Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures . . . for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. *Thesis, 2*

*Romans 10:17.* So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. *Thesis*

*John 20:31.* . . . but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. *Thesis*

### Lutheran Confessions

Although the work was accomplished and forgiveness of sins was acquired on the cross, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How should we know that this has been accomplished and offered to us if it were not proclaimed by preaching, by the oral Word? Whence do they know of forgiveness, and how can they grasp and appropriate it, except by steadfastly believing the Scriptures and the Gospel? Now, the whole Gospel and the article of the Creed, "I believe in the holy Christian church, the forgiveness of sins," are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word. *LC, LS, 31-32: Thesis*

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. "He who hears you hears me"

cannot be applied to traditions. For Christ requires them to teach in such a way that he might be heard, because he says, "hears me." Therefore he wants his voice, his Word to be heard, not human traditions. *Ap, XXVIII, 18-19: Thesis, 4*

The following reasons from the Word of God support and confirm the foregoing explanation of and summary reply to the questions and issues stated at the beginning of this article. It is true that they are contrary to proud reason and philosophy, but we also know that "the wisdom of this perverse world is folly with God" and that it is only from the Word of God that judgments on articles of faith are to be pronounced. *FC, SD, II, 8: Thesis, 4*

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. *FC, Ep, VIII, 42: Thesis*

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed." 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 to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. *FC, Ep, RN, 1-2: Thesis, 1, 4*

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. *FC, SD, RN, 3: Thesis, 1, 2*

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. *FC, Ep, RN, 7: Thesis, 1, 4*

There is, of course, no more faithful or trustworthy interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ than the Lord Christ himself, who best understands his words and heart and intention and is best qualified from the standpoint of wisdom and intelligence to explain them. In the institution of his last will and testament and of his abiding covenant and union, he uses no flowery language but the most appropriate, simple, indubitable, and clear words, just as he does in all the articles of faith and in the institution of other covenant-signs and signs of grace or sacraments, such as circumcision, the many kinds of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and holy Baptism. *FC, SD, VII, 50:3*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, Ep, VII, 13: 3*

This means that the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel. *SA, II, ii, 15: Thesis, 4*

Finally, what assurance do we have that religious rites established by men without God's command can justify since we can affirm nothing about the will of God without the Word of God? *Ap, XV, 17: 4*

The Word of God is the true holy thing above all holy things. Indeed, it is the only one we Christians acknowledge and have. Though we had the bones of all the saints or all the holy and consecrated vestments gathered together in one heap, they could not help us in the slightest degree, for they are all dead things that can sanctify no one. But God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies all things. By it all the saints themselves have been sanctified. At what-

ever 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. *LC, I, 91-92: Thesis*

#### Additional References

*FC, SD, RN, 9-10: Thesis, I, 2*

*LC, II, 55: Thesis*

*PREFACE, Book of Concord, p. 13: Thesis*

*SA, III, viii, 3: Thesis*

*LC, IV, 57: 3, 4*

*LC, I, 101-02: Thesis*

*FC, SD, RN, I: Thesis*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

We believe and teach that God has given us His Holy Scripture to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:13-17): We therefore confess Scripture to be the only, but all-sufficient foundation of our faith, the source of all our teachings, the norm of our conduct in life, and the infallible authority in all matters with which it deals. (Luke 16:29-31; Deut. 4:2; 13:1-5; Is. 8:20; Acts 26:22; John 10:35) *1959 Statement on Scripture, III: Thesis*

We therefore recognize the Holy Scriptures as God's inerrant Word, and this Word of God alone shall establish articles of faith (cf. Smalcald Articles, Part II, Art. II). We pledge ourselves to teach all things taught in the Holy Scriptures, and nothing but that which is taught us by God in the Holy Scriptures. *1949 Common Confession, V: Thesis, I*

Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures in their entirety as the inspired Word of God. *1949 Common Confession, V: 3*

Scripture being the Word of God, it carries its own authority in itself and does not receive it by the approbation of the church. The Canon, that is, that collection of books which is the authority for the church, is not the creation of the church. Rather, the Canon has, by a quiet historical process which took place in the worship life of the church, imposed itself upon the church by virtue of its own divine authority. *1959 Statement on Scripture, III: 3*

Whatever cognizance needs to be taken—as indeed it must—of the connection between Biblical materials and their background in the whole complex of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious factors of their day, a clear distinction must nevertheless be maintained between the unique, divine, and revelatory character of Scripture and the sheer human and contingent character of Scripture's earthly milieu. Parallelisms between extra-Biblical materials and the form or substance of Scripture do not as such constitute causal or substantive relations. This is not in the least to deny the genuinely human and earthly dimension of Scripture itself. It is only to say that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness, explicit or implicit, of every other form of human expression. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: 3*

In conformity with the Lutheran Symbols our church confesses and acknowledges the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the Word of God given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, submits unreservedly to them as the sole source, norm, and authority for the church's teaching, and confidently uses them as the powerful vehicles of the Holy Spirit's continuing operation. *CTCR, "Stance Document," pp. 5-6: Thesis, 2, 4*

The commission does not suggest that the Law-Gospel dialectic is the means for determining what is true or not true in Scripture. Everything that Scripture teaches is true. The emphasis on the distinction between Law and Gospel is intended to exalt the specifically Christian use of the Scripture in the proclamation of the

divine Word. *CTCR, "Answers to Stance Document": I, 2*

We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God. They are the Word of God because the holy men of God who wrote the Scriptures wrote only that which the Holy Ghost communicated to them by inspiration, 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21. We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called "theological deduction," but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.

We furthermore teach regarding the Holy Scriptures that they are given by God to the Christian Church for the foundation of faith, Eph. 2:20. Hence the Holy Scriptures are the sole source from which all doctrines proclaimed in the Christian Church must be taken and therefore, too, the sole rule and norm by which all teachers and doctrines must be examined and judged. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, I, 2*

We reject the idea that tradition is a source of revelation. (Cf. Matt. 15:3-6; Col. 2:8)

We reject the idea that other new sources or norms of divine revelation besides Scripture are to be expected. (Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19-20; Gal. 1:8-9) *1959 Statement on Scripture, I: 4*

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. *ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," p. 5: Thesis*

We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. Inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ but also to such as may seem very remote (e. g., in the field of history, geography, and nature). For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement on Scripture, II: 1, 3*

#### Additional Reference

*ALC-LCMS, "Sola Scriptura," pp. 6-8: Thesis, I, 4*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

*1962 Resolution 3-16: 3*

*1967 Resolution 2-16: Thesis, I, 2*

*1967 Resolution 2-30: 3*

*1969 Resolution 2-03: 3*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Although the Lutheran Confessions do not employ the terms "normative authority" and "causative authority," do these terms nevertheless express confessional teaching?

2. Is the confessional emphasis on the Bible as the norm for preaching in any way opposed to the confessional emphasis on the Gospel as the object of faith?

3. What did Luther mean in emphasizing the clarity of Holy Scripture? Do you believe the Bible is clear enough to be the only rule and norm for faith and life?

4. Is the Christian community in any age free to go beyond the

doctrine of the prophets and apostles in determining the content of certain aspects of its faith and witness, for example, in certain political or social questions?

5. Do we accept Christ because of the Bible, or the Bible because of Christ, or is this a false alternative?

6. Does the way in which a Christian comes to accept the Holy

Scriptures as authoritative (namely, as a result of his faith in Christ) in any way limit the *extent* of Biblical authority? Why or why not?

7. Do you think that the *power* of Holy Scripture is sometimes confused with its *authority*? If so, how? Do you believe that the power of Holy Scripture receives enough attention in our preaching and teaching?

## E. The Canonical Text of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that the authoritative Word for the church today is the *canonical* Word, not precanonical sources, forms, or traditions—however useful the investigation of these possibilities may on occasion be for a clearer understanding of what the canonical text intends to say.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That there are various “meanings” of a Biblical text or pericope to be discovered at various stages of its precanonical history, or that the meaning a canonical text has now may differ from the meaning it had when it was first written.

2. That Biblical materials that are judged to be “authentic” (for example, “authentic” words of Jesus, “authentic” books of Paul, or “authentic” ideas of Moses) have greater authority than “non-authentic” Biblical statements.

3. That certain pericopes or passages in the canonical text of Scripture may be regarded as imaginative additions of the Biblical authors or of the early Christian community and therefore need not be accepted as fully authoritative.

4. That extracanonical sources may be used in such a way as to call into question the clear meaning of the canonical text.

5. That the essential theological data of Biblical theology is to be found in the precanonical history of the Biblical text.

6. That certain canonical materials have greater authority than other canonical materials because of their greater antiquity or because they are allegedly more “genuine” or “authentic.”

7. That various statements of Jesus recorded in the Gospels may not actually be from Jesus and therefore lack historical factuality or the full measure of His authority.

### Scripture Passages

*Luke 1:1-4.* Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. 7

*Luke 24:44-48.* Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything

written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. 1

*John 21:24.* This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. 7

*Acts 10:43.* To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. 1

*2 Thessalonians 2:15.* So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. *Thesis, 6*

*Luke 24:25.* And he said to them, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!” 3, 6

*Psalms 119:160.* The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. 3

*2 Peter 3:15-16.* And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. 2

*Acts 18:24, 28.* Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures . . . for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. 1

*John 5:46-47.* If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my word? 1

*John 17:17.* Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. 3

*2 Timothy 3:15-17.* . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis, 2, 3, 6*

*Romans 3:2.* Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God. *Thesis*

*Mark 7:10, 13.* For Moses said, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die”; but you say . . . thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do. *Thesis, 4*

### Lutheran Confessions

We shall not, can not, and should not permit any clever human opinions, no matter what appearance or prestige they may have, to lead us away from the simple, explicit, and clear understanding of Christ’s word and testament to a strange meaning different from the way the letters read, but, as stated above, we shall understand and believe them in the simple sense. *FC, SD, VII, 92: 1, 4*

## LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

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. *SA, II, ii, 15: Thesis, 4*

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. "He who hears you hears me" cannot be applied to traditions. For Christ requires them to teach in such a way that he might be heard, because he says, "hears me." Therefore he wants his voice, his Word to be heard, not human traditions. *Ap, XXVIII, 18-19: Thesis, 4*

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. *FC, Ep, RN, 7: Thesis, 3, 4, 5*

If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do. *LC, V, 76: 3, 7*

Here he 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. *FC, SD, RN, 9: Thesis, 4, 5*

... and in order that our contemporaries as well as our beloved posterity may be clearly and thoroughly informed and possess final certainty as to which Christian confession it is that we and the churches and schools of our lands have hitherto at all times adhered and appealed to, we have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God. . . . *Preface, Book of Concord, p. 8: Thesis, 4*

Because 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. *LC, IV, 57: 3, 7*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, VII, 13: 3, 7*

On the contrary, we mean specifically to condemn only false and seductive doctrines and their stiff-necked proponents and blasphemers. These we do not by any means intend to tolerate in our lands, churches, and schools inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it. *Preface, Book of Concord, p. 11: 4*

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. *FC, SD, RN, 3: Thesis*

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

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 to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. *FC, Ep, RN, 1-2; Thesis 3, 4, 5*

Since the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired source and norm of all Christian preaching and teaching, we hold ourselves committed to the diligent and unremitting study of the written Word through the responsible use of every appropriate means and method that God has provided as an aid to our understanding of the Scriptures. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 8: Thesis*

Whatever cognizance needs to be taken—as indeed it must—of the connection between Biblical materials and their background in the whole complex of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious factors of their day, a clear distinction must nevertheless be maintained between the unique, divine, and revelatory character of Scripture and the sheer human and contingent character of Scripture's earthly milieu. Parallelisms between extra-Biblical materials and the form or substance of Scripture do not as such constitute causal or substantive relations. This is not in the least to deny the genuinely human and earthly dimension of Scripture itself. It is only to say that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness, explicit or implicit, of every other form of human expression. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: 3*

We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. Inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ but also to such as may seem very remote (e.g., in the field of history, geography, and nature). For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement in Scripture, II: 3, 7*

We reject the idea that tradition is a source of revelation. (Cf. Matt. 15:3-6; Col. 2:8)

We reject the idea that other new sources or norms of divine revelation besides Scripture are to be expected. (Heb. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19-20; Gal. 1:8-9) *1959 Statement on Scripture, I: 4*

The authoritative Word for the church today is the canonical Word, not precanonical sources, forms, or traditions—however useful the investigation of these possibilities may on occasion be for a clearer understanding of what the canonical text intends to say. *CTCR, "Stance Document," pp. 9-10: Thesis*

Does the commission's document base the authority of Scripture on extra-Biblical data?

No. Extra-Biblical data are valuable only as aids to the understanding of Holy Scripture. The authority of Scripture is derived from its nature as the Word of God. *CTCR, "Answers to Stance Document": Thesis, 4, 5*

## LCMS Synodical Resolutions

a. The heart of the New Testament message is the Good News of an event which took place in history, "under Pontius Pilate" in Palestine; this Good News concerns a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth; the validity of the apostolic proclamation and the faith of the church stand or fall with the historical reality of the event (1 Cor. 15:1-19; John 15:22-24). The Gospels therefore invite historical investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents.

b. The event recorded in the Gospels is unique, without analogy in human history. It is nothing less than God's entering into human history for us men and for our salvation in the Person of Him in whom "the Godhead dwells bodily." It is the crisis point and turning point of human history, the coming in of the new world of God,



the dawn of the new creation. Historical investigation here moves in the presence of the Creator, present in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth; historical investigation must reckon with the unlimited power of Him who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not. Here the miracle is not only a possibility or probability; it is *essential* to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer. Christian historical investigation must therefore beware of measuring probabilities by standards taken from a secularized conception of history; the warning uttered by the document "A Lutheran Stance Toward Biblical Studies" (Part Two, Chapter 3) is very much in place.

c. The apostolic proclamation of the event and the inscripturation of that proclamation took place under the impulsion and discipline of the Spirit of Truth. He glorifies the Christ through the witness of men. To attribute to the church a creatively formative part in the witness to the event is to fly in the face of all that is revealed concerning the activity of the Spirit; such an attribution introduces an intolerable synergism at a crucial point in the saving work of God. 1969 Resolution 2-16: 3, 4, 7

WHEREAS, Memorials 331, 338, 339, and 340 in a variety of ways are concerned with the doctrine of Scripture—the establishment of the canon and of the nature, inspiration, inerrancy, proper interpretation, and clarity of Scripture; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, and that Scripture is in all its words and parts the very Word of God, as taught in the Scripture itself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21) and in the Lutheran Confessions. 1962, Resolution 3-16: 2, 3, 7

*Resolved*, That while we uphold the importance of the human authorship of the Scriptures, even though the human author of each book cannot be ascertained, we recognize that divine authorship is the dominant factor in the origin of the Bible, as the Synod emphasizes in the statement it adopted in 1959 (*Proceedings*,

p. 189): "We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture" (*Statement on Scripture*, 1958). 1965 Resolution 2-35: 3, 4, 7

## QUESTIONS

1. Since God is the primary Author of every Word of Scripture, what value and/or limitations would there be in attempting to get behind the Biblical text? Does the meaning of Holy Scripture lie in its *words*, or in the way(s) its words were used in various precanonical situations?

2. Is it in keeping with the Lutheran Confessions to hold that certain books or portions of Scripture have more or less *authority* than others? More or less direct *value* for our faith and life?

3. Since the Lutheran Confessions have no official list of canonical writings, is it un-Lutheran to place extracanonical sources (e. g., precanonical traditions or apocryphal writings) on the same authoritative level as the Scriptures?

4. If you assume that the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament were not actually spoken by Him but were in fact developed by the early Christian community, what does this do to our understanding of the Lord's Supper? of Holy Baptism? of the Sermon on the Mount?

5. Contemporary exegetical theology claims that many pericopes in the Gospels existed as independent literary units before they were incorporated into the Biblical text. Is the attempt to trace the precanonical use of such units permissible? Is it helpful? Is the study of the precanonical use of such a pericope, assuming it can actually be established, as important for the church's theological task as the attempt to understand and express the meaning of the text itself?

6. Does the authority of a portion of the text of Holy Scripture increase with the demonstration of its greater antiquity? Why or why not?

## F. The Infallibility of Scripture

With Luther, we confess that "God's Word cannot err" (LC, IV, 57). We therefore believe, teach, and confess that since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, they contain no errors or contradictions but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth. We hold that the opinion that Scripture contains errors is a violation of the *sola scriptura* principle, for it rests upon the acceptance of some norm or criterion of truth above the Scriptures. We recognize that there are *apparent* contradictions or discrepancies and problems which arise because of uncertainty over the original text.

We reject the following views:

1. That the Scriptures contain theological as well as factual contradictions and errors.

2. That the Scriptures are inerrant only in matters pertaining directly to the Gospel message of salvation.

3. That the Scriptures are only functionally inerrant, that is, that the Scriptures are "inerrant" only in the sense that they accomplish their aim of bringing the Gospel of salvation to men.

4. That the Biblical authors accommodated themselves to using and repeating as true the erroneous

notions of their day (for example, the claim that Paul's statements on the role of women in the church are not binding today because they are the culturally conditioned result of the apostle's sharing the views of contemporary Judaism as a child of his time).

5. That statements of Jesus and the New Testament writers concerning the human authorship of portions of the Old Testament or the historicity of certain Old Testament persons and events need not be regarded as true (for example, the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110, the historicity of Jonah, or the fall of Adam and Eve).

6. That only those aspects of a Biblical statement need to be regarded as true that are in keeping with the alleged *intent* of the passage (for example, that Paul's statements about Adam and Eve in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 11 do not prove the historicity of Adam and Eve because this was not the specific intent of the apostle; or that the virgin birth of our Lord may be denied because the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke did not have the specific intent to discuss a biological miracle).

7. That Jesus did not make some of the statements

or perform some of the deeds attributed to him in the Gospels but that they were in fact invented or created by the early Christian community or the evangelists to meet their specific needs.

8. That the Biblical authors sometimes placed statements into the mouths of people who in fact did not make them (for example, the claim that the "Deuteronomist" places a speech in Solomon's mouth which Solomon never actually made), or that they relate events as having actually taken place that did not in fact occur (for example, the fall of Adam and Eve, the crossing of the Red Sea on dry land, the episode of the brazen serpent, Jesus' cursing of the fig tree, John the Baptist's experiences in the wilderness, Jesus' changing water into wine, Jesus' walking on water, or even Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead or the fact of His empty tomb).

9. That the use of certain "literary forms" necessarily calls into question the historicity of that which is being described (for example, that the alleged mid-rashic form of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke suggests that no virgin birth actually occurred, or that the literary form of Genesis 3 argues against the historicity of the Fall).

#### Scripture Passages

*John 17:17.* Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. *Thesis*

*2 Timothy 3:15-17.* . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis*

*1 Thessalonians 2:13.* And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. *Thesis*

*Psalms 119:160.* The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. *Thesis*

*John 10:35.* If he called them gods to whom the word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken) . . . *Thesis*

*Galatians 1:8.* But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. *Thesis*

*2 Thessalonians 2:15.* So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. *Thesis*

*Luke 24:25-27.* And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. *Thesis*

*John 21:24.* This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true. *Thesis*

*2 Peter 1:16.* For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 14:37.* If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. 4

#### Lutheran Confessions

. . . and in order that our contemporaries as well as our beloved posterity may be clearly and thoroughly informed and possess final certainty as to which Christian confession it is that we and the churches and schools of our lands have hitherto at all times adhered and appealed to, we have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God. . . . *PREFACE, BOOK OF CONCORD, p. 8: Thesis, 1, 2, 3*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, Ep, VII, 13: Thesis 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*

"For as we have it from the lips of Christ, so it is; he cannot lie or deceive." *LC, V, 14: Thesis, 1, 5*

Because 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. *LC, IV, 57: Thesis, 1, 2, 3, 7, 8*

If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do. *LC, V, 76: Thesis, 7, 8*

There is, of course, no more faithful or trustworthy interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ than the Lord Christ himself, who best understands his words and heart and intention and is best qualified from the standpoint of wisdom and intelligence to explain them. In the institution of his last will and testament and of his abiding covenant and union, he uses no flowery language but the most appropriate, simple, indubitable, and clear words, just as he does in all the articles of faith and in the institution of other covenant-signs and signs of grace or sacraments, such as circumcision, the many kinds of sacrifice in the Old Testament, and holy Baptism. *FC, SD, VII, 50: 1, 2, 3, 5*

Now, this is not the word and ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the divine Majesty at whose feet every knee should bow and confess that it is as he says and should accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility. *LC, V, 11: Thesis, 1, 5*

Furthermore, we are to put forth every effort to live according to the will of God and "to confirm our call," as St. Peter says. Especially are we to abide by the revealed Word which cannot and will not deceive us. *FC, Ep, XI, 14: Thesis, 7, 8*

On account of this personal union and communion of the natures, Mary, the most blessed virgin, did not conceive a mere, ordinary human being, but a human being who is truly the Son of the most high God, as the angel testifies. He demonstrated his divine majesty even in his mother's womb in that he was born of a virgin without violating her virginity. Therefore she is truly the mother of God and yet remained a virgin. *FC, SD, VIII, 24: 9*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. Inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ but also to such as may seem very remote (e.g., in the field of history, geography, and nature). For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement on Scripture, II: Thesis, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8*

We believe and teach that God has given us His Holy Scripture to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:13-17). We therefore confess Scripture to be the only, but all-sufficient foundation of our faith, the source of all our teachings,



the norm of our conduct in life, and the infallible authority in all matters with which it deals. (Luke 16:29-31; Deut. 4:2; 13:1-5; Is. 8:20; Acts 26:22; John 10:35) *1959 Statement on Scripture, III: Thesis, 4*

Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Thesis, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*

May the same line of argument employed in the document to affirm the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 be used to assert the substantial Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch on the basis of John 5:39-47?

Yes. In both cases the authorship of the person named by Jesus is basic to His argument. However, in Matt. 22:43 Jesus identifies the authorship of a specific passage, whereas in John 5:39-47 He does not explicitly state the extent of the Mosaic authorship.

What does it mean when the document asserts that the "indications of authorship of the passages in question is never the main thrust of Jesus' utterances" (p. 12)?

All of Jesus' utterances must be accepted as they read. The force of the statement in its context is to affirm that the primary purpose of our Lord's words is to awaken men from the death of sin to the life of salvation in His name. The statement does not question the truthfulness of any aspect of our Lord's utterances. *CTCR, "Witness of Jesus," p. 6: 5, 6*

The "literary form" of the text—even when it can be ascertained with reasonable certainty—is only a clue to understanding, not a criterion of truth. Moreover, the Christian interpreter reckons with the fact that God in His revelation may both modify conventional literary modes, even radically, and also create unique modes without analogy in other literature. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: 9*

This means that every statement of Scripture must be understood in its native sense, according to grammar, context, and linguistic usage of the time. Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Gen. 1 to 3, it must be understood as speaking of literal, historical facts. Where Scripture speaks symbolically, metaphorically, or metonymically, as for example in Rev. 20, it must be interpreted on these its own terms. Furthermore, since God spoke in the common language of man, expressions such as sunrise and sunset, the corners of the earth, etc., must not be viewed as intending to convey scientific information. (Ps. 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19; 2 Tim. 3:15) *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: 9*

We reject and condemn "demythologizing" as a denial of the Word of God. Where Scripture records as historical facts those events and deeds which far surpass the ordinary experience of men, that record must be understood literally, as a record of facts; the miraculous and mysterious may not be dismissed as intended to have only a metaphorical or symbolical meaning. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: 9*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, and that Scripture is in all its words and parts the very Word of God, as taught in the Scripture itself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21) and in the Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm the Scripturally implicit hermeneutical principles that the Bible does not contradict itself and that the clear passages of Scripture must interpret the less clear. *1962 Resolution 3-16: Thesis*

*Resolved*, That while we uphold the importance of the human authorship of the Scriptures, even though the human author of each book cannot be ascertained, we recognize that divine authorship is

the dominant factor in the origin of the Bible, as the Synod emphasizes in the statement it adopted in 1959 (*Proceedings*, p. 189): "We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture" (*Statement on Scripture*, 1958). *1965 Resolution 2-35: Thesis, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8*

*Resolved*, That the Synod affirm the resolutions of previous conventions (Resolution 2-16, New York convention, 1967, *Proceedings*, p. 92; Resolution 2-01, Detroit convention, 1965, *Proceedings*, p. 94) that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the verbally inspired and the infallible written Word of God, according to which all preaching, teaching, and living is to be ordered and judged (F. C., *Triglot*, p. 851, Tappert, pp. 503–504). *1969 Resolution 2-03: Thesis*

*Resolved*, That the Synod answer these questions by appealing to what the Scriptures themselves say, as for example: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?" (John 5:46, 47; cf. Luke 24:27). "And He stood up to read; and there was given to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah" (Luke 4:16, 17; cf. Matt. 4:14-16; Rom. 10:16-20). Thus the Scriptures ascribe the Pentateuch and the Book of Isaiah to Moses and Isaiah respectively. The Scriptures do not in so many words ascribe the human authorship exclusively to these men, but neither do they in so many words negate these conclusions. *1965 Resolution 2-35: 5*

*Resolved*, That the 1969 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod affirm the historicity of the New Testament, making this affirmation as an act of faith in the incarnation of our Lord as attested and presented in living reality by the Spirit of Truth in words which He Himself has taught. *1969 Resolution 2-16: 7*

*Resolved*, That the Synod affirm its conviction that the events recorded in the Book of Jonah did occur as shown by (a) historical data in the book itself; (b) our Lord's reference to Jonah and Nineveh in the New Testament (Matt. 12:38-42; Luke 11:29 to 32). *1965 Resolution 2-27: 5, 9*

*Resolved*, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod reaffirms its belief that Adam and Eve were historical persons who fell into sin and were redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it abide by its official pronouncement regarding these matters as expressed in the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. I; Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. I; *Brief Statement*, paragraphs 5, 6, 7. *1965 Resolution 2-29: 9*

#### QUESTIONS

1. In the Large Catechism Luther stated:

We do the same in infant Baptism. We bring the child with the purpose and hope that he may believe, and we pray God to grant him faith. But we do not baptize him on that account, but solely on the command of God. Why? Because 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. (LC, IV, 57)

Does Luther's statement that "God's Word cannot err" have reference only to the command to baptize, or is Luther in effect asserting the inerrancy of all Scripture?

2. Can a Bible that is not factually true serve as the only rule and norm for our faith and life? If not, why not? If it can, who determines what is true or not true, and how is this done without setting up some norm above the Scripture?

3. Does the admission that Holy Scripture is not intended to be a "scientific textbook" mean that the Scriptures are or may be mistaken when they speak about matters pertaining to science or nature?

4. People often say, "To err is human." When we grant that the Bible is a human book, written by men in their own language and style, does this imply that the Bible errs? Why or why not? (Incidentally, is the slogan, "To err is human," true of humanity as such, or only a description of the way man is since the fall?)

5. How does one determine the intention of any statement? Do similar principles apply to the interpretation of Holy Scripture? Why or why not?

6. Can one disagree with Jesus' statements about anything

without thereby raising serious questions about the Person of Christ?

7. Is it possible to affirm errors in Holy Scripture without thereby, in effect, setting up a higher standard than the Scriptures themselves?

8. Lutherans readily confess that the Scriptures accomplish their divine purpose. Is this attribute of the Holy Scriptures what is meant by "inerrancy," or is it better described with a term such as "efficacy"?

## G. The Unity of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that since the same God speaks throughout Holy Scripture, there is an organic unity both within and between the Old and New Testaments. While acknowledging the rich variety of language and style in Scripture and recognizing differences of emphasis in various accounts of the same event or topic, we nevertheless affirm that the same doctrine of the Gospel, in all its articles, is presented throughout the entire Scripture.

We reject the view that Holy Scripture, both within and between its various books and authors, presents us with conflicting or contradictory teachings and theologies. We regard this view not only as violating the Scripture's own understanding of itself but also as making it impossible for the church to have and confess a unified theological position that is truly Biblical and evangelical.

### Scripture Passages

*Titus 1:2-3.* . . . in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior. *Thesis, Antithesis*

*2 Timothy 1:9-10.* . . . who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. *Thesis*

*Hebrews 1:1-2.* In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. *Thesis*

*Romans 3:21-26.* But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. *Thesis*

*Romans 1:1-2.* Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures. . . . *Thesis*

*1 Peter 1:10-11.* The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation;

they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. *Thesis*

*Acts 2:30-31.* Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. *Thesis*

*Acts 3:18-26.* But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul that does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came afterwards, also proclaimed these days. You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed." God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you in turning every one of you from your wickedness." *Thesis*

*John 5:46-47.* If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? *Thesis*

*John 17:17.* Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. *Antithesis*

*Romans 15:4.* For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. *Thesis*

*John 5:39.* You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. *Thesis*

*2 Timothy 3:15-17.* . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis, Antithesis*

*2 Thessalonians 2:15.* So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. *Thesis*

*Luke 24:25-27.* And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. *Thesis, I*

*Psalms 119:160.* The sum of thy word is truth; and every one of thy righteous ordinances endures for ever. *Antithesis*

John 7:42. "Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" *Thesis*

Romans 4:6-7, 9. So also David pronounces a blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;" . . . Is this blessing pronounced only upon the circumcised, or also upon the uncircumcised? We say that faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. *Thesis, Antithesis*

Acts 17:11. Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all eagerness, examining the scriptures daily to see if these things were so. *Thesis*

2 Peter 3:15-16. And count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures. *Thesis, Antithesis*

Acts 18:24, 28. Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures . . . for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. *Thesis*

Luke 24:44-48. Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." *Thesis*

Acts 10:43. To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. *Thesis*

1 Corinthians 15:1-5. Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. *Thesis, Antithesis*

Galatians 3:6-9. Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. *Thesis*

### Lutheran Confessions

The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. This 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. *Ap, XII, 53: Thesis*

Third, in Acts 10:43, Peter says, "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." How could he say it any more plainly? We receive the forgiveness of sins, he says, through his name, that is, for his sake: therefore, not for the sake of our merits, our contrition, attrition, love, worship, or works. And he adds, "when we believe in him." Thus he requires faith. We cannot take hold of the name of Christ except by faith. In addition, he cites the consensus of all

the prophets, which is really citing the authority of the church. But we shall discuss this passage later on in considering penitence. *Ap, IV, 83: Thesis*

Let pious consciences know, therefore, that God commands them to believe that they are freely forgiven because of Christ, not because of our works. Let them sustain themselves with this command of God against despair and against the terrors of sin and death. Let them know that this is what the saints in the church have believed since the beginning of the world. Peter clearly cites the consensus of the prophets; the writings of the apostles attest that they believed the same thing; nor are testimonies of the Fathers lacking. *Ap, XII, 72-73: Thesis*

Even though the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins, the patriarchs knew the promise of the Christ, that for his sake God intended to forgive sins. As they understood that the Christ would be the price for our sins, they knew that our works could not pay so high a price. Therefore they received free mercy and the forgiveness of sins by faith, just as the saints in the New Testament. The frequent references to mercy and faith in the Psalms and the prophets belong here; for example, "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Here the psalmist confesses his sins, but he does not lay claim to any merit of his own. He adds, "There is forgiveness with thee" (v. 4). Here he comforts himself with his trust in God's mercy. He quotes the promise: "My soul waits for his word, my soul hopes in the Lord," that is, because thou has promised the forgiveness of sins I am sustained by thy promise. *Ap, IV, 57-58: Thesis*

In the Old Testament as in the New, the saints had to be justified by faith in the promise of the forgiveness of sins given for Christ's sake. Since the beginning of the world, all the saints have had to believe that Christ would be the offering and the satisfaction for sin, as Is. 53:10 teaches, "When he makes himself an offering for sin." *Ap, XIV, 55: Thesis, Antithesis*

But here Peter cites the consensus of the church in support of our position: "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name," etc. Surely the consensus of the prophets should be interpreted as the consensus of the universal church. *Ap, XII, 66: Thesis, Antithesis*

Dr. Luther very diligently urged this distinction in nearly all his writings and showed in detail that there is a vast difference between the knowledge of God which comes from the Gospel and that which is taught by and learned from the law, since from the natural law even the heathen had to some extent a knowledge of God, although they neither understood nor honored him rightly (Rom. 1:21).

Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs themselves, constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through the deceit of the serpent transgressed God's laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves with the proclamation of the woman's seed, who would bruise the serpent's head; likewise, of the seed of Abraham, by whom all nations would be blessed; likewise, of David's son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the nations, "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with whose stripes we are healed." *FC, SD, V, 22-23: Thesis*

### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

In the New Testament the men of the Reformation heard the radical Gospel most clearly in Paul; it is no accident that the first

passage cited in the Augsburg Confession (or the Smalcald Articles) is a passage from Paul. But they were not proclaiming a peculiarly "Pauline" Gospel; they claimed the whole New Testament, all of the Scriptures, as witnesses to this Gospel, as is clear both from their actual citations and from their debonair and sweeping assertions that they have all Scriptures on their side and really have no need to cite particular passages. *CTCR, "Seven Reformation Theses," p. 9: Thesis*

The purpose of Scripture is to proclaim Christ as the Savior of sinners (John 5:39, 46; Acts 10:43). All Scripture is written because of Christ and has a connection with the revelation of God in Christ, some passages directly, some more remotely. Every word of Scripture is therefore an organic part of the Scripture's witness to Christ. *1959 Statement on Scripture, I: Thesis*

The undeniably necessary effort to hear a text of Scripture first of all in its particularity, its meaning "then and there," must be balanced by an equal effort to hear the text both in its integral relation to all the rest of Scripture and in its meaningfulness for all who hear it today. This effort does not require an arbitrary flattening out of the rich variety of the Biblical witness into a dull one-dimensional uniformity. But it does entail above all a firm grasp of the essential unity of both Testaments, Old and New, and of their common witness to the one Truth that is as relevant now as when it was first proclaimed. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: Thesis*

Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": Antithesis*

Ultimately all the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures have an organic connection with the central theme of the Scriptures, which is the Gospel. A denial of any teaching of the Scriptures involves a mutilation of, and departure from, the complete Gospel. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis*

## H. Old Testament Prophecy

Since the New Testament is the culminating written revelation of God, we affirm that it is decisive in determining the relation between the two Testaments and the meaning of Old Testament prophecies in particular, for the meaning of a prophecy becomes known in full only from its fulfillment. With the Lutheran Confessions, we recognize the presence of Messianic prophecies about Jesus Christ throughout the Old Testament. Accordingly, we acknowledge that the Old Testament "promises that the Messiah will come and promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life for His sake" (Apology, IV, 5) and that the patriarchs and their descendants comforted themselves with such Messianic promises (cf. FC, SD, V, 23).

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the New Testament statements about Old Testament texts and events do not establish their meaning (for example, the claim that Jesus' reference to Psalm 110 in Matthew 22:43-44 does not establish either that Psalm's Davidic authorship or its predictive Messianic character).

Since the same God speaks by the same creative energy of the same Holy Spirit throughout Scripture, the Old Testament and the New Testament are to be viewed as constituting an organic unity. This unity is to be understood, not as a simple equation of the two Testaments with each other but in the sense of Heb. 1:1-2: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Since the New Testament is the culminating revelation of God, it is decisive in determining the relation between the two Testaments and the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies in particular; the meaning of a prophecy becomes known in full only from its fulfillment. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis*

## QUESTIONS

1. Were people in the Old Testament saved by keeping the Law, or by their trust in the promises of God concerning the coming Savior?

2. Examine a Biblical pericope (like the baptism of Jesus or the crucifixion); in all places it occurs in the Scriptures. Note the variety of concepts and emphases that are employed. Does variety of concept and style imply contradiction? How can our preaching and teaching make greater use of such variety in a proper way?

3. Do you believe that James and Paul have contradictory theologies? Why or why not?

4. The alleged existence of contradictory theologies in the Bible is frequently used as an argument for tolerating doctrinal differences between churches within the ecumenical movement. Is this legitimate? Why or why not?

5. Could The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod accept the notion of contradictory theologies in Holy Scripture and continue to insist on doctrinal unity as the necessary basis for church fellowship?

2. That Old Testament prophecies are to be regarded as Messianic prophecies, not in the sense of being genuinely predictive, but only in the sense that the New Testament later applies them to New Testament events.

3. That the Old Testament prophets never recognized that their prophecies reached beyond their own time to the time of Christ.

## Scripture Passages

*John 8:56.* Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad. *Thesis, 3*

*John 12:41.* Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke of him. *Thesis, 3*

*Titus 1:2-3.* . . . in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by command of God our Savior. *Thesis*

*Romans 3:21-22.* But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. *Thesis*

*Hebrews 1:1-2.* In many and various ways God spoke of old

to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. *Thesis*

*Romans 1:1-2.* Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures. . . . *Thesis*

*Acts 10:43.* To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. *Thesis*

*Galatians 3:6-9.* Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. *Thesis, 2, 3*

*1 Peter 1:10-12.* The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. *Thesis, 2, 3*

*John 5:46-47.* If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? *Thesis*

*John 5:39.* You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. *Thesis*

*2 Timothy 3:15-17.* . . . and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. *Thesis*

*Luke 24:25-27.* And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. *Thesis, 2*

*John 7:42.* Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was? *Thesis, 2*

*Acts 18:24, 28.* Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. . . . for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. *Thesis, 2*

*Luke 24:44-47.* Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. *Thesis, 2*

*Acts 2:31.* . . . he (David) foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. *2, 3*

### Lutheran Confessions

Dr. Luther very diligently urged this distinction in nearly all his writings and showed in detail that there is a vast difference between the knowledge of God which comes from the Gospel and

that which is taught by and learned from the law, since from the natural law even the heathen had to some extent a knowledge of God, although they neither understood nor honored him rightly (Rom. 1:21).

Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with the proper distinction. The descendants of the holy patriarchs, like the patriarchs themselves, constantly reminded themselves not only how man in the beginning was created righteous and holy by God and through the deceit of the serpent transgressed God's laws, became a sinner, corrupted himself and all his descendants, and plunged them into death and eternal damnation, but also revived their courage and comforted themselves with the proclamation of the woman's seed, who would bruise the serpent's head; likewise, of the seed of Abraham, by whom all nations should be blessed; likewise, of David's son, who should restore the kingdom of Israel and be a light to the nations, "who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and with whose stripes we are healed." *FC, SD, V, 22-23: Thesis*

In some places it presents the law. In others it presents the promise of Christ; this it does either when it promises that the Messiah will come and promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life for his sake, or when, in the New Testament, the Christ who came promises forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life. *Ap, IV, 5: Thesis*

Third, in Acts 10:43, Peter says, "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." How could he say it any more plainly? We receive the forgiveness of sins, he says, through his name, that is, for his sake; therefore, not for the sake of our merits, our contrition, attrition, love, worship, or works. And he adds, "when we believe in him." Thus he requires faith. We cannot take hold of the name of Christ except by faith. In addition, he cites the consensus of all the prophets, which is really citing the authority of the church. But we shall discuss this passage later on in considering penitence. *Ap, IV, 83: Thesis*

It is completely erroneous to imagine that the Levitical sacrifices merited the forgiveness of sins before God and that by analogy there must be sacrifices in the New Testament besides the death of Christ that are valid for the sins of others. This notion completely negates the merit of Christ's suffering and the righteousness of faith, it corrupts the teaching of both the Old and the New Testament, and it replaces Christ as our mediator and propitiator with priests and sacrificers who daily peddle their wares in the churches. *Ap, XXIV, 57: Thesis*

For what is more certain in the church than that the forgiveness of sins is given freely for Christ's sake, that not our works but Christ is the propitiation for sin? As Peter says (Acts 10:43), "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." We would rather agree with this church of the prophets than with those damnable writers of the Confutation who so impudently blaspheme Christ. *Ap, XX, 2: Thesis*

Even though the law does not teach the free forgiveness of sins, the patriarchs knew the promise of the Christ, that for his sake God intended to forgive sins. As they understood that the Christ would be the price for our sins, they knew that our works could not pay so high a price. Therefore they received free mercy and the forgiveness of sins by faith, just as the saints in the New Testament. The frequent references to mercy and faith in the Psalms and the prophets belong here; for example, "If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Here the psalmist confesses his sins, but he does not lay claim to any merit of his own. He adds, "There is forgiveness with thee" (v. 4). Here he comforts himself with his trust in God's mercy. He quotes the



promise: "My soul waits for his word, my soul hopes in the Lord," that is, because thou has promised the forgiveness of sins I am sustained by thy promise. Therefore the patriarchs, too, were justified not by the law but by the promise and faith. *Ap, IV, 57-59: Thesis, 3*

In the other part Daniel promises the king forgiveness of sins. This promise of the forgiveness of sins is not the preaching of the law, but a truly prophetic and evangelical voice which Daniel surely wanted to be received by faith. Daniel knew that the forgiveness of sins in the Christ was promised not only to the Israelites but to all nations. Otherwise he could not have promised the king forgiveness of sins. *Ap, IV, 261-62: Thesis, 2, 3*

But now since he ascended into heaven, not just like some other saint but, in the words of the apostle (Eph. 4:10), far above all heavens that he might truly fill all things, he is everywhere present to rule, not only as God but also as man, from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth, as the prophets foretell (Ps. 8:6; 93:1; Zech. 9:10) and as the apostles testify that he worked with them everywhere and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it (Mark 16:20). *FC, SD, VIII, 27: 2*

The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ. This 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. For all the saints were justified by faith in this promise, not by their own attrition or contrition. *Ap, XII, 53: Thesis, 2*

But here Peter cites the consensus of the church in support of our position: "To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name," etc. Surely the consensus of the prophets should be interpreted as the consensus of the universal church. *Ap, XII, 66: Thesis, 2, 3*

Let pious consciences know, therefore, that God commands them to believe that they are freely forgiven because of Christ, not because of our works. Let them sustain themselves with this command of God against despair and against the terrors of sin and death. Let them know that this is what the saints in the church have believed since the beginning of the world. Peter clearly cites the consensus of the prophets; the writings of the apostles attest that they believed the same thing; nor are testimonies of the Fathers lacking. *Ap, XII, 72-73: Thesis, 2, 3*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

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 witness (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) *ALC-LCMS, "Sola Gratia," pp. 2-3: Thesis*

Does the document leave room for a denial of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament?

No, as the document itself indicates, the commission is fully committed to the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. As is well known, the Lutheran Confessions strongly affirm Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament (cf., e.g., Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 23). *CTCR, "Answers to Stance Document": Thesis*

Since the same God speaks by the same creative energy of the same Holy Spirit throughout Scripture, the Old Testament and the New Testament are to be viewed as constituting an organic unity. This unity is to be understood, not as a simple equation of the two Testaments with each other but in the sense of Heb. 1:1-2: "God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past

unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Since the New Testament is the culminating revelation of God, it is decisive in determining the relation between the two Testaments and the meaning of the Old Testament prophecies in particular; the meaning of a prophecy becomes known in full only from its fulfillment. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis, 1, 2*

Does the document use the *kenosis* of our Lord to affirm that He was "merely a first-century Palestinian Jew" in His knowledge and use of the Old Testament?

On the contrary! The document insists that in Jesus' knowledge and use of the Old Testament, as in all He said and did, He was not merely a first-century Palestinian Jew but the incarnate Son of God and that His *kenosis* was a self-giving rather than a self-diminution. *CTCR, "Questions on Witness of Jesus," p. 1: 1*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

WHEREAS, The Holy Scriptures declare the salvation of sinners to be absolutely dependent on the grace of God mediated by the eternal Son of the Father; and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures show that God has continuously revealed and offered His grace to sinners for their comfort through faith in the promised Savior; and

WHEREAS, Many revelations of this Messiah and of His salvation are given in the Old Testament, including references to the Seed, the Servant, the Lamb, etc., which become progressively fuller and clearer throughout the Old Testament; and

WHEREAS, The fulfillment of these prophecies of the coming Savior is affirmed by the New Testament Gospel of Christ; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That we reaffirm our belief that the Old Testament prophecies of the Savior find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of sinners. *1965 Resolution 2-26: Thesis*

*Resolved*, That the Synod answer these questions by appealing to what the Scriptures themselves say, as for example: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?" (John 5:46, 47; cf. Luke 24:27). "And He stood up to read; and there was given to Him the book of the prophet Isaiah" (Luke 4:16, 17; cf. Matt. 4:14-16; Rom. 10:16-20). Thus the Scriptures ascribe the Pentateuch and the Book of Isaiah to Moses and Isaiah respectively. The Scriptures do not in so many words ascribe the human authorship exclusively to these men, but neither do they in so many words negate these conclusions. *1965 Resolution 2-35: 1*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Is it permissible to teach that the Old Testament prophetic vision of the future was limited to prognosticating on the basis of an astute reading of the signs of the times and a general expectation of the kingdom of God? Why or why not?

2. What is meant when the New Testament says that events, persons, and institutions of the Old Testament were "types" of Christ or shadows of things to come? Is there a difference between Messianic typology, on the one hand, and Messianic prophecy involving such events as the virgin birth and the crucifixion?

3. Did Jesus accommodate the content of His message to the comprehension and time of His hearers? What bearing does the answer to this question have in determining the nature of Old Testament prophecy?

4. Is it proper for a Christian interpreter to read a passage or pericope of the Old Testament "on its own terms" if those terms do not include what the New Testament may have to say about it? If so, is there anything essentially different between Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Old Testament?

## *I. Historical Methods of Biblical Interpretation*

Since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the person of His Son actually entered into man's history, we acknowledge that the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the Word. Furthermore, we recognize that the inspired Scriptures are historical documents written in various times, places, and circumstances. We therefore believe that the Scriptures invite historical investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents. We affirm, however, that the Christian interpreter of Scripture cannot adopt uncritically the presuppositions and canons of the secular historian, but that he will be guided in his use of historical techniques by the presuppositions of his faith in the Lord of history, who reveals Himself in Holy Scripture as the one who creates, sustains, and even enters our history in order to lead it to His end.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the question of whether certain events described in the Scripture actually happened is unimportant in view of the purpose and function of Holy Scripture.

2. That methods based on secularistic and naturalistic notions of history, such as the following, may have a valid role in Biblical interpretation:

- a. That the universe is closed to the intervention of God or any supernatural force.
- b. That miracles are to be explained in naturalistic terms whenever possible.
- c. That the principle of the economy of miracles may lead us to deny certain miracles reported in the Scriptures.
- d. That the doctrines of Holy Scripture are the result of a natural development or evolution of ideas and experiences within Israel and the early church.
- e. That the message of Scripture can be adequately measured by laws derived exclusively from empirical data and rational observation.
- f. That man's inability to know the future makes genuine predictive prophecy an impossibility.

3. That our primary concern in Biblical interpretation is not with explaining the meaning of the primary sources, namely, the canonical Scriptures, on the basis of the sources themselves.

4. That if the use of historical methods leads to conclusions at variance with the evident meaning of the Biblical text, such conclusions may be accepted without violating the Lutheran view of Scripture or our commitment to the Lutheran Confessions (for

example, the claim that it is permissible to deny the existence of angels or a personal devil because of literary, historical, or theological considerations).

### **Scripture Passages**

*John 1:14.* And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 15:1-8.* Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. *Thesis*

*Luke 2:1-3.* In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to be enrolled, each to his own city. *Thesis*

*Luke 1:1-4.* Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed. *Thesis*

*1 Corinthians 15:17-20.* If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. *I*

### **Lutheran Confessions**

On this basis, likewise, Christ performed all his miracles and manifested his divine majesty according to his good pleasure, when and how he wanted to. He did so not only after his resurrection and ascension but also in the state of his humiliation—for example, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, again when he was twelve years old, among the teachers, again in the garden when with one word he struck his enemies to the ground, and again in death, when he died not just like another man but in such a way that by and in his death he conquered sin, death, the devil, hell, and eternal damnation. The human nature could not have accomplished this if it had not been personally united with the divine nature and had communion with it. Hence also the human nature has, after the resurrection from the dead, its exaltation above all creatures in heaven and on earth. This is precisely that he has laid aside completely and entirely the form of a servant (without, however, laying aside the human nature, which he retains throughout eternity) and has been installed in the complete exercise and use of the divine majesty according to the assumed human nature. He had this majesty immediately at his conception even in his mother's womb, but, as the apostle testifies, he laid it aside, and as Dr. Luther explains it, he kept it hidden during the state of his humiliation and did not use it at all times, but

only when he wanted to. But now since he ascended into heaven, not just like some other saint but, in the words of the apostle (Eph. 4:10), far above all heavens that he might truly fill all things, he is everywhere present to rule, not only as God but also as man, from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth, as the prophets foretell (Ps. 8:6; 93:1; Zech. 9:10) and as the apostles testify that he worked with them everywhere and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it (Mark 16:20). *FC, SD, VIII, 25-27: 2*

"The third ground is that God's Word is not false nor does it lie." *FC, Ep, VII, 13: 1, 4*

If you cannot feel the need, therefore, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself do. *LC, V, 76: 1, 4*

Because 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. *LC, IV, 57: 1, 4*

... and in order that our contemporaries as well as our beloved posterity may be clearly and thoroughly informed and possess final certainty as to which Christian confession it is that we and the churches and schools of our lands have hitherto at all times adhered and appealed to, we have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God. . . . *Preface, Book of Concord, p. 8: 3*

We are therefore bound to interpret and explain these words of the eternal, truthful, and almighty Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Creator, and Redeemer, not as flowery, figurative, or metaphorical expressions, as they appear to our reason, but we must accept them in simple faith and due obedience in their strict and clear sense, just as they read. Nor dare we permit any objection or human contradiction, spun out of human reason, to turn us away from these words, no matter how appealing our reason may find it. *FC, SD, VII, 45: 2, 3*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

The problem of "history" needs to be handled with extraordinary sensitivity by the Christian interpreter. He cannot adopt uncritically the presuppositions and canons of the secular historian. In his use of historical techniques the interpreter will be guided by the presuppositions of his faith in the Lord of history. It is indeed true that Christian faith rightly sees in the historicalness of God's redemptive work (His entry into and participation in our *saeculum*) a divine warrant for the use of "secular" means and methods in the study of His Word, including linguistic, literary, and historical analysis of the texts. But at the same time faith recognizes that there is more to history than can ever be adequately measured by "laws" derived exclusively from empirical data and rational observation. In other words, the Christian interpreter must continually take into account "that the Scriptures, precisely in their historical character, are Holy Scriptures since they are the product of the Spirit who produces in history that which is not of this world" (cf. *CTCR Statement on Inspiration, LCMS Proceedings, 1965, page 293*). *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: Thesis, 2*

Whatever cognizance needs to be taken—as indeed it must—of the connection between Biblical materials and their background in the whole complex of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious factors of their day, a clear distinction must nevertheless be maintained between the unique, divine, and revelatory character of Scripture and the sheer human and contingent character of Scripture's earthly milieu. Parallelisms between extra-Biblical materials and the form or substance of Scripture do not as such constitute causal or substantive relations. This is not in the least to deny the genuinely human and earthly dimension of Scripture itself. It is only to say that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness,

explicit or implicit, of every other form of human expression. *CTCR, "Stance Document," p. 10: Thesis*

We condemn and reject any and all teachings and statements that would limit the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture or that deny the divine authorship of certain portions of Scripture. Inspiration applies not only to such statements as speak directly of Christ but also to such as may seem very remote (e. g., in the field of history, geography, and nature). For since God is the Lord of history and has revealed Himself by acts in history and has in the Person of His Son actually entered into man's history, the historical framework in which the Gospel message is set in Scripture is an essential part of the inspired Word just as much as the spiritual truths revealed in it. *1959 Statement on Scripture, II: Thesis, 1, 4*

We reject and condemn "demythologizing" as a denial of the Word of God. Where Scripture records as historical facts those events and deeds which far surpass the ordinary experience of men, that record must be understood literally, as a record of facts; the miraculous and mysterious may not be dismissed as intended to have only a metaphorical or symbolical meaning. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis, 1, 2, 4*

Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35. *Brief Statement, "Holy Scripture": 1, 4*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

WHEREAS, The Scriptures teach and our Lutheran Confessions affirm that the fall of our first parents is a historical fact "which corrupted God's handiwork in Adam" (*FC, SD, 1, 42; cf. FC, SD, I, 7, 9, 23, 27, 42; SA, III, viii, 5; cf. also Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22*), thus bringing sin into the world so that "since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin" (*AC, II, 1*), and "we must confess what St. Paul says in Romans 5:12, namely, that sin had its origin in one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men were made sinners and became subject to death and the devil" (*SA, III, i, 1*) . . .

*Resolved*, That the Synod reaffirm its faith in the united testimony of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions on the aforementioned teachings; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Synod reject and condemn all those world views, philosophical theories, exegetical interpretations, and other hypotheses which pervert these Biblical teachings and thus obscure the Gospel; *1967 Resolution 2-31; Thesis, 2, 4*

a. The heart of the New Testament message is the Good News of an event which took place in history, "under Pontius Pilate" in Palestine; this Good News concerns a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth; the validity of the apostolic proclamation and the faith of the church stand or fall with the historical reality of the event (*1 Cor. 15:1-19; John 15:22-24*). The Gospels therefore invite historical investigation and are to be taken seriously as historical documents.

b. The event recorded in the Gospels is unique, without analogy in human history. It is nothing less than God's entering into human history for us men and for our salvation in the Person of Him in whom "the Godhead dwells bodily." It is the crisis point and turning point of human history, the coming in of the new world of God, the dawn of the new creation. Historical investigation here moves in the presence of the Creator, present in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, historical investigation must reckon with the unlimited power of Him who raises the dead and calls into being the things that are not. Here the miracle is not only a possibility or probability; it is *essential* to the presence and activity of the Creator and Redeemer. Christian historical investigation must therefore beware of measuring probabilities by standards taken from



a secularized conception of history; the warning uttered by the document "A Lutheran Stance Toward Biblical Studies" (Part Two, Chapter 3) is very much in place. *1969 Resolution 2-16: Thesis, I, 2*

### QUESTIONS

1. Secular and humanistic notions of history are often evidenced in various uses of the so-called historical-critical method. Six such notions are indicated in antithesis two. Discuss the implications of each of them.

2. What is the Christian view of history? How will this view affect historical methods and conclusions, or won't it?

3. What distinguishes the Biblical account of past events from all other historical records?

4. What are the implications of the "earthly dimension" of Scripture for Biblical interpretation? In what sense is Holy Scripture "qualitatively different" from other literature? What are the implications of this difference for Biblical interpretation?

5. According to some Lutheran proponents of the historical-critical method, the Biblical interpreter must "translate" meaning *then* into meaning *now*, and the latter may in fact be quite different from the former. Does the *meaning* of the Scriptures change? Is it more accurate to speak of differing applications of the given meaning rather than changes in "meaning"?

6. A prominent theologian of the Lutheran Church in America recently stated: "Preus and his committee make an all-out attack on the historical-critical method, because they realize that it was the results of just this method that blew apart the older dogmatic conception of doctrinal unity in the Bible. This method opened

our eyes to pluralism, divergent trends, historical conditionedness and relativity, and also theological contradictions in the Bible" (Carl Braaten, *Dialog*, Autumn 1972, p. 251). If Braaten is correct in his judgment that the use of the historical-critical method has led to the conclusion that "in the Bible we know there is no unity of doctrine," is this method compatible with a confessional Lutheran view of Holy Scripture?

7. Can the historical-critical method (as normally defined and understood in contemporary scholarship) be used with Lutheran presuppositions, or is that a contradiction in terms?

8. Identify the proper "Lutheran presuppositions" for Biblical interpretation. What determines that such presuppositions are "Lutheran"?

9. Granted that any method may employ *tools* that are intrinsically neutral, is there anything intrinsically neutral about a *method* as such? Do some methods *necessarily* involve certain presuppositions? Is this the case with the so-called historical-critical method (as that term is generally understood)?

10. Is it fair to evaluate a method in terms of its usual results? If so, what would this say about the strengths and/or weaknesses of the so-called historical-critical method?

11. Few, if any, exegetes in our Synod would agree with Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Would you fault Bultmann for his presuppositions (which he would probably claim are Lutheran), for his methodology (which he would probably claim is typical of contemporary scholarship), or his conclusions (which he would probably claim are a logical result of his presuppositions and methodology)?

## V. Original Sin

We believe, teach, and confess that God, by the almighty power of His Word, created all things. We also believe that man, as the principal creature of God, was specially created in the image of God, that is, in a state of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We affirm that Adam and Eve were real historical human beings, the first two people in the world, and that their fall was a historical occurrence which brought sin into the world so that “since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin” (AC, II, 1). We confess that man’s fall necessitated the gracious redemptive work of Jesus Christ and that fallen man’s only hope for salvation from his sin lies in Jesus Christ, His Redeemer and Lord.

We therefore reject the following:

1. All world views, philosophical theories, and exegetical interpretations which pervert these Biblical teachings and thus obscure the Gospel.
2. The notion that man did not come into being through the direct creative action of God, but through a process of evolution from lower forms of life which in turn developed from matter that is either eternal, autonomous, or self-generating.
3. The opinion that the image of God in which Adam and Eve were created did not consist of con-created righteousness, that is, a perfect relationship to God.
4. The notion that Adam and Eve were not real historical persons and that their fall was not a real historical event which brought sin and death into the world.
5. The opinion that original sin does not deprive all men of their spiritual powers and make it impossible for them to be in the right relationship to God apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

### Scripture Passages

*Hebrews 11:3.* By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. *Thesis, 2*

*Genesis 1 and 2.* The Creation of the World. *Thesis, 2, 4*

*Psalms 33:6.* By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. *Thesis, 2*

*Colossians 1:15-16.* He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. *Thesis, 2*

*Exodus 20:11.* . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. *Thesis, 2*

*Exodus 31:17.* It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. *Thesis, 2*

*John 1:1-4.* In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. *Thesis, 2*

*Colossians 3:10.* . . . and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. *Thesis, 3*

*Genesis 5:1-2.* This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. *Thesis*

*Ephesians 4:24.* . . . and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. *Thesis, 3*

*Genesis 3.* The Fall of Man. *Thesis, 4*

*Romans 5:12-19.* Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous. *Thesis, 4*

*1 Timothy 2:14.* . . . and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. *Thesis, 4*

*Ephesians 2:1-3.* And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. *Thesis, 5*

*John 3:6.* That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. *Thesis*

*Romans 7:18.* For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. *5*

*1 Corinthians 2:14.* The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. *5*

*Romans 8:7.* For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot. *5*

*Psalms 51:5.* Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. *Thesis*

*Acts 17:26.* And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation. *Thesis*

### Lutheran Confessions

Likewise we believe, teach, and confess that man’s unregenerated will is not only turned away from God, but has also become an enemy of God, so that he desires and wills only that which

is evil and opposed to God, as it is written, "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Likewise, "The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot." As little as a corpse can quicken itself to bodily, earthly life, so little can man who through sin is spiritually dead raise himself to spiritual life, as it is written, "When we were dead through our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ." Therefore we are not of ourselves "sufficient to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God" (II Cor. 3:5). *FC, Ep, II, 3: Thesis, 5*

If you were to ask a young child, "My boy, what kind of God have you? What do you know about him?" he could say, "First, my God is the Father, who made heaven and earth. Apart from him alone I have no other God, for there is no one else who could create heaven and earth." *LC, II, II: Thesis, 2*

So original righteousness was intended to involve not only a balanced physical constitution, but these gifts as well: a surer knowledge of God, fear of God, trust in God, or at least the inclination and power to do these things. This the Scripture shows when it says that man was created in the image of God and after his likeness (Gen. 1:27). What else is this than that a wisdom and righteousness was implanted in man that would grasp God and reflect him, that is, that man received gifts like the knowledge of God, fear of God, and trust in God? So Irenaeus interprets the likeness of God. *Ap, II, 17-18: Thesis 3*

So when Luther wanted to show the magnitude of original sin and of human weakness, he taught that the remnants of original sin in man are not in their nature neutral, but they need the grace of Christ to be forgiven and the Holy Spirit to be mortified. *Ap, IV, 45: Thesis*

Although in the case of Adam and Eve man's nature was originally created pure, good, and holy, sin did not invade their nature in such a way that Satan created or made something essentially evil and blended this with their nature, as the Manichaeans imagined in their enthusiasm. The fact is, that Satan misled Adam and Eve through the Fall, and that by God's judgment and verdict man lost the concreated righteousness as a punishment. This deprivation and lack, this corruption and wounding which Satan brought about, this loss has so perverted and corrupted human nature (as was indicated above) that all men, conceived and born in the natural way from a father and a mother, now inherit a nature with the same lack and corruption. For since the Fall human nature is not at first created pure and holy and is corrupted only subsequently through original sin, but in the first moment of our conception the seed from which man is formed is sinful and corrupted. *FC, SD, I, 27-28: Thesis, 4*

God not only created the body and soul of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but also our bodies and souls after the Fall, even though they are corrupted, and God still acknowledges them as his handiwork, as it is written, "Thy hands fashioned and made me, all that I am round about" (Job 10:8). *FC, SD, I, 4: Thesis, 4*

That this inherited damage is the reason why all of us, because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, are in God's disfavor and are children of wrath by nature, as St. Paul says (Rom. 5:12). *FC, SD, I, 9: Thesis, 4*

Here we must confess what St. Paul says in Rom. 5:12, namely, that sin had its origin in one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men were made sinners and became subject to death and the devil. This is called original sin, or the root sin. *SA, III, i, 1: Thesis, 4*

Just as the devil cannot be conquered without Christ's help, so we cannot buy our way out of the slavery by ourselves. World history itself shows the great power of the devil's rule. Blasphemy and wicked doctrines fill the world, and by these bonds the devil

has enthralled those who are wise and righteous in the eyes of the world. In others, even grosser vices appear. Christ was given to us to bear both sin and penalty and to destroy the rule of the devil, sin, and death; so we cannot know his blessings unless we recognize our evil. *Ap, IV, 48-50: Thesis, 5*

Our churches teach that man's will has some liberty for the attainment of civil righteousness and for the choice of things subject to reason. However, it does not have the power, without the Holy Spirit, to attain the righteousness of God—that is, spiritual righteousness—because natural man does not perceive the gifts of the Spirit of God (I Cor. 2:14); but this righteousness is wrought in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word. *AC, XVIII, 1-3: 5*

The chief articles of our Christian faith constrain and compel us to maintain such a distinction. In the first place, in the article of creation Scripture testifies not only that God created human nature before the Fall, but also that after the Fall human nature is God's creature and handiwork (Deut. 32:6; Is. 45:11; 54:9; 64:8; Acts 17:25, 26; Rev. 4:11). *FC, SD, I, 34: 2*

For that reason and in order to distinguish God's creature and handiwork in man from the devil's work, we declare that it is by God's creation that man has a body and soul; likewise, that it is God's work that man is able to think, to speak, to act, and to do anything, for "in him we live and move and are" (Acts 17:28). But the fact that our nature is corrupted, that our thoughts, words, and deeds are evil, is in its origin the handiwork of Satan, who through sin has in this fashion corrupted God's handiwork in Adam. *FC, SD, I, 42: Thesis, 4*

Outside of Christ death and sin are our masters and the devil is our god and lord, and there is no power or ability, no cleverness or reason, with which we can prepare ourselves for righteousness and life or seek after it. *FC, SD, II, 43: Thesis, 5*

Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent. And this disease or vice of origin is truly sin, which even now damns and brings eternal death on those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Our churches condemn the Pelagians and others who deny that the vice of origin is sin and who obscure the glory of Christ's merit and benefits by contending that man can be justified before God by his own strength and reason. *AC, II, 1-3: Thesis, 5*

Our churches teach that although God creates and preserves nature, the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, that is, of the devil and ungodly men. If not aided by God, the will of the wicked turns away from God, as Christ says in John 8:44, "When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature." *AC, XIX: 5*

#### LCMS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

We teach that the first man was not brutelike nor merely capable of intellectual development, but that God created man *in His own image*, Gen. 1:26, 27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10, that is, in true knowledge of God and in true righteousness and holiness and endowed with a truly scientific knowledge of nature, Gen. 2:19-23.

We furthermore teach that sin came into the world by the fall of the first man, as described Gen. 3. By this Fall not only he himself, but also all his natural offspring have lost the original knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, and thus all men are sinners already by birth, dead in sins, inclined to all evil, and subject to the wrath of God, Rom. 5:12, 18; Eph. 2:1-3. We teach also that men are unable, through any efforts of their own or by the aid of "culture and science," to reconcile themselves to God and thus to conquer death and damnation. *Brief Statement, "Of Man and Sin": Thesis, 3, 4, 5*

Therefore all men are born into this world with original sin; and being unable to observe God's divine commands, they willfully continue to transgress God's holy Law in thoughts, words, and deeds. Man as sinner has delivered himself into the bondage of sin and of the devil, from which man cannot free himself by his own powers. From this desperate condition and tyranny only God can set man free. *1949 Common Confession, "Man": 5*

This means that every statement of Scripture must be understood in its native sense, according to grammar, context, and linguistic usage of the time. Where Scripture speaks historically, as for example in Gen. 1 to 3, it must be understood as speaking of literal historical facts. *1959 Statement on Scripture, IV: Thesis, 4*

Scripture tells us not only that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and that He saw everything which He had made was good; it also indicates that soon after creation evil entered into the world. Sin corrupted God's good creation by turning man, the creature made in the image of God, into a rebel against the will of His own Creator.

The Scriptures trace the corruption of God's creation back to a great temptation. It was staged by a serpent, which is identified in Rev. 12:9 as Satan (the devil). This most subtle of all the "wild creatures" is described as persuading man to disobey God's specific command not to eat of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden. *CTCR, "Creation in Biblical Perspective," p. 5: Thesis, 4*

The Biblical teaching that man is God's creature gives man his true worth. He does not exist as the result of an accident, nor is he the chance product of blind cosmic forces. He is in point of fact the deliberate creation of a wise, mighty, and loving God. *CTCR, "Creation in Biblical Perspective," p. 11: 2*

The Biblical teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption leaves no room for the notion of the development of the universe and of all that is in it from matter that is either eternal or autonomous or even self-generating. Holy Scripture teaches very plainly that our universe had a beginning, that it is finite, temporal, and perishable, and that it has been brought into being by the Word of the Creator Himself. *CTCR, "Creation in Biblical Perspective," p. 12: 2*

#### LCMS Synodical Resolutions

*Resolved*, That The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod reaffirms its belief that Adam and Eve were historical persons who fell into sin and were redeemed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and that it abide by its official pronouncement regarding these matters as expressed in the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Art. I; Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Art. I; *Brief Statement*, paragraphs 5, 6, 7. *1965 Resolution 2-29: Thesis, 4*

WHEREAS, Scripture teaches and the Lutheran Confessions affirm the doctrine of creation in such a way as to show us both that

man is the principal creature of God (Gen. 1–2; Col. 1:16-18; cf. the citations from the Confessions above) and that the doctrine is to be used to humble and terrify us and also to lift us up and warm our hearts with gratitude to God for all His blessings (LC. Creed, I, 22–23; cf. Is. 40; Ps. 104; Job 38; cf. also FCSD, I, 34–37); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures teach and the Lutheran Confessions affirm that Adam and Eve were real, historical human beings, the first two people in the world (Gen. 2; Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-47; 1 Tim. 2:11-15, cf. FC, Ep. I, 4; SD, I, 9, 27; Ap. XII, 55), created in God's image with body and soul "pure, good, and holy" (FC, SD, II, 27), thus possessing "the knowledge of God, fear of God, and trust in God" (Ap II, 17, 18; cf. Col. 2:10; Eph. 2:24); and

WHEREAS, The Scriptures teach and our Lutheran Confessions affirm that the fall of our first parents is a historical fact "which corrupted God's handiwork in Adam" (FC, SD, I, 42; cf. FC, SD, I, 7, 9, 23, 27, 42; SA, III, viii, 5; cf. also Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), thus bringing sin into the world so that "since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin" (AC, II, 1); and "we must confess what St. Paul says in Romans 5:12, namely, that sin had its origin in one man, Adam, through whose disobedience all men were made sinners and became subject to death and the devil" (SA, III, i, 1). *1967 Resolution 2-31: Thesis, 4*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Does the statement in Romans 5 that by "one man sin came into the world and death by sin" and that by "one man's obedience many will be made righteous" shed any light on the question of whether Adam and Eve were historical persons whose fall into sin was also historical? If this passage permits the conclusion that the fall of Adam and Eve need not be taken historically, does it permit a similar conclusion with regard to the obedience of Jesus Christ? If not, why not?

2. Do the Lutheran Confessions affirm the historicity of Adam and Eve and the fall? Do they base their teaching of original sin on the actual fall of Adam and Eve, or is this teaching limited to affirming the universality of sin?

3. What impact do evolutionary theories (theistic or atheistic) have on the Biblical affirmation that Adam was formed by God from the dust of the earth and Eve from his rib? That Adam and Eve are the first parents of all mankind? That sin and death entered the world as a result of Adam and Eve's disobedience?

4. If the Biblical teaching on the fall is interpreted as a description of universal sin rather than as a historical event which forever changed natural man's relationship to God, how is it possible to account for the origin of sin without making God the creator of evil?

## VI. Confessional Subscription

We reaffirm our acceptance of the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and our unconditional subscription to “all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God” (Constitution, Article II; cf. also Bylaw 4.21). We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture and as authoritative for our work as ministers of Jesus Christ and servants of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

We accept the following clarifications of the nature of our confessional subscription:

1. We acknowledge that the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions includes not only those doctrines of Holy Scripture explicitly treated in the Confessions but also those Biblical doctrines set forth somewhat indirectly or incidentally, such as the doctrines of Holy Scripture, creation, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology.

2. With the fathers, we recognize that not everything in the Lutheran Confessions is a part of its doctrinal content, but we reject all attempts to abridge the extent of this doctrinal content in an arbitrary or subjective manner. We recognize, for example, that subscription to the Lutheran Confessions does not bind us to all strictly exegetical details contained in the Confessions, or even to the confessional use of certain Bible passages to support a particular theological statement. However, since the Confessions want to be understood as Biblical expositions, we reject the notion that we are not bound by our confessional subscription to the exposition of Scripture contained in the Confessions or to the doctrinal content which the Confessions derive from individual Bible passages.

3. We recognize that the Confessions must be read and studied in terms of the historical situations in which they were written, but we reject the view that our confessional subscription means only that we regard the Confessions as a historically correct response to the problems encountered by the church when the Confessions were written.

4. We recognize that the doctrinal content of the Confessions centers in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of our justification by grace through faith, but we reject the view that the doctrinal content of the Confessions includes only those confessional statements which explicitly and directly deal with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, we do not accept the idea that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions permits us to reject such confessional positions as the

existence of the devil and of angels or that Adam and Eve were real historical persons whose fall into sin was a real historical event.

5. We recognize that the Lutheran Confessions contain no distinct article on the nature of Holy Scripture and its interpretation, but we acknowledge and accept the confessional understanding of the nature of Holy Scripture and of the proper theological principles for its interpretation.

6. We recognize the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scripture and therefore reject the opinion that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions leaves us free to reject any doctrinal statements of the Confessions where we feel there is no supporting Biblical evidence.

7. We acknowledge that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions pledges us to preach and teach in accordance with the entire Holy Scripture. We therefore reject the opinion that all Biblical matters not explicitly treated in the Lutheran Confessions are open questions.

8. We confess that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule and norm for faith and life, and that other writings “should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture” (FC, Ep. Rule and Norm, 1-2). We therefore reject the notion that it is legitimate to maintain the doctrinal conclusions of the Confessions without accepting their Biblical basis, or to regard formal confessional subscription as an adequate safeguard against improper exegetical conclusions.

9. Finally, we affirm that our acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions means not only that we tolerate the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions as a viable option for Lutheran Christians today but that we in fact preach, teach, and confess the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions as our very own.

### Lutheran Confessions

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, “Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

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 to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. *FC, Ep, RN, 1-2; Thesis, 7, 8*

No one can blame us if we derive our expositions and decisions

in the controverted articles from these writings, for just as we base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors who remained steadfastly in the pure doctrine. *FC, SD, RN, 13: Thesis, 6*

We likewise purpose to cooperate with one another in the future in the implementation of this effort at concord in our lands, according to our own and each community's circumstances, through diligent visitation of churches and schools, the supervision of printers, and other salutary means. If the current controversies about our Christian religion should continue or new ones arise, we shall see to it that they are settled and composed in timely fashion before they become dangerously widespread in order that all kinds of scandal might be obviated. *Preface, Book of Concord, p. 14: 7*

All these and similar articles, and whatever attaches to them or follows from them, we reject and condemn as false, erroneous, heretical, contrary to the Word of God, to the three Creeds, to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology, to the Smalcald Articles, to Luther's Catechisms. All pious Christians will and should avoid these as dearly as they love their soul's welfare and salvation.

Therefore, in the presence of God and of all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity, we wish to have testified that the present explanation of all the foregoing controverted articles here explained, and none other, is our teaching, belief, and confession in which by God's grace we shall appear with intrepid hearts before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and for which we shall give an account. Nor shall we speak or write anything, privately or publicly, contrary to this confession, but we intend through God's grace to abide by it. In view of this we have advisedly, in the fear and invocation of God, subscribed our signatures with our own hands. *FC, SD, XII, 39-40: 1, 5, 9*

Besides, examples ought to be interpreted according to the rule, that is, according to sure and clear passages of Scripture, not against the rule or the passages. *Ap, XXVIII, 60: 2*

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong. *FC, Ep, RN, 7: 8*

Here he 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. *FC, SD, RN, 9: 8*

#### LC-MS Synodical Statements and Study Documents

We accept as our confessions all the symbols contained in the Book of Concord of the year 1580.—The symbols of the Lutheran Church are not a rule of faith beyond, and supplementary to, Scripture, but a confession of the doctrines of Scripture over against those who deny these doctrines.

Since the Christian church cannot make doctrines, but can and should simply profess the doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture, the doctrinal decisions of the symbols are binding upon the conscience not because our church has made them nor because they are the outcome of doctrinal controversies, but only because they are the doctrinal decisions of Holy Scripture itself.

Those desiring to be admitted into the public ministry of the Lutheran Church pledge themselves to teach according to the symbols not "in so far as," but "because," the symbols agree with Scripture. He who is unable to accept as Scriptural the doctrine set forth in the Lutheran symbols and their rejection of the corresponding errors must not be admitted into the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated *ex professo*, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines.

The obligation does not extend to historical statements, "purely exegetical questions," and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All doctrines of the Symbols are based on clear statements of Scripture. *1949 Common Confession: Thesis, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9*

The church's response and witness to the Word of God, particularly in the face of denial and attack, finds expression in the confessions of the church. Loyalty to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions is therefore essentially fidelity to the Holy Scriptures. We hold to them not merely because they have been formulated and accepted by the church as the expression of its faith, but because they constitute the right understanding and exposition of the Scriptures. The Scriptures remain the norm by which every confession must be interpreted and judged. *1952 Common Confession: Thesis, 7*

#### LC-MS Synodical Resolutions

*Resolved*, That this convention again reaffirm the Synod's insistence on a *quia* ("because") subscription to the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. *1965 Resolution 2-17: Thesis, 6*

*Resolved*, That we pray in this day of theological unrest and confusion that God by His mercy keep us faithful to His inspired and inerrant Word "as the only rule and norm of faith and practice" and to the Lutheran Confessions as a true and faithful exposition of that Word. *1967 Resolution 2-16: Thesis*

The Synod holds that "the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel" (Tappert, p. 295:15) and that "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (Tappert, p. 464:1). Accordingly the Constitution of the Synod prescribes (Article VIII, C) that "doctrine shall be decided only by the Word of God" (cf. Constitution, Article II, 1; VII; Bylaw 1.09 b). The Synod is irrevocably committed to the *Sola Scriptura* principle.

The Synod maintains that it is not a violation of the *Sola Scriptura* principle when it adopts doctrinal resolutions, for the Synod in such resolutions does not presume to *establish* doctrine, but intends only to *confess* doctrines taught by the Scriptures.

The Synod affirms that a doctrine is a doctrine because it is contained in the Scriptures. The Synod, therefore, rejects the opinion that a doctrine taught by the Scriptures and confessed by the Synod becomes binding upon its members only if and when it is unanimously approved. Rather, the Synod holds that a doctrine must be unanimously accepted because it is clearly taught in Scripture. . . .

The Synod, nevertheless, holds that its confessional base is as broad as *Holy Scripture*, and that provided a doctrinal resolution is in fact in harmony with the Word of God, which is "the *only* rule and norm of doctrine," the content of such a resolution is *intrinsic* to the Synod's confessional basis. *1971 Resolution 2-21: Thesis, 7*

#### QUESTIONS

1. Doctor C. F. W. Walther held that "the servant of the church is not bound by . . . the interpretation of certain Bible passages." Can you give examples of certain exegetical judgments to which this principle would apply? Is it accurate to paraphrase this principle to mean that confessional subscription does not bind us to the confessional interpretation of *any individual passage* of Holy Scripture? How would such an interpretation affect the confessional interpretation of a passage such as "This is My body"?

2. Would the following hypothetical incident be a valid applica-



tion of the principle that confessional subscription does not bind us to all strictly exegetical details in the Scriptures?

A Lutheran professor tells a class that he cannot accept the virgin birth as a biological miracle because he does not consider that to be the major point suggested by the literary form employed by Matthew or Luke. Moreover, the professor feels that Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 is incorrect exegesis of the Old Testament. When a student suggests that this position violates the professor's confessional subscription, the professor responds by stating that confessional subscription does not bind him to the confessional interpretation of specific passages.

3. If we grant as a general principle of interpretation that statements should be interpreted in accordance with their author's intention (as we do in Holy Scripture), what would this principle imply about our acceptance of *confessional* references to the historical

fall of Adam and Eve?

4. Are only those doctrines explicitly and directly treated in the Lutheran Confessions included in our confessional subscription? Why or why not?

5. Are the confessions in effect placed above the Scriptures if an article of faith is affirmed, not because it is held that the article of faith is taught in the Scripture, but rather simply because the article is affirmed in the Confessions?

6. Is it a violation of the Lutheran Confessional principle for the church to accept new statements of belief as the need arises?

7. Congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod normally have an article in their constitution expressing their subscription to the Lutheran Confessions. What are the implications of such confessional subscription for the preaching, teaching, and life of the congregation?

## CONCLUSION

The 1971 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod reaffirmed the Synod's desire to abide by its doctrinal position as stated in its constitution (Article II). The Synod clearly stated its conviction that its confessional base is as broad as Holy Scripture and that the Synod accepts anything and everything that the Scriptures teach. Moreover, the Synod declared its right as a Synod to apply its confessional base definitively to current issues and thus conserve and promote unity and resist an individualism which breeds schism.

This Statement expresses the Synod's Scriptural and confessional stance on a number of important topics. It is hoped that the endorsement of this Statement will be of assistance to the Synod in the "conservation and promotion of the unity of the true faith" (Constitution, Article III).