

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

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

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

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Part 2

Definitions of Gospel, Theology, Doctrine, and Consensus

As Used in the LCA

By Robert C. Schultz

GOSPEL

The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article V, 6, defines the proper, **eigentlich** meaning of "gospel" in distinction from "law" as "solely the preaching of God's grace." It quotes Luther: "Everything that preaches about our sin and the wrath of God, no matter how or when it happens, is the proclamation of the law. On the other hand, the Gospel is a proclamation that shows and gives nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ" (FC, SD, V, 12). And it says, ". . . this Gospel alone, strictly speaking, teaches about saving faith in Christ. The Gospel, however, is that doctrine which teaches what a man should believe in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins from God. . . . 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 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, 19-21; cf., Apology IV, 43).

"Gospel" has been and may be used in a broad sense to describe "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" (FC, SD, V, 4).

The "broad" use of "gospel" can be applied to anything which contains the gospel in its proper sense. Thus even in the broad use, the proper meaning of "gospel" remains determinative. This broad usage stands "apart from the proper distinction between law and gospel" (FC, SD, V, 5), but the distinction between law and gospel must also be applied to such material.

DOCTRINE

"Doctrine" is the doctrine of the gospel. It is that which must be taught in and by the church in order to communicate the gospel in its purity without confusing it with the law. The focus here may be either on the process of teaching or on the content of the teaching. However, these two factors are inseparable in practice, for the gospel cannot be communicated unless what is said expresses the gospel. And since the gospel cannot be communicated to those who do not know that they are sinners and under the wrath of God, the teaching of the law is necessary to the doctrine of the gospel. In considering specific aspects of doctrine, we may speak of doctrines. Doctrine and doctrines are defined by the church in its confessional writings. The Scripture is the norm of all doctrines. But not everything in the Scripture is doctrine. Only what expresses the gospel in its purity from the law is doctrine, or what is a necessary expression of the distinction between law and gospel.

THEOLOGY

"Theology" is the church's disciplined reflection on its doctrine in terms of its necessity, validity, and the interrelatedness of various doctrines. Thus there may be agreement on doctrine at the same time there are differences and even disagreements on theology. Since confessional doctrines themselves may contain both "doctrine" and "theology," the doctrines must be clearly and distinctly stated in theses and antitheses (FC, SD, Rule and Norm, 19).

CONSENSUS

"Consensus" describes agreement on doctrine, on what must be preached in and by the church in proclaiming the gospel. It does not presuppose that all parties have the same theology. This consensus was claimed by the signers of the Augsburg Confession (AC, I, 1) and by the theologians of the Formula of Concord (FC, SD, R&N, the frequent references to unanimity, **einhellig**). The original signers of these two confessions both excluded those from signing who disagreed with the doctrine and proclaimed their "consensus" and "unanimity" in doctrine in spite of disagreements in "theology."