

DECEMBER 14, 1983

AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH AND EXPRESSION OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS
TO THE COMMISSION FOR A NEW LUTHERAN CHURCH
FROM THE FELLOWSHIP OF EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN LAITY AND PASTORS
(FELLP)

This pro forma⁽¹⁾ statement is addressed to concerned members of the merging churches and the Task Force on Theology of the COMMISSION FOR A NEW LUTHERAN CHURCH.
Grace and Peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

It is our purpose to present a Statement of Faith and an expression of theological concerns with regard to the New Lutheran Church. We propose to do so according to the following sequence:

First: To affirm Jesus Christ as the only foundation for life and salvation. (Article IV, Augsburg Confession).

Second: To affirm the Holy Scriptures as the infallible authoritative Word of God for our times, as the Lutheran Church from its inception has affirmed it, and to affirm the three historic creeds of the Christian Church.

Third: To affirm the historic expression of our Lutheran faith in terms of grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone.

Fourth: To express concern about the effect of scriptural interpretations regarding contemporary issues in our society.

Fifth: Conclusions regarding the above.

PART I
FAITH IN CHRIST AS LORD AND SAVIOR

WE AFFIRM

Article IV (Justification) of the Augsburg Confession:

"It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3. 21-26 and 4:5."

1. Pro Forma: A statement which has the form and preliminary listing of information and concerns which will follow at another opportunity.

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PART II
GOD'S WORD, CREEDS, CONFESSIONS

WE AFFIRM:

Part I. Epitome of the Formula of Concord:

"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."

"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..."

"Immediately after the time of the apostles--in fact, already during their lifetime--false teachers and heretics invaded the church. Against these the ancient church formulated symbols (that is, brief and explicit confessions) which were accepted as the unanimous, catholic, Christian faith and confessions of the orthodox and true church, namely the Apostles Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We pledge ourselves to these, and we hereby reject all heresies and teachings which have been introduced into the church of God contrary to them."

WE AFFIRM:

THE UNITED TESTIMONY OF FAITH AND LIFE⁽¹⁾ (1952). III. THE MEANS OF GRACE:

"God has willed that the knowledge and benefit of Christ's redemption be brought to man through His Means of Grace, namely, through the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacraments. Through these Means of Grace He not only offers, but actually bestows, His grace in Christ unto forgiveness of sins and a life of everlasting fellowship with Him.

THE WORD

"We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of man's salvation. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit informs and convinces us that His Word is true, that He will keep all His promises to us, and testifies in our hearts that our faith in Christ is not in vain. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth' (John 17:17, AV).

"We bear witness that the Bible is our only authentic and infallible⁽²⁾ source of God's revelation to us and all men, and that it is the only inerrant⁽³⁾ and completely adequate source and norm of Christian doctrine and life.

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1. The United Testimony of Faith and Life: From the latest edition of the ALC Handbook.
 2. We affirm that Scripture having been given by divine inspiration is infallible, so that, far from misleading us, it is true and reliable in all the matters it addresses. As our Lord himself said "it cannot be broken" (John 10:31). It can never fail in its judgements and teachings. All that it teaches is unimpeachable, absolute, authority, and it cannot be contradicted, or denied.
 3. Inerrant: We affirm that scripture in its entirety is inerrant as being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.

We hold that the Bible, as a whole and in all its parts, is the Word of God under all circumstances regardless of man's attitude toward it. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works:' (2 Tim. 3:16-17, AV).

"The Bible is the Word of God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit through human personalities in the course of human history. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Peter 1:21, AV).

"We acknowledge with humble gratitude the condescending love of God in speaking to men through the agency of human language. We reject all rationalizing processes which would explain away either the divine or the human factor in the Bible.

"The Holy Scriptures contain both Law and Gospel, but the primary content of the Holy Scriptures is the Gospel. The Law is brought into the service of the Gospel by working in man a realization of his sinfulness and of his need of redemption, by awakening in him the terror of conscience since he stands under the wrath of God, and by revealing to him God's holy will. The Gospel brings to the penitent sinner the assurance of God's pardon and the promise of victory over sin."

WE AFFIRM

"The ALC CONSTITUTION (1960) CONFESSIO OF FAITH: "The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life."

Our spiritual leaders in the Lutheran Faith who brought about a great union of Lutherans in the 1960's recognized the theological and social problems arising from "winds of change of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14) regarding the authority of Scripture which came from Europe to America. In what has proved to be a prophetic stance they clearly declared what every reader in every congregation could easily understand; that the canon of Scripture (the written testimonies of the Old and New Testaments) is inerrant, infallible and the inspired Word of God revealed for the salvation of all who hear and believe in Jesus Christ.

Confessional Lutheranism has always recognized that faithfully executed exegesis⁽¹⁾ and Christ-honoring hermeneutics⁽²⁾ are practiced by those who love the Lord Jesus. Such faithfulness in the stewardship of the Holy Scriptures takes into account the entire history of the transmission of the sacred Scriptures. Individualistic non-confessional teachings, writings and proclamations of the Word are contrary to the teachings of Christ, scripture and to the confessional documents quoted in part in the paper.

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1. Exegesis: To examine a portion of scripture and draw out of it the meaning intended.
 2. Hermeneutics: The science or art of interpretation. The bringing of the Gospel message to people in our day.

"Reproof and correction" (II Tim. 3:16, AV) are appropriate for such abuses. We call upon the merging Churches to provide for corrective and disciplinary action to assure that such abuses do not become a part of the New Lutheran Church.

PART III
GRACE ALONE, FAITH ALONE, SCRIPTURE ALONE

In this section we emphasis traditional Lutheran Confessional Themes, with further expansion and clarification to be presented in the future.

WE AFFIRM:

GRACE ALONE: We affirm that sinners are saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9 and Romans 5:1).

therefore, we stand against

Universalism⁽¹⁾ in all its forms, as well as doctrines of inclusivism⁽²⁾ such as "Two Covenant" theologies⁽³⁾. We call upon the Lutheran Church to reject clearly, plainly, and pointedly such teachings, and to discipline⁽⁴⁾ the authors of such doctrine.

WE AFFIRM:

FAITH ALONE, AND SCRIPTURE ALONE

We affirm the ministry of Word and Sacrament (Baptism and Holy Communion), Law and Gospel, repentance and forgiveness of sins which our Lord Jesus has given to his church (Luke 24:47)

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1. Universalism: The concept that everyone will be saved somehow by the Grace of God.
 2. Inclusivism: The doctrine that all people regardless of repentance and faith in Christ are to be included in the Church of God. This doctrine upholds sin and sinner without the requirement of repentance.
 3. Two Covenant Theology: The opinion that those who believe in God through an appreciation of the Old Covenant promises are saved by such faith apart from a personal faith in our Lord Jesus. Thus we live in Two Covenant times: the Old Covenant (of the Jews), and the New Covenant of our Lord Jesus.
 4. To instruct such persons to discontinue practices or if refused to take appropriate action to suspend them from the fellowship of the church. Scripture mandates such disciplinary action (1 Cor. 5:11-13).

therefore, we stand against

Any new translation of scripture which adds to or deletes from the original Hebrew and Greek texts in order to change God-language, e.g. "Our Father-Mother who are in heaven" etc.

We urge that when the doctrine of the Trinity is discussed that the biblical-confessional "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" language be retained.

We note with alarm that the initial draft of the Task Force on Theology under the nature and mission of the church has carefully excluded all references to God as Father and Jesus as His son when dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity.

we further stand against

Sacramentalism⁽¹⁾ and we reject the proclamation of "cheap grace"⁽²⁾, which is intimately bound to Sacramentalism. The Augsburg Confessions, Article VI (The New Obedience) calls us to live a life of faith which "should produce fruits, and good works"; and which reminds us that "we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ."

Again we call upon the churches to admonish its teachers, preachers, writers and members that such teachings give false comfort to sinners and offend the Lord Jesus, the Scriptures, and our Lutheran confessions.

PART IV PRACTICAL CONCERNS

WE AFFIRM:

The New Life in Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ as God and Savior leads a person to be a new creature in Christ and to have new attitudes. St. Paul says it clearly in II Cor. 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, the old has passed away the new has come." Such a new life in Christ will express itself in a personal relationship whth Jesus Christ, consistent prayer life, faithful witnessing and ongoing "worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4.23)⁽³⁾.

WE AFFIRM:

Evangelism and world mission are central not only to what the church does but also to what the church is. We urge the structure of the New Church to stress by word and life its commitment to bring the gospel to the whole world according to the command of Christ, Acts 1:8.

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1. Sacramentalism: The abuse and use of the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion so that a person or congregation depends on the act without any reference to repentance and a public affirmation of faith in our Lord Jesus. (Rom. 10:9, Matthew 10:32,33 and Article II of the Solid Declaration).
 2. Cheap Grace: "The preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, Baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate." p47 The Cost of Discipleship, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
 3. Also explained in the Solid Declaration Article II.

therefore we stand against,

The expression of ethical relativism⁽¹⁾ within our churches, colleges, seminaries, social service agencies, and auxiliaries. We stand against the fruits of ethical relativism and call for specific discipline of those church leaders and agencies who condone and promote homosexual behavior, advocate abortion on request, approve and promote immoral sexual behavior and deny the biblical challenge to lead the new life in Christ. The Sixth Commandment is: "You shall not commit adultery: and Luther's time-honored explanation is: "We should fear and love God, and so we should lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed each one loving and honoring his wife or her husband."

We also call upon the merging churches to renounce the use of pornographic films (euphemistically called sexually explicit films) and materials in counseling procedures of Lutheran agencies and institutions.

We further stand against the employment of athiestic, agnostic and non-Christian counselors in Lutheran higher education and social service agencies.

We also call upon the church to denounce antinomianism⁽²⁾ in teaching, writing, preaching and Christian living; so that a clear call to repentance and forgiveness which leads to new life in Christ is rightly proclaimed. The Formula of Concord declares in the Solid Declaration, V. Law and Gospel "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 forgiveness of sins."

PART V CONCLUSION

This PRO FORMA Affirmation of Faith and Expression of Theological Concerns is addressed to those whose concerns about merger, and whose enthusiasm for merger draw them to consider prayerfully what the Holy Spirit has for the Lutheran Churches in the future.

Additional matters including evangelism, world mission, prayer and others must and will be addressed to the Commission for a New Lutheran Church and the Task Force on Theology.

Pious words either ancient or modern will not make a living church with a living faith. A church which lives the new life in obedience to Christ will be the servant church of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus who calls lost sinners to salvation by God's grace through faith in Him.

We have stated in a positive way our affirmation of the central theme of Christianity and Lutheranism: namely, that a person is justified by grace through faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ.

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1. Ethical Relativism: What is right or wrong depends on a person's own understanding of a situation or circumstances and not on any reference to Scripture or doctrine of the church. (See Relativism, Websters Dictionary #111 p1916 item #b).
 2. Antinomianism: The concept that a person is so free in the Gospel that obedience to the law or laws is unnecessary.

Therefore:

WE AFFIRM our willingness to unite with those whose Christian lifestyle and attitudes reflect a living faith in obedience to the teachings of the Word of God.

WE AFFIRM our willingness to unite with those who confess with us the ancient formulas regarding the Christian faith and the authority of the infalliable Word of God.

WE ARE UNITED in heart and spirit with the reformers who concluded the Epitome of the Formula of Concord with these words: "All these and similar articles, together with their erroneous implications and conclusions, we reject and condemn as wrong, false, heretical, and contrary to the Word of God, the three Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and the Catechisms of Luther. All pious Christians of high degree and low, must guard against these if they dearly love their soul's eternal welfare and salvation.

In testimony that this is the doctrine, faith, and confession of all of us as we shall give account of it on the Last Day before the righteous judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we shall neither secretly nor publicly say or write anything contrary to it but intend by the grace of God to abide by it, we have advisedly, in true fear and invocation, of God, subscribed our signatures with our own hands".

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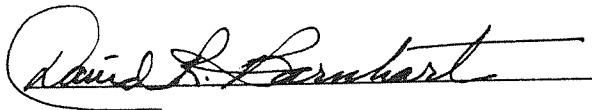
We the undersigned wish to declare clearly that we are totally committed to working within the Lutheran Church to bring about a Christ-centered new Lutheran Church in unity, harmony and in obedience to the Word of God.



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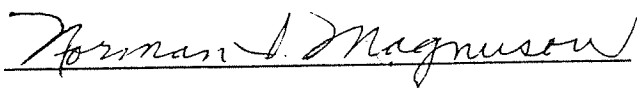
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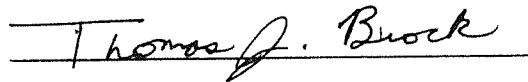
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