

CONVENTION ESSAYS - 1993

GOD'S WORD IS OUR GREAT HERITAGE

- I. It is ours to share.
 - A. We have a common mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
Essayist: Pastor Duane Tomhave, Administrator, Board for World Missions, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)
 - B. We have a are forgiven through Jesus Christ.
Essayist: Prof common message: sins. Salimo Hachibamba, President, Seminary of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa
 - C. We have a common means: The Gospel in Word and Sacrament.
Essayist: Pastor Gaylin Schmeling, Chairman, Doctrine Committee, Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)
- II. It is ours to preserve.
 - A. We have a common foundation: God's pure Word.
Essayist: Pastor Egil Edvardsen, Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden and Norway)
 - B. We have a common confession: unity in the Spirit.
Essayist: Pastor Gerhard Wilde, President, Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (Germany)
 - C. We have a common concern: to divide Law and Gospel properly.
Essayist: Prof. Wilhelm Petersen, President, Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)
- III. Lessons for the Future from the Past:
Highlights from the History of the Synodical Conference
Essayist: Pastor Richard Lauersdorf, First Vice President, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)

**WE HAVE A COMMON MISSION:
To Make Disciples of Christ**

1. BY AUTHORITY OF A LOVING SAVIOR

- A. The God of heaven and earth
- B. Who lived among us, died, and rose for us
- C. Who ascended with a world-loving commission and promise

2. IN A WORLD THAT NEEDS TO KNOW HIS SAVING LOVE

- A. He sent us with a specific task to make other disciples, baptizing and teaching them
- B. Our motivation is Christ's love for us and our message is Christ's love for all
- C. We take our place among bold confessors of the faith

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“God’s Word is our great heritage, and shall be ours forever.” The hymn, from which the theme of this conference is taken, continues: “To spread its light from age to age shall be our chief endeavor.” Almost 2000 years ago Jesus Christ banded together a group of twelve followers less than 2000 miles south of here. He sent his disciples out into the world with a commission to make disciples of all nations. Because of those first apostles and generations who were made disciples after them, you and I are in this place today. We have come together as believers confessing a Spirit-given unity in a common Christian faith. Whether we live thousands of miles north, east, south, or west, we share a common gospel message. We have a common concern to proclaim and preserve the precious treasure in Word and sacrament that has been entrusted to true disciples today. Our first essay explores the common mission we all have—no different from the early church—to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 28:18-20 is a very full passage of God’s Word. In it are truths that teach infant baptism, the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, and the importance of teaching every scriptural truth. In an earlier presentation at an ELS/WELS Forum in 1988, “Synods of Mission-minded Confessional Lutherans,” this essayist evaluated the tensions in finding a proper balance between sound theology and creative missiology (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, V.86, No.2, p. 105). If anyplace there ought to be an intense interest in pure doctrine, it ought to be on the church’s front line of gospel outreach. Without pure teaching, there eventually will be no saving message to proclaim. Ernst H. Wendland, veteran WELS missionary and seminary professor, emphasizes how the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures and our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions give us a theology of world mission which is clear, authoritative, and compelling. Yet, the same author also describes the opposite side of the tension: “The danger does seem to lie within Lutheran orthodoxy to become so concerned about ‘purity of doctrine’ that one loses sight of the responsibility to share it. One is almost afraid that in the sharing of it, it will somehow become contaminated” (WLQ, V. 82, No.3, p. 201).

We intend to concentrate on the main mission mandate of Matthew 28, “Go, and make disciples of all nations.” Near the end of their Gospels, each of the four evangelists records the glorified Lord charging his disciples with the same task. “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven’” (John 20:21). “He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:46-48). “He said unto them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whosoever does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15,16). The common thread is being sent and going to those who have not yet heard and believed the good news of a Savior from sin. Preaching the gospel is the means by which the Holy Spirit makes disciples. We will see that this commission from our Lord written in Matthew 28 to us is exactly the same as it was in the first century. So also must be our response.

WE HAVE A COMMON MISSION: TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

1. BY AUTHORITY OF A LOVING SAVIOR

“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshiped him: but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and in earth has been given to me’” (Matthew 28:16,17). The risen Savior summons all the authority that is rightfully his. Upon this mountain setting the glorified Christ speaks of his power in heaven and earth. The conquering hero holds dominion over Satan, sin, death, and hell. His mission on earth is accomplished, and his mission must be made known to all people. God has given his Son absolute authority to get the task done. What a God he is!

GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Mission work is not just incidental, a last minute thought of Jesus before he ascended. Mission work has its origin not in the church, nor in human minds, but in the very nature of God. The just and holy God has a mission heart. Perhaps it is best known as LOVE, and best expressed in that precious truth Jesus shared with Nicodemus in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The message of God's mission love for the world is woven throughout the Bible from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. God's love does not change. Already Adam and Eve experienced God's love in the promised seed of the woman, when they chose in free will to disobey him. As a result of the fall into sin, imperfect human beings populated the earth, disregarded God's call to repentance, and faced his wrath in destruction by the flood. But God spared Noah and his family in love. Again, after the confusion at Babel, the human race spread and resisted loving fellowship with God. God's love for the nations, which he would bless, caused him to establish an everlasting covenant with Abraham. The spiritual children of Abraham today, believers, are partners in bringing that blessing of God's redemptive love to all the earth.

When God gave his law, he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex. 34:6,7). Of himself he says, "I am the Lord your God . . . I am a jealous God . . . punishing . . . the sin . . . of those who hate me . . . but showing love to (those) who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:1-6). When even his chosen people continued in their rebellion against him, he raised up prophets to call them back into his fellowship. They were to be witnesses of his love to the world. Through Isaiah God told the people of Israel, "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David" (55:3) and said that they would be "a light for the Gentiles" (42:6). He added, "All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God (52:10) and "nations will come to your light. . . ." (60:3).

The Psalms repeatedly speak of God's "unfailing love" and echo the refrain: "He is good; his love endures forever." The Psalmists also reveal the object of his love: "I will be exalted among the nations" (46:10). "May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (67:2). "All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call his name blessed" (72:17). "He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (98:3). The object of his creative love is all people. But sinful humankind has a barrier separating it from its Creator. They could do nothing to change this status. God hates sin and must punish sinners. Yet the object of his redemptive love also is all people in all nations. The prophet Malachi reveals God's mission heart of love: "'My name will be great among the nations,' says the Lord Almighty" (1:11). God's love will not be frustrated. The just and holy God found a way to love us in the God-man, our atoning sacrifice, Jesus Christ, the world's loving Savior.

WHO LIVED AMONG US, DIED, AND ROSE FOR US

Not only does Jesus have all authority given to him in heaven and on earth as true God, but also as true man. These natures are inseparable. From all eternity Jesus was with God. He became flesh and lived among us (cf. John 1:1,14). "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law" (Gal. 4:4,5). For three years he taught his disciples. They had watched his enemies subject him to lying accusations and finally put him to death. There are ten recorded instances of Jesus appearing to his followers after miraculously rising from the grave on the third day.

Now he stands before his disciples, some still doubting, in his glorified body. What better explanation of Jesus' loving mission is there than the words of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians: "Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even

death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (2:6-11). He, their Lord and Savior, standing before them at the mountain, is the almighty God with unlimited authority. "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36). God's mission heart had found a way to love sinful people. He is the authority behind his only-begotten Son, whom he loves, whom he sent, and who now is returning victorious.

WHO ASCENDED WITH A WORLD-LOVING COMMISSION AND PROMISE

Now we switch the scene to the disciples who had come through the trauma of their Lord's betrayal and crucifixion. They had heard or seen the news of his triumphant resurrection. Some doubted, others were startled and frightened; one was ashamed. The loving Savior dealt with some of them individually. He offered the opportunity to touch his wounds to Thomas, who boldly confessed his Lord and his God. To Peter, who responded with love to Jesus' searching love, came a renewed assignment to feed the Savior's flock. They must have been worried about their ability to live up to their Lord's expectations. The three years of training ended all too soon for them. Their anxiety increased as they became aware that he was soon to leave them. Their idea of his kingdom, like that of most of their Jewish companions, probably still included thoughts of Jesus' permanent presence among them in Jerusalem. Prior to the Holy Spirit's confirming appearance to the disciples at Pentecost, any idea of a worldwide mission was fearsome.

The words of Jesus, as he is about to ascend, not only direct their attention to his power and authority, but also include a comforting promise: "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." His leaving was not an absolute absence. Clearly he tells them that as they go out into the vast arena of the world of their day, he would accompany them. And the same assurance exists for disciples today and until the end of the age. He is really present with us in carrying out his work on earth, even though he has ascended into heaven.

We turn to the Scriptures for instruction. Paul explains in Ephesians 4:10: "He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe." He goes on to tell how the ascended Lord is the one who sends churchworkers among God's people to prepare them for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. The ascended Lord, as the head of this body, will rule all things in the interest of his church. We can count on that when we are carrying out his work. See again God's great love for the world in sending his Son from heaven. Jesus' credentials are amazing: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:15-20).

Is there any doubt about God's love, Jesus' authority in heaven and earth, or his promise to be with us always? Confidently we carry out our common mission: To make disciples of Jesus Christ.

2. IN A WORLD THAT NEEDS TO KNOW HIS SAVING LOVE

To track how God's love flows through his Son and through his believers to a world in need, it is valuable to hear portions of the prayer of Jesus just before he was arrested which John 17

records. "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you have granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they might know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. . . . I will remain in the world no longer, but they (the disciples) are still in the world, and I am coming to you. . . . I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world anymore than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. . . . My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message. . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. . . . I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

HE SENT US WITH A SPECIFIC TASK: TO MAKE OTHER DISCIPLES, BAPTIZING AND TEACHING THEM

It is not easy to think beyond our own culture, preferences, and prejudices. The most natural reaction for those first disciples was to limit their work to Jews in Jerusalem. Jesus had been preparing them already to think of nations beyond familiar Judea and Galilee, to become world witnesses. Seeing the exemplary faith of the powerful Gentile Centurion, Jesus comments: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 8:11). Jesus' confrontation with the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4 opened the disciples' eyes to see without prejudice the rich harvest of souls among other cultures. In a conversation about the end times Jesus told his disciples, "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me . . . and this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14). Small wonder his first followers were jittery when he sent them out with the commission that forms the heart of their task and ours: Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The Great Commission, so-called, is seen by some as primarily a marching order for professional missionaries. There have even been those who argued that it ceased with the original apostles. These familiar words of our Savior have been implanted in believers' hearts, and a thankful echo resounds from disciples who are the results of worldwide Christian mission work. The original Greek text has but one verb, "make disciples" (*matheteusate*). "Go" (*porueuthentes*), "baptizing" (*baptizontes*), and "teaching" (*didaskontes*), are all participles, which means that they do not stand alone, but derive their force from the verb. The reason for going anywhere, next door or across the world, is to make disciples. Nothing will happen unless believing disciples make contact with those who are not yet disciples. As this sentence is constructed, the participle "go" stands in a coordinate relationship with the verb, which gives it the force of an imperative. A literal translation would be, "Having gone, make disciples of all nations," and it is not incorrect to translate it, "go, and make disciples." A disciple is a learner, a person who follows a teacher, in this case a believer in Christ. All nations (*ethne*) include all the heathen, unbelievers who do not know Jesus Christ. What an awesome assignment! Make believers out of all unbelievers. As we study these words, we ever remember that the power to go and the promised results come only from a loving Savior and his Holy Spirit. The aim is to win the lost and to build them up in the faith, just as the searching love of our God in Christ Jesus found us sinners, implanted faith in our hearts and keeps us in his Word. What means does he use? The gospel in Word and sacraments. Baptism, the sacrament which imparts faith also to children, is mentioned here. In the case of older persons, teaching may be the primary means until convincing truth prepares an inquirer to desire baptism. Teaching also reminds us that all disciples of Christ, newly converted and seasoned veterans, will want to continue to learn and live by everything revealed in the Word of God.

Right here is where we part company with many other Christian denominations, notably those who see baptism as a mere symbol of initiation, who practice only adult believer's baptism, who separate water baptism and Spirit baptism. Other essays will concentrate on our common message and means, as well as our common foundation in the Word, teaching it thoroughly, and our unity in the Spirit. It might best serve our purposes and our time limits to discuss what motivates us to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching. And what methodology do we take along on our mission to the world?

OUR MOTIVATION IS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR US, AND OUR MESSAGE IS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR ALL

Is a command enough to send us on our way to all nations? Frequently Christian writers speak of our going simply because the Sovereign Lord says, "Go!" Sinners by nature have no power to serve an offended God. Without his redeeming grace, neither loyal obedience nor high admiration can be found in us. A parent might similarly say to a child, "Do this or that because I said so!" It might get done, but often grudgingly. How much better if a person is motivated other than by fear, guilt, flattery, or even to get something in return.

The better motivation of which we again speak, of course, is love. As a disciple each of us has been brought by the Holy Spirit into a new relationship with Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us. We love him only because he first loved us. "God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:8-11). Jesus restated the Great Commandment by which true disciples live: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind . . . (and) Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:37-39). Surely the most far-reaching love for our neighbor flows from the Great Commission.

It's not what we do for God, but his love for us, that compels us. We find pleasure being ambassadors who make a grand announcement that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them . . . and that God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:19,21). Pastor T. N. Teigen, in an essay, "The Proclamation of Justification" (His Pardoning Grace, NPH, 1966, p. 70), tells of an old Norwegian farmer who met a zealous Reformed evangelist on the street. Taking the farmer by his coat lapels and looking him straight in the eye, the evangelist asked, "Brother, are you saved?" "Yes," came the calm reply. "When were you saved?" the evangelist questioned. "Oh, some 2000 years ago!" came the confident answer.

If Christ died for all, no one ought to be excluded from my love either. If he declares all justified in Christ, I can offer no conditional salvation. When he says, "Go and make disciples of all nations," I can find no valid excuses. When he adds, "baptizing" all nations in the name of the Triune God, I will make no other qualifications. Baptism and the Word are the powerful means by which the Holy Spirit transforms unbelievers into disciples.

And when he includes "teaching them to obey" (Greek: *terein*—"hold firmly to") everything he has commanded, I will not be satisfied with less than a thorough training in the inspired, infallible, and unchanging word. The gospel is proclaimed in the Word and offered in the sacraments to people whom God will reach with his forgiving, saving, and eternal love. From the Great Commission, then, the church receives its charter not just for making disciples of all nations of the earth, but also for nurturing those who have been made disciples as they are taught everything that Christ commanded.

In the United States it is popular for businesses and other organizations to spell out briefly what the purpose of their group is. Our synod carefully chose words to identify its God-given twin task in this way:

As men, women and children united in faith and worship by the Word of God, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod exists to make disciples throughout the world for time and for eternity, using the gospel to win the lost for Christ and to nurture believers for lives of Christian service, all to the glory of God.

What variation exists among people on planet earth: achievements, climate, color, language, location, race, traits. Yet all are sinners, all are souls for whom Christ died, and all need to know God's saving love. Into such a world those first believers went, boldly speaking the truth in love.

WE TAKE OUR PLACE AMONG BOLD CONFESSORS OF THE FAITH

It was a rather ordinary band of believers to whom Jesus entrusted this world mission. They had not been wise in the world's wisdom. Nor had they been theologians of the church. Their backgrounds and educations had not qualified them for such a task. However, the eleven apostles were humble, God-fearing men who had learned divine wisdom from their Master. Matthias later joined with them, and the Lord himself added the mighty Paul. The Book of Acts recounts some of their early mission activity. Think of the breaking of language barriers at Pentecost and Peter's bold sermon. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (2:41). Before the Sanhedrin officers in Jerusalem they spoke boldly, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (4:20). Later the apostles announced, "We must obey God rather than men!" when they were given strict orders not to teach in the name of Jesus, and "left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (5:28,29,41,42).

When a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, believers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria and "preached the word wherever they went" (Ac. 8:4). At Cornelius' home Peter learned anew "that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation" (10:34,35). Shortly after the conversion of the Apostle, Paul began the numerous missionary journeys to other parts of the Mediterranean world. In Antioch the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (13:2,3). Thus began the grand foreign mission enterprise, a privilege in which Christian churches still participate today. When the mission explorers returned to Antioch after the first expedition, "they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). Even imprisonment did not stop Paul from writing the theology of the church in his many Epistles to early Christian congregations. Nor was his zeal diminished, for the last verse of Acts (28:31) summarizes: "Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus."

The Roman Christians were asked: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (10:14,15). In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2:1,2). In his second letter he penned: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. . . . But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (4:5,7). And with the Colossians he could share this wonderful result: "All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth" (1:6).

These first gatherings of saints in the New Testament church were not ideal. They were troubled with all sorts of imperfections and blemishes. Segregation and religious bigotry had to be overcome. Yet they were true children of God, repentant, believing and eager to share their faith.

They were missionary churches in the finest sense of the term. They have set an example for all time.

But what about obstacles, of which there are many? The Lord has not promised that the task of proclaiming the gospel to the nations will be easy. We are up “against rulers, . . . authorities, . . . powers of this dark world, . . . and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Human institutions, societies’ power structures, schools, businesses, and even church organizations, can be used as Satan’s tools. The devil never rests from cunningly trying to destroy the work of Christ by slanders, deceit, rebellions, betrayals, intimidation, and even inflicting torture. That might be enough to scare anyone off from “making disciples of all nations.” Paul overrides this with confident assurance in Romans: “If God be for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble, or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus” (8:31,35,37-39).

It is that motivating love of God in Christ that has made confessors bold down through the ages. In your mind’s eye imagine the difficulties faced by those first European missionaries to the Huns and Goths, the Celts and Vikings near where we are meeting these days. How was the gospel message first received? How many generations did it take for our distant ancestors to repent at the foot of the cross? How many lives were lost in the mission process? How different the world became when emperors and states forced Christianity on a people. Constantinople became “Christian,” and later the church split into eastern and western branches. Vladimir chose eastern orthodoxy for Russia in the 12th century. “*Cuius regio, eius religio*” (He who rules determines his subjects’ religion) has had a dreadful effect on true faith. What are the effects in our world today from whole countries being declared Christian without repentance and faith of individual citizens?

After the separations following the Reformation, a variety of new denominations sprang up in Christianity, and rulers often determined again whether people would be Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, or some sort of forced ecumenical mixture. Sometimes these matters were settled by wars. Thousands from Europe also fled and migrated to other countries because of religious persecution or because of a desire for religious freedom. North America imported the European religious scene and added quite a variety of homegrown denominations with a tie to Christianity. The United States laid down an early unique path for separation of church and state, which still influences the independence with which its churches operate. While other countries have modified versions of the same freedom of religion principle, many do not want to import the denominational chaos they perceive in “free” America. That attitude affects the welcome our missionaries receive as representatives of an orthodox, confessional, Lutheran church denomination.

During this same period of history, sporadic efforts were being made to reach Africa, China, and the Pacific islands, and revisit the Mediterranean regions with the gospel. Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and animism held sway over many people as they do today. Pluralistic societies often believe that all roads lead to God and thus consider Christianity, with its exclusive claims, to be altogether too rigid. Roman Catholic orders, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, and Dutch Reformed have established many mission churches in other countries. Scandinavian and German Lutheran Christians, confronted with much suspicion within their official churches, also found ways to take the gospel overseas. It is no secret that the state Lutheran churches, for various reasons, spent little time and effort in spreading the gospel beyond their own lands. With all their faults, Pietists, reacting with a perception that orthodoxism and formalism stifled outreach, were largely responsible for the mission societies that arose within the Lutheran Church. Their efforts were felt worldwide, especially in Africa, Australia, India, North America, and South America. The church body to which this writer belongs, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, traces its origins to the efforts of German mission societies. Our world missionaries often

report contacts with people whose faith stems from the Word brought by emissaries of European Lutheran mission societies.

Who will bring the message of the saving gospel to the nations in our day? Who will be the voice of biblical, historic, confessional, orthodox Lutheran Christianity if not we who are assembled here and the churches we serve? Even among those who call themselves Lutheran there is little agreement on the basic foundation of the Word of God and the absolute necessity of the gospel proclamation. When the inspiration and infallibility of God's Word, the Bible, are questioned, there can be no certain message. Quickly churches substitute charitable, agrarian, medical, or educational efforts for gospel proclamation. Such social ministries easily turn churches into humanitarian organizations, which may serve vital human needs. It is reported that 70 percent of overseas Christian mission work today primarily provides for peoples' physical well-being rather than their spiritual welfare.

Our role is not to bemoan what others are not doing, nor to hole up in our fortresses and polish our scriptural treasures. We have the right theology for the right kind of gospel mission work that is most needed by the unconverted people in nations everywhere. It is universal. It is unconditional. It is urgent. It is not our responsibility to convince anyone of the truth. That is the Spirit's work. But we can tell of Jesus' love—mission work—right at home as we build bridges for the gospel within our own family, among our relatives, neighbors, and friends. Persons will be more naturally drawn to us in a relationship of concern or friendship. They, in turn, will reach out to a large group through their network of friends. Thus the church will multiply across town and across cultures. Half the people on earth have not had a clear presentation of the gospel, and will not, unless someone crosses the boundaries of their culture and language, identifies with them, and builds a bridge of LOVE.

That love started in the heart of God. Our lives have been permanently imprinted with God's love in Christ Jesus and have been given spiritual and eternal meaning. Through us God seeks those who are lost in sin and wandering in unbelief. Gathering these lost in every nation is the desired and essential end result of our mission work. They may be people in the home across the street from your church, seated next to you on an airplane, or living in a distant land where the name of Jesus has never been heard. To all of these, without exception, we are to go. Boldly we confess, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Ac. 4:12).

As we scan our international scene and compare it to the time of Jesus, it is every bit as overwhelming as that faced by the first disciples. With a six billion population, there are 20 times more people alive on planet earth. We may more easily be able to travel over vast distances and to communicate by electronic impulses in a matter of moments. A loving God has graciously placed in our hands resources unknown to previous generations. But souls are still best won and nurtured by person-to-person communication rather than by electronic mass media or remote-controlled organizational programs. We have a common mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ, by whose authority and with whose presence we go into a world that needs to know his saving love. We are his followers who go where we can. Where we can't go, we send, support, and pray for missionaries who take our place. True mission work is an act of love begun in eternity within the heart of God. This love flows through his Son and his redeemed people. It culminates in eternity where there will be with us "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9).

**WE HAVE A COMMON MESSAGE:
We Are Forgiven Through Jesus Christ**

Prof. Salimo Hachibama
Zambia, Africa

All of us gathered here can agree that the theme of this paper represents a biblical truth. It seems to be self-explanatory that you would think that there would be no need to write a paper on it. But alas! The need is there. Many denominations and theologians no longer preach this truth as a fact. Many believe that forgiveness comes through work righteousness. And those of us working in Africa are aware of studies going on in which the focus is on how African culture can be fused into the work of Christ in order to bring forgiveness that can be appreciated by the African Christian.

For the sake of bringing to your attention how serious our task is in this fellowship, we want to advocate for some false belief in this paragraph. We will explain our reason for doing so and then state, clearly, what we believe. Here we go: Forgiveness of sins is taught in the Bible, which was inspired in human language. This presupposes that man must be able to learn and understand the Bible. The Bible can be translated. Here we want to argue that words are language specific and as such their forms are not always transferable from one language to another. The art of translating involves decoding and transferring decoded information into ideas that are apprehensible in another language. Our argument is that in most cases only ideas are translatable; this means that the ability of the translator to work with source language becomes crucial. There is also a possibility that a translator can introduce non-biblical culture through his translation as he tries to reconstruct a source message into ideas intelligible to receptor language. We are saying that the Bible that a missionary came with was a reproduction of his culture, the culture that he imposed on the African.

What we have in the above paragraph is the argument that surrounds us from every side in Africa. There is a big push, by the so called "African theologians," in the direction of making the Bible understood in African culture and context. The literature that these "theologians" produce is accessible by our members. Here is what they say about Bible translation: Bible translation imbued (filled) local cultures with eternal significance and endowed (indigenous) African languages with a transient (excelling) range, while it also presumed (African languages) that the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor—so the missionary needs to discover (God) in the new culture (*Christian Education in the African Context*, page 31).

Human reason tends to go along with the argument of these "theologians." If one were not to read the Bible correctly, say, even the Holy Spirit agrees with their argument. If you took the New Testament and examined it, you would find that almost all quotations are from the Septuagint which is a translation of the Hebrew text which we do not have (?), into Greek. Translators of the Septuagint almost always (?) did not translate Hebrew text literally. This assessment is reached upon by comparing their translation with the Hebrew texts that are available. New Testament writers almost always quoted the Septuagint and even paraphrased, combined a few quotations under the name of one prophet, and some people are called by different names from those that appear in available Hebrew texts.

Above we have advocated or promoted African culturization theology. In the next paragraph we want to state what we believe.

We believe that before one could argue for culturization of the Bible, one should be aware of what translators translate from. For example, we have already stated that we do not have (?) the text which Septuagint translators used. For one to argue that Bible texts are inconsistent and, therefore, can not establish the only norm and standard by which Christians, their conduct, and teachings should be judged is totally absurd. The other argument against them is the unity of the Bible from beginning to end, which suggests that despite variant readings there can only be one person behind all the statements of the Bible. That person is God. True Christian faith persuades us to teach divine authorship of the Bible. Yet another argument is what Jesus says about himself. He came to all people of the world because they would believe in him: Whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). All people in Jesus will have one culture and that is biblical/godly culture.

If we took translations of the Bible from different languages, would we find any translation that would not clearly and in simple language show God's plan of salvation? We are yet to find such a translation. Speaking of fundamental doctrines that speak of our salvation, E. W. A. Koehler says: Over against the view that the Scripture is obscure, waiting for priest and pope, the theologian and council, to demonstrate its real meaning, the Lutheran Church upholds the perspicuity

(clearness) of Scripture, the clear word and teaching of the apostles, the pure, clear fountain of Israel (*A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, pages 13 and 14).

We are saying that the Bible is a book that should be understood in its own biblical context and not subject to any cultural bias. It can not and should not be understood or interpreted according to the culture of the reader because the Bible says thus of cultures that are not biblical: You shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their graven images with fire (Deut. 7:5). The Bible is above any culture and other religions or beliefs. It is God's book to men which makes us, even though we are many and have different cultural back-grounds, one in Christ. What we have just stated should be understood in the light of the Augsburg Confession's description of Church: It is 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. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4,5, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Article VII).

This meeting is a forum where we can: Give outward expression to the unity of spirit and oneness in faith and confession that binds us together (CELC Provisional Constitution). Together we can say confidently that we are forgiven through Jesus Christ. We can say this because we know that: This is the true Christian faith. Unless a man believes this firmly and faithfully, he cannot be saved (Athanasian Creed).

We are forgiven through Jesus Christ. This statement leaves us with no doubt that there is sin. If there was no sin, why would we speak of forgiveness? This leads us to another question, "What is sin?" J. T. Mueller says: Every departure from the norm of the divine law is sin no matter whether it consists in a state or condition or in actual deeds. Considered etymologically (according to the meaning of the word), sin is, in the first place, a negative concept (anomia), and as such it denotes man's lack of conformity with the divine law. So Scripture defines sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4). But sin is also a positive concept, and as such it denotes opposition to, or transgression of the law, so that positively sin is a violation of the law (*Christian Dogmatics*, pages 210-211).

When we define sin as above, we must be careful that we do not, wrongly, understand sin to be only those acts that are done deliberately. According to the Bible not only deeds are sinful as shown in 2 Samuel 12:13, but that there are also sins of thoughts, desires, and those committed ignorantly (James 1:15; Romans 7:17; Matthew 5:8; Romans 7:19; 1 Timothy 1:13). Anything, therefore, which fails to measure up to the standard of God's law or is opposed thereto, whether it seems horrible to man or not, is sin and wickedness (*Abiding Word*).

We have defined what sin is according to Scripture. Now we need to see how sin affects man. In other words, we need to say something about the nature of man. By nature man is sinful from birth (Psalm 51:5). In his flesh dwelleth no good thing (Romans 7:18). His old Adam is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Ephesians 4:22). The Augsburg Confession explains this nature of man this way: Since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclination from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.

Man by nature is helpless and hopeless. He has no power to save himself. He needs someone to get him out of this mess. He needs Jesus Christ. The theme of this paper confirms this fact by stating that we are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

Now we need to see how God carried out the plan of salvation through forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

When we state that: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ, we are thinking about his redemptive work which made it possible for us to have forgiveness of sins through him. What is redemption? When one hears of redemption, he thinks of (a) promise of deliverance, (b) act of buying back

something that was one's but was lost, (c) release on the part of one who was in bondage, (d) payment of debt in full. Man is a lost and condemned creature; he deserves to die eternally (Romans 6:23). But the will of God is that all should be saved (1 Timothy 2:3,4). For this reason God has redeemed man through the blood of Jesus which was shed on the cross as payment for man's sins (1 John 1:7). God did this out of love to all people (John 3:16).

The truth of redemption is the underlying cause of our salvation. In so saying we should be careful that we do not limit redemption only to the church, the believers or the elect. The Bible is very explicit in stating that Christ redeemed all men. John the Baptist calls him the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:6). He reconciled the world unto God (2 Corinthians 5:19). The redemption of Christ was also for those who rejected him and are, by their own fault, ultimately lost in hell (2 Peter 2:1). The death of Jesus was not only for a few, for he tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). The redemption of Jesus is also for fallen man. In 1 Timothy 1:15 we read: This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Yes, Christ has redeemed us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. This is why we say: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ. We need to guard against those who would have us not believe in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ as the Bible teaches it.

In preparing this paper we took time to read through *Christian News*. In Vol. 29, No.5 page 5, this is what we found: Many contemporary Christians do not believe that Jesus died to satisfy God's requirements of payment or punishment for sin. They do not like to say that we are saved by the blood of Jesus. The writer of this article quotes a Catholic priest by the name of Robert J. Daly. This priest wrote in his book, "The Origin of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice," that: Jesus' death did not assume that God's forgiveness was effected or influenced by the offering of the blood sacrifice. On the contrary it is precisely an incarnational spiritualization of sacrifice that is operative in the New Testament and the early church. In other words, it was not the material blood or body of Jesus that constituted the sacrifice acceptable to God. It was the internal dispositions of obedience and love toward God, and of self-sacrificing love and service to and for the brothers and sisters.

Other western literature that we read records a sharp change in the western church's stand on the Gospel and person of Jesus Christ. We cite two of these. The first are those of the party of "Critical analysis in modern academia" who deny the virgin birth of Jesus. They claim that the nativity stories were not part of the earliest Christian traditions. They say that the virginal conception of Jesus was a myth and assert that Jesus may have been born to a sexually violated girl. They cite historical differences between the account of when Jesus was said to have been born, what events took place. They take pleasure in finding what they call discrepancies between the record of Matthew and Luke. They also compare what is recorded in world history and archaeological discoveries to what is recorded by the two evangelists that talk about the birth of Jesus (THE FIRST NOEL, *U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT*, DECEMBER 2, 1992). Second we cite a church historian E. Glenn Hinson who classifies all those who believe like us as fundamentalists. In a paper called "CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISM: HOPE OR DISASTER FOR EUROPEAN CHRISTIANITY" (Lecture given on November 20, 1991, in the Ruschlikon Baptist Church, Ruschlikon, Switzerland) he says, "Fundamentalism originated out of a series of Bible conferences held at Niagara, New York, during the late nineteenth century. It represented a reaction against developments in critical interpretation of the Bible entering the United States from Germany, the social gospel movement, and the application of Darwin's theory of evolution to Christian theology. Fearful lest the very foundation of Christianity be shattered, conservative theologians singled out what they considered to be the "foundation" of Christian faith. Originally in 1878 they listed fourteen points. In 1895 they narrowed these to five: 1) plenary verbal inspiration of Scriptures, 2) literal virgin birth, 3) substitutional atonement of Christ, 4) physical resurrection, and 5) literal Second Coming.

People like these are slaves of sin. By the grace of God we are no longer like them, even though once we were also slaves to sin. Now we are liberated and free by the redemption of Jesus

Christ. We know this because the Bible says in John 8:36, If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. Yes, we can say: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

We have a common message: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ. We would not do justice to the theme of our paper if we did not touch on justification. Webster's New World Dictionary gives the theological meaning of the word justification as follows: The act by which a sinner is freed through faith from the penalty of his sin and is accepted by God as righteous or worthy of being saved. New Bible Dictionary says this about justification: It is a forensic term meaning acquit, declare righteous. It is the opposite of condemn (Deuteronomy 25:1; 1 Peter 17:15; Romans 8:33). In Scripture, God is the judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25) and his dealings with man are constantly described in forensic terms. Righteousness, (i.e., conformity with his law) is what he requires of men, and he shows his own righteousness as a Judge (Psalm 7:11; Isaiah 5:16; 10:22; Acts 17:31; Romans 2:5; 3:5).

Through Christ, God has forgiven sins of all people. God did this by sending his Son to suffer and die for the world. Because of the redemption of Christ, God no longer imputes sins of people (2 Corinthians 5:19). Instead of charging their sins against them, he credits them with the merits of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because Christ satisfied God's demands, God, through Christ, has justified the ungodly (Romans 4:5). E.W.A. Koehler states this clearly when he says: They who by nature and by their own works were altogether ungodly, were because of the work of Christ declared and pronounced just and righteous. Therefore, by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life (Romans 5:18).

Dr. C. H. Little in *Lutheran Confessional Theology*, page 149, states: Justification properly consists of the non-imputation of sins, or their forgiveness, to the sinner, which is the negative side; and the imputation (giving) of Christ's perfect righteousness, as though it were his own, which is the positive side.

The facts we have presented on justification are biblical and can be said to be beyond cultural boundaries. However, when we try to explain, in our own words, and with our own examples, what justification is, we could have some cultural or traditional implications, and even sometimes be misunderstood. On page 148 of *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Koehler gives an example of an emancipation (setting free) of all slaves by Lincoln. But as we go on in the history of the U.S., we find movements like the Civil Rights Movement. If one would apply the example that Koehler has given, it would mean that Christ made it possible for man to complete the process of his freedom/justification which Christ had started by his suffering and death. This would make justification another of liberation theology doctrines and not an accomplished fact.

In *Christian Education in the African Context*, page 33, the writer says: The task of elaborating a Christian approach to culture emerges in earnest, not at the point of historical missionary transmission of the faith, but rather in the process of the indigenous reception and assimilation, with which the historical process itself becomes meaningful. The Christian approach to culture grows out of the process whereby the questions and problems raised by local cultures find their solutions and answers latent (hidden) in the Gospel, mediated through an indigenous hearing of the Word of God received within the culture. Such a process can take place effectively only in and through the terms and categories of the culture. The process comes into its own vernacular.

What we see in the above paragraph is the danger of trying to find cultural equivalents for a doctrine of Scripture no matter which.

Apart from cultural problems that we can introduce as we try to explain the doctrine of justification with our examples, there is also a danger (if we are dependent solely on a translation and are not able to refer to the original in some way) of whether the translator was able to capture the forensic meaning of justification with the choice of the word he used to translate justification. There is also a possibility of a translator not thinking of justification as a forensic term (Catholic translator).

In *Christian Education in the African Context*, page 32, the writer points out a problem that we should be watchful about. He says: Thus the critical role of Bible translation points to the

significance of local religions providing the idiom for Christian apprehension and this confers on pre-Christian religions a theological significance which has often been denied to them.

(To highlight this problem we say that some knowledge of the historical background of theological key terms used in a translation is very important. Certain terms that are prominent in traditional religion should be avoided, if at all possible. Using such words Christianizes traditional religion. What some have called syncretism (which according to Webster's New World Dictionary means "the combination or reconciliation of differing beliefs in religion") is simply naturalization of Christianity by using idioms or key words borrowed from traditional religion. We do not believe in syncretism, which implies deliberate harmonization or combining of Christianity with indigenous/traditional religion beliefs.)

Saying publicly, "We have a common message: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ," ties us together with one aim and purpose, namely, that we will let people know that our common message is that sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ. We will also want to make sure that the fact of forgiveness is understood in biblical culture and not in any other.

We have no choice but to work together and help each other in proclaiming and defending the pure and true teachings of the Word of God. To do this we will have to know what is invading what region of our fellowship. For us in Africa papers and lectures have been presented at various places that raise serious doubts as to whether an African Christian knows what he is converted to. It has been argued that whatever European denomination came in one's area that became a true-teaching church for him. The African has been plunged into divisional theology which is a reproduction of European church politics, it has been argued. The African is forced to argue over ideologies and words which do not mean much to him at all. This divisional theology has no regard for clan, tribe, or any social unity. It is a theology of divide and rule, where the role of an African Christian is to perpetuate European traditions and cultures which are said to be biblical theology.

Such kind of sentiments require us to define what one is converted to. In other words, what is conversion? We are in agreement with what F. Pieper says in his *Christian Dogmatics*, Volume II, page 454. We quote: The conversion of man, or his return to God, does not consist in his attempt to reform his life or to arouse some sort of "religious" feelings in himself. The favor of God has been fully secured for us through Christ's work and is offered to all men in the Gospel (2 Corinthians 5:19). The sinner's return to God, that is, his conversion, is effected in the moment when, turning away in despair from his own morality or his own righteousness, he accepts the grace of God offered to him in the Gospel, or believes the Gospel. Acts 11:21: A great number believed and turned unto the Lord. To turn to the Lord means to believe in Christ as our Mediator, through whom we have eternal life. Therefore it is necessary, if you would be converted, that you became terrified and die, that is, that you have an awakened and trembling conscience. Then, when this condition has been brought about, you must grasp the consolation. You will find this consolation not in any work which you have done, but in the work of God, who sent His Son into the world to proclaim to the terrified sinners the consoling compassion of God, His grace, which is given freely. This is how conversion is effected; others ways are wrong.

What Pieper has said in so many words, Koehler in his *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, page 130, summarizes in a small paragraph. We quote: Conversion is wrought by the Holy Ghost in the hearts of a man. While conversion will inevitably manifest itself in the outward life of a person, it actually takes place in the heart, and consists in this that the heart, broken and contrite because of sin, trusts in Christ for grace and forgiveness. It is, therefore, essentially the bestowal of faith. In order to effect this change of heart, the Holy Ghost works repentance, offers grace, and works faith.

On the doctrine of conversion, *Christian Education in African Context* on page 33 has: It is essential to understand a Christian approach implies that the cultures of the world are meant to be converted to Christ. The words of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) require that the various nations are to be made disciples of Christ, . . . it is the nations, not some people within nations, who are to be disciples. . . . Conversion is not about adopting someone else's pattern of life and thought. However ancient and however excellent, that is not conversion but

proselytization. . . . Conversion involves the turning towards Christ of everything that is there already, so that Christ comes into places, thoughts, relationships and world views in which He has never lived before.

Over against what African theologians say we want to state categorically that conversion is the work of God the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith. It would be strange for God to convert people to a tradition/culture of another people. If God is going to convert us to a culture, it will be his own culture.

When early missionaries came to Africa, they came with the colonialists. In most cases the work of a missionary was wrongly associated with that of the so-called “oppressors,” the colonialists, the work of deceitfully advocating change which would make an African submit to European authorities.

In *Christian Education in the African Context* on page 31, paragraph 2, we read: Cultural outsiders, though they may advocate changes, may never themselves make the changes that they advocate in another culture. Only insiders may make such changes.

Today, an African theologian sees his task as being that of defining theology in African context. Theology of the missionary isn't good enough anymore because it fails to address itself to the African situation. The work of a missionary is not that of bringing about change, it is that of one learning to work with the African situation as best as he can, it is claimed.

In defense of our founding fathers and the common, universal faith they taught us, we will do our best to bring people to the true teachings and meaning of God's Word as explained in the Book of Concord, 1580. We will show without reservation that the Bible is God's book to all people and that it is above any human culture. What it said to the Jew it is saying to the Gentile also.

We are not trying to be long in our presentation at all. We feel that to appreciate the theme of this paper one should be reminded of the grace of God by which we become beneficiaries of the forgiveness Christ won for us. We quote from *Abiding Word*: God's grace, as the term is used generally in the Holy Scripture, means God's attitude of love whereby he has loved all sinners who have not deserved his love. He has loved unworthy sinners to the extent that He gave his only begotten Son into the world for satisfaction of sins.

In grace all men were drawn to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). In this grace all are forgiven and eternal life is assured to all.

We have a common message: We are all forgiven through Jesus Christ. This is an accomplished fact.

In passing, we want to explain the role of faith in all we have presented in this paper. We like what Koehler says in connection with this matter. Therefore we quote his words found on pages 144-145 of his *Summary of Christian Doctrine*: Faith: In the first place, it clings to the promise of God and apprehends and appropriates to itself what this promise offers. In the second place, faith produces something; it renews the sinner. The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20). Faith sanctifies us in our lives because it first justifies us before God. The appreciation of the blessings received by and through faith prompts us to consecrate our lives to God.

For people of different nationalities, continents, languages and almost representing all colors of human race to have the kind of fellowship as this one, which binds us together, means that such people are agreed in their confession of faith and doctrine. *WELS Doctrinal Statement* on page 15, paragraph 2, helps us define Church fellowship: Church fellowship is every joint expression, manifestation and demonstration of a common faith in which Christians on the basis of their confession find themselves to be united with one another. And united we are! Together we will declare: We are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

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**WE HAVE A COMMON MEANS:
The Gospel in Word And Sacraments**
Rev. Gaylin Schmeling
Evangelical Lutheran Synod (USA)

- I. The Means of Grace: Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments
 - A. The Means of Grace Flow from the Cross of Christ (1-2)
 - B. There Is No Promise of the Spirit's Activity apart from the Means of Grace (3—4)
- II. Our Common Means: The Word Which Is Spirit and Life
 - A. The Word of God Is Inspired, Infallible, and Inerrant (5)
 - B. The Word of God Is the Power of God unto Salvation (6-8)
 - C. The Central Message of the Word Is the Cross of Christ (9-12)
- III. Common Means: The Blessed Sacraments
 - A. The Sacraments Are the Visible Word (13)
 - B. The Definition of a Sacrament (14-15)
- IV. Common Means: The Water of Baptism
 - A. The Command and Institution of Baptism (16-18)
 - B. The Blessings of Holy Baptism
 1. Baptism as Full Forgiveness (19-23)

- 2. Baptism as the New Birth (24-26)
 - 3. Baptism as Dying and Rising in Christ (27-28)
 - C. Holy Absolution Is the Continuum of Holy Baptism (29-30)
- V. Our Common Means: The Body and Blood of the Supper
- A. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament (31-39)
 - B. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament (40-41)
 - C. The Blessings of the Sacrament
 - 1. The Supper Gives the Forgiveness of Sins (42-43)
 - 2. The Supper Gives Life (44-48)
 - 3. The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation (49-51)
- I. The Means of Grace: Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments
- A. The Means of Grace Flow from the Cross of Christ
 - 1. On that first Good Friday when the Roman soldiers came to break the legs of those crucified to hasten their death, they found that Jesus was already dead. Therefore they did not break His bones. "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34). This statement indicates that Jesus truly died a natural human death, but the fathers found far more significance in this statement. They understood this passage in the light of the words of Zechariah, the Prophet, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first born" (12:10). "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (13:1). The God-man Jesus Christ, the Almighty Himself, was pierced on the cross for our salvation. The blood and water from his wounded side has provided that wonderful cleansing fountain for sin and uncleanness of which Zechariah speaks. It can wash away each stain and mark, each spot and wrinkle. His holy, precious blood is the source of redemption for the whole world (1 John 1:7; 2:2).
 - 2. That fountain of salvation, opened just moments after His death where full redemption was accomplished, continues to flow for us today in the water of Baptism, the blood of the Lord's Supper, and in His Word which is spirit and life. Here the Lord comes to us with all His blessings as St. John indicates, "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6). The means of grace indeed flow from the cross of Christ and make present for us all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. (WA Tr IV: 519-520, #4799.1-2; G. Stoeckhardt, *The Three Letters of John*, pp. 116-118; J. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, pp. 753-754; C. Zorn, *Brosamlein*, pp. 169-170)
 - B. There Is No Promise of the Spirit's Activity apart from the Means of Grace
 - 3. The Scripture nowhere promises the Spirit and His gifts outside of the means of grace. In fact, our Confessions quote Luther as saying, "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and Sacraments. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and Sacraments is of the devil" (SA III VIII 9, p. 313). It is impossible to receive any saving knowledge apart from the means of grace. Whenever man looks to other revelations, error and heresy begin.
 - 4. The Spirit has chosen to use means to convey to us all the treasure of salvation. The Scriptures declare that faith comes from hearing the Word (Romans 10:17), that Baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21), that whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven and whenever you do not forgive sins, they are not forgiven (John 20:23), and that the Lord's Supper

gives the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). The scriptural and confessional doctrine of the means of grace is defined in this way by Dr. Pieper:

He (God) ordained the means by which He gives men the infallible assurance of His gracious will toward them; in other words, He both confers on men the remission of sins merited by Christ and works faith in the proffered remission or, where faith already exists, strengthens it. The Church has appropriately called these divine ordinances the means of grace (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 103).

This doctrine is a wonderful comfort for the believer. We do not have to spend our whole life searching for God's grace and forgiveness. He freely offers and gives it to us in His objective means of grace. There is nothing we must do or accomplish to receive His grace. Not only does He give us His forgiveness in the means of grace, but through them He also works and strengthens the faith which receives that forgiveness, life, and salvation. This comforting doctrine, which emphasizes that our salvation does not depend on our own effort, indeed upholds the central article of the faith, justification by faith alone.

II. Our Common Means: The Word Which Is Spirit and Life

A. The Word of God Is Inspired, Infallible, and Inerrant

5. The proclaimed and written Word is the primary means of grace, the chief thing in both the Sacraments. This Word of God, which is the Holy Scripture, is absolutely clear and true. God the Holy Spirit breathed into the minds of the holy writers the very thoughts they should express and the very words they were to write. Therefore we know that the Bible is infallible and errorless in every detail. This doctrine, which we call "verbal inspiration," is definitely the teaching of the Scripture. St. Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Likewise St. Peter writes, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21; see also John 10:35; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:15-17). The *Formula* speaks 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 teaching are to be judged and evaluated" (FC SD *Rule and Norm* 3, pp. 503-504).

B. The Word of God Is the Power of God unto Salvation

6. The battle for the Bible has been fought in our circles and throughout the church. In many places it is still being fought. Fine statements concerning verbal inspiration have been formulated. This is a wonderful blessing for which we should thank God. But at the same time we must always emphasize why the battle for the Bible was fought. The Scripture is not just an errorless record of past history. It is not merely an exact account which makes computer age technology look poor by comparison. Rather, it is the power of God unto salvation (Roman 1:16). The Word of God is like a fire and like a hammer that shatters the rock (Jeremiah 23:29) and is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).
7. The Word is creative and life-giving. Jesus says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). That Word can turn a heart dead in trespasses and sins to a living faith in the Savior. This is the teaching of the entire Scripture. Already in the Old Testament the power of the Word is confirmed when God speaks through Isaiah, "For as the rains come down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it" (Isaiah 55:10-11). The Word will accomplish what God pleases, namely, that faith is worked through hearing that Word (Romans 10:17) or, as St. Peter puts it, that we are born again through the incorruptible seed of God's Word (1 Peter 1:23; see also 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 2

Thessalonians 2:14). There is no question that this is the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before Emperor Charles V the fathers confessed at Augsburg:

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it please God, in those who hear the Gospel (AC V, p. 31).

8. This life-giving Word, which creates faith in us, also strengthens faith and preserves us in that faith. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit is given in all His fullness with all His many gifts. Here the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are offered and bestowed. The Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). It gives direction for our life and therefore "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). The Word's the nourishment and strengthening which our faith and new spiritual life need on our earthly journey (1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:28-30). Just as our body needs food to grow, so our spiritual life needs the Word to remain strong and healthy. The Scripture is the feast to which Isaiah invites, "Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price . . . let your soul delight itself in abundance" (Isaiah 55:1,2). In the midst of all adversity and affliction God's Word gives peace, comfort, and joy to the heart (Psalm 19:8,9; Jeremiah 15:16; John 16:33). In every need and conflict of life we will flee to that life-giving Word, for through it the Holy Spirit creates faith, strengthens faith, and preserves it unto our end.

C. The Central Message of the Word Is the Cross of Christ

9. When we speak of the Word being the power of God unto salvation and giving forgiveness of sins and life, we are specifically speaking of the Gospel in contradistinction to the Law. The Law is never life-giving. The Law can only kill. This proper distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Law is the holy, eternal, unchanging will of God. The Law commands what people are to do and not to do, and always insists on total obedience. While the Law serves as a curb in this sinful world, and also as a guide in that it shows believers how to live as children of God, its primary purpose is to make us conscious of sin and our lost condition by nature (Romans 3:20). The Gospel, on the other hand, makes no demands but freely grants and offers. It gives the gracious forgiveness of Christ and eternal salvation. Showing God's undeserved love to sinners and to the unworthy for Christ's sake alone, the Gospel shines to illuminate human hearts and to make them alive. The Law and the Gospel are very different and distinct. "The Law says 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says 'believe in this,' and everything is already done" (LW 31:41).
10. The message of the Gospel is God revealed in the cross. In the Law, God hides Himself behind the fire, smoke, thunder and lightning of Mt. Sinai, so that sinful man does not dare to approach. But in the Gospel God has revealed His grace and mercy to the fallen creation in the person of Jesus Christ. God clothed Himself in flesh that man might know His love. God hid Himself in the suffering and death of the cross so that we might know Him. In the Heidelberg Disputation Luther insists, "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. . . . God can be found only in suffering and the cross" (LW 31:53). This is the theology of the cross which is the heart and core of the Scripture, as St. Paul writes, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The cross which signifies the suffering of Christ, as His redemptive act, is an event which appears to be a tragedy, but which is in fact the grandest event God ever performed. The theology of the cross recognizes God precisely where He has hidden Himself, in His suffering and in all which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness. This is the paradox of the cross.
11. Jesus became poor and lowly to raise us to His divine glory, to eternal life in heaven. He lived a perfect and harmonious life with God and man which the Father accepted as the perfect life of all people. Then He allowed Himself to be nailed to a Roman cross and to be swallowed up in death so that He might give Himself as the one sufficient redemptive sacrifice for all sin. What appeared to be His end, His defeat, was really His ultimate victory.

In His death the Victim becomes the Victor Divine, the Conqueror of the Universe, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, for He broke forth from the grave triumphant, having vanquished His foes, freeing us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. His glorious resurrection is the pronouncement of absolution for the whole world. In Him all are forgiven.

12. It is through the word of the cross that God comes to us and unites us with Christ's death and resurrection. As Law, the cross shows the full extent of God's wrath because of sin and destroys every form of self-righteousness. As Gospel, the cross shows fully the extent of God's love. It gives forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation which were guaranteed to us by the resurrection. Thus the cross in the light of Easter becomes God's means for making us alive, for bringing us to faith. As Jesus suffered death to give us life, so sinful man must hear the killing word of the Law so that his heart is prepared for the life-giving word that in Jesus' death and resurrection there is forgiveness for all, a gift of God's grace. He dies to sin and arises to the new life of faith.

III. Our Common Means: The Blessed Sacraments

A. The Sacraments Are the Visible Word

13. The Gospel always remains the supreme means of grace. This truth Luther emphasizes when he writes, "The Word, I say, and only the Word, is the vehicle of God's grace" (LW 27:249). It is the Word of God which gives power to a sacrament and makes it a sacrament as he especially says concerning the Lord's Supper, "It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament" (LC V 10, p. 448). The Sacraments are a means of grace because of the Word and promises of God connected to them. The Sacraments can be considered the sacramental Word or the visible Word, as does the Apology:

As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite (sacrament) itself enters through the eyes to move the heart. The Word and the rite have the same effect, as Augustine said so well when he called the sacrament "the visible Word," for the rite is received by the eye and is a sort of picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect (Ap XIII 5, p. 212).

B. The Definition of a Sacrament

14. The Scripture does not use the word "sacrament," nor does it give a definition of a sacrament. Yet our Lutheran fathers saw that the rites bestowing God's grace had certain common elements. This is the source of our Lutheran definition of a sacrament. "By a sacrament we mean a sacred act instituted by God Himself, [LC Preface 20, p. 364; LC IV 1, p. 436] which consists of certain visible means connected with His Word [LC IV 18, p.438; LW 36:124], through which He offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us" [LW 36:124; Ap XIII 3 4, p. 211] (ELS Catechism p. 196). Based on this definition the Lutheran Church confesses two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

15. The Sacraments belong in the sphere of the Gospel. They are gracious acts through which God provides what He has promised in His Word. The Sacraments give us the same treasure of salvation as is given through the Word. One who is burdened and terrified by his sin cannot but thank God that He has not only provided one but many means through which we receive the forgiveness of sins (SA III, IV, p. 310).

IV. Our Common Means: The Water of Baptism

A. The Command and Institution of Baptism

16. Baptism is that glorious creative act of the entire Trinity in which we were born again, being united with Christ's death and resurrection, and thus were incorporated into the body of Christ, the church, receiving all the blessings of salvation. This Sacrament the Risen Lord instituted shortly before His Ascension. He commanded the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son

and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19,20). Likewise He said in the Gospel of Mark, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). The divine institution of Baptism is also evident from apostolic practice. The apostles administered Baptism already at the first Pentecost. In his Pentecost sermon St. Peter urged, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

17. According to the institution of Baptism, we are to make disciples by means of baptizing and by means of teaching. Baptism is then a means through which disciples are made. An individual is to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized in the name of the Trinity means to be connected to the Trinity, to be united with the Trinity in such a way that the individual becomes God’s possession and is dedicated to His service. In this institution the Lord commands His church to baptize all nations. This shows that Baptism is meant for all people—no age group excluded. Finally the baptismal command concludes, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” reminding us that the Lord will be with us in Baptism not only in His omnipresence, as He is in all things, but in such a way that we are saved according to the Father’s mercy, united with Christ and His death and resurrection, and born again by the Spirit (MWS 113).
18. The essential parts of Baptism are the water and the Word (Ephesians 5:25,26). The water used in Baptism is ordinary water like that which one would drink or in which one could bathe. We do not have to obtain the water from a special place like the Jordan. Nor is the amount or manner of applying water expressed in Scripture. Some today believe that the word “baptize” denotes only “immersing.” However, in Mark 7:4 the Greek verb baptizein is used to speak of “the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches” showing that this verb simply means “to wash.” When we wash pitchers, vessels, and couches, we do not ordinarily totally immerse them. Thus we may apply the water in Baptism in any manner. This water in itself does not make Baptism. Luther says in the Small Catechism: “Baptism is not just water, but it is water used according to God’s command and connected with His Word.” The Word that is to be connected with the water and which makes it a powerful means of grace is found in the baptismal institution: “Go therefore . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The baptismal formula used is: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

B. The Blessings of Holy Baptism

1. Baptism as Full Forgiveness

19. Baptism is not a mere rite which we must perform because of God’s command, nor is it merely an action by which we symbolically show what happened to us when we came to faith, as the Reformed teach. Rather, Baptism is a divine work apart from all human action. Here God offers and gives full forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). St. Peter says that Baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21). This does not mean that there is another way to be saved besides trusting in Jesus’ forgiveness won on the cross. Rather, Baptism unites us with Christ’s cross. Baptism is a means through which the treasure of salvation is brought to us. On the cross Jesus won forgiveness for all people. Yet that forgiveness will do us no good unless it is brought to us who are living in the twentieth century. This is the purpose of Baptism. Baptism works like a pipeline bringing forgiveness of sin from its source, the cross, to each of us personally at the baptismal font.
20. Luther at times pictures the baptismal font as a fountain filled with the Messiah’s blood. “This is not a common bath of water . . . but it is a Baptism of blood or a blood bath (Blutbad) which Christ alone, the Son of God Himself, prepared through His own death” (St. L. XII, 538; see also LW 51:324-326). Because Baptism offers and gives the forgiveness won on the cross through Christ’s blood, Luther sees Baptism as a bath in the rose-colored blood flowing from the dear Savior’s veins. It can indeed wash away each stain and mark,

each spot and wrinkle. Though our sins are as scarlet, they are as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they are as wool, for here we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, having received His full forgiveness at the font. This beautiful comforting picture language Luther uses in his great baptismal hymn:

The eye of sense alone is dim
And nothing sees but water;
Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him
The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
It sees the cleansing fountain, red
With the dear blood of Jesus,
Which from the sins, inherited
From fallen Adam, frees us
And from our own misdoings.

(ELS Hymnal Supplement, Hymn 111)

21. Because Baptism effects the forgiveness of sin, it delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation. Death no longer has any power over us for it has lost its sting (1 Corinthians 15:55). It is no longer the terrible end of everything, but it has become a restful sleep and the gateway to eternal joy in the mansions of the Father (John 11:25-26; 14:1-6). As certainly as Baptism brings us into communion with Christ's redemptive death, giving us forgiveness, so certainly it unites us with His resurrection, giving life and salvation (Romans 6:3-11). Concerning Baptism's power to conquer death and give eternal life Luther concludes in the Large Catechism:

Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man's door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men (LC IV 43, p. 442).

22. Baptism delivers us from the devil. On account of our sins Satan has power over us. We are by nature his slaves doing his every bidding. But when our sins were forgiven in baptism, we were freed from his domination. To emphasize this liberation certain of the old Lutheran agendas included an exorcism in the baptismal liturgy: "I adjure you, you unclean spirit, by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that you go out of and depart from this servant of Jesus Christ. Amen" (Kirchen-Agende, p. 4; see also LW 53:96).

23. The ultimate purpose of Baptism is eternal salvation. Baptism indeed saves us (1 Peter 3:21)! In Baptism we were marked with the holy cross and sealed as the Lord's. We became the children of God, heirs of heaven. Our Baptism shows that the Father is always extending His loving arms to us that we may repent and return to Him. The confession, "I am baptized," assures us that the Lord is with us all the way in this life, never leaving nor forsaking us, and that at last He will carry us home to the heavenly fatherland above.

2. Baptism as the New Birth

24. The baptismal font is full of Christ's forgiveness and salvation. It is a wonderful treasure in every way. This treasure is received and made our own by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Yet this faith is impossible for humanity by itself for "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Faith is worked alone through the means of grace.

25. This Baptism which requires faith also creates such faith. Baptism is regenerative. St. Paul writes, "God saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Baptism is here called a washing that regenerates and renews because it creates faith, making us spiritually alive and thus saves us. Likewise St. Paul shows that in Baptism we are risen with Christ through faith (Colossians 2:12). St. John declares that we are born again by the water and the Word which is Baptism (John 3:5). To be born again

means to come to faith in Jesus and His forgiveness for salvation. Therefore Baptism works faith.

26. Since Baptism brings to us all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and creates the faith to receive these benefits, it should not be withheld from our children. They are included in the "all nations" of the baptismal institution (Matthew 28:19). They are born dead in trespasses and sins as all humanity (Ephesians 2:1), and Baptism is the only means whereby infants, who too must be born again, can ordinarily be regenerated and brought to faith (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). In the Scriptures Baptism is compared with circumcision (Colossians 2:13). As little children were circumcised in the Old Testament, so they should now be baptized. Also the assumption that little children should not be baptized because they can not believe must be rejected, for the Scriptures clearly speak of little ones who believe in Christ and who are part of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15). When an individual has already been brought to faith through the Word, then Baptism strengthens and seals that faith. An unbelieving child is usually brought to faith through Baptism and an unbelieving adult through the Word, but in both cases it is the same almighty miracle, for both by nature are dead in sin and can not come to faith by themselves.

3. Baptism as Dying and Rising in Christ

27. The most comprehensive statement concerning Baptism in the New Testament is found in Romans 6. Here St. Paul shows that in Baptism we were united with Christ and His cross. Our old sinful flesh was nailed to the cross, and we died to sin. We were buried with Christ in the tomb. Because we have participated in the death of Christ through Baptism, we were freed from sin and delivered from death and the devil (Romans 6:7). All our sins were washed into the depths of the sea through Jesus' blood. As Jesus arose triumphant that first Easter morning, so we arose to new life in Baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). Faith in Christ's cross was created in our hearts, we received new resurrection life in Him, and we were incorporated into His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Therefore our Baptism gives us all of the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection and the absolute certainty of salvation.

28. Baptism is not merely a one time occurrence in the past without any real meaning for the here and now. No, it has value each and every day of our life. Each day we need to die and rise again in Baptism. Through Christ's resurrection, Baptism is the power source of our new life, our resurrection life right now, so that we can daily crucify the flesh and arise to new life; that is, we can daily put off the old man and put on the new man. Each day in true repentance we will throw our sins of pride, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, and greed back into the baptismal font and drown them. Then through the word of absolution given us in Baptism, our new resurrection life will come forth strengthened to live a more God-pleasing life. This is the daily use of Baptism to which Luther refers in his Small Catechism under the "Meaning of Baptism."

C. Holy Absolution Is the Continuum of Holy Baptism

29. Because of our definition of a sacrament Lutherans do not usually speak of Holy Absolution as a sacrament. Yet as a continuum of Holy Baptism, we hold it in high regard. "You see that Baptism, both by its power and by its signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, formerly called Penance, which is really nothing else than Baptism" (LC IV 74, p. 445). Absolution continues the dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. In confession we drown our sins in the baptismal font and in absolution we receive Jesus' forgiveness flowing to us in the baptismal water.

30. Absolution is the administration of the Keys, the dispensing of the Gospel of forgiveness, be that to many or to the individual. Christ said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Again He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are

retained" (John 20:23). This is the wonderful comforting word, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). Some may ask, "How can a man forgive sins; isn't that a prerogative of God alone?" On the cross Christ won full and complete forgiveness for all people (1 John 2:2). It was done once and for all. But He did not distribute or give that forgiveness on the cross. He distributes it through Holy Baptism, through the Lord's Supper, and through the word of absolution spoken by men in Christ's stead (LW 40:213,214). He commanded men to speak His forgiveness in His place (John 20:23; Luke 10:16). Therefore when in the Divine Liturgy we hear the pastor say, "I forgive you all your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we should be absolutely confident of forgiveness, since it is as certain as if Christ spoke the words Himself. Our Confessions teach, "Our people are taught to esteem absolution highly because it is the voice of God and is pronounced by God's command" (AC XXV, pp. 61-62).

V. Our Common Means: The Body and Blood of the Supper

A. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament

31. The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. The historical setting of the Supper was the Passover, the most solemn meal for God's Old Testament people. In the meal where Old Testament believers ate the flesh of the Passover lamb, which was to picture for them the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus the very Lamb of God gave New Testament believers not only a picture of His flesh and blood with bread and wine, but He gave them His true body and blood wherein He bestowed upon them all the blessings of the cross.
32. As the Passover meal was underway, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread, broke it for distribution, and gave thanks or blessed it. Exactly what that blessing entailed we are not told, but it must have been quite different from the usual Passover benediction because concerning the blessed bread that He was offering His disciples and inviting them to receive the Lord said, "Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." These are the words of blessing Christ gave to the church so that in our Lord's Supper celebration the Word may be joined to the elements effecting the presence, as St. Augustine says, "If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament" (*Accedat verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum*). Notice what Jesus said concerning that which He was offering His disciples: "This is My Body." Jesus did not say, "This is a picture of My body," nor did He say, "This only represents My body." Rather, He said, "This is My Body." This is the confession of the Lutheran fathers: "It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected" (AC X, p. 34).
33. The Words of Institution continue: "In the same way also He took the cup after supper." Jesus took the third cup of the Passover, which was a cup of wine, for only wine was used in the Passover. He blessed it even as He had blessed the bread and gave it to them saying, "This is the new testament in My blood." St. Matthew explains further, "which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." The words of explanation concerning this cup which is His true blood allude to the ratification of the first covenant in Exodus 24. Real blood ratified the old covenant and the people were given that real blood in testimony of the fact that they received the blessing of the sacrifice. Likewise real blood ratified the new covenant, and God's people are still given that real blood of the true Lamb of God so that they are certain that the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice apply to them (LS 100-102). The Words of Institution summarize the blessings of this Sacrament with the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," which shows that all the treasure house of salvation is offered in this Supper, as Luther says in the Small Catechism, "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

34. Jesus concluded His Institution with the command, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." A similar command had already been given concerning His body. These words explain that this institution was not meant as only a one time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory (1 Corinthians 11:26). Each time Christians celebrate this Supper they bring Christ's great sacrifice into remembrance and receive the treasure of that sacrifice: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.
35. When Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," He commanded us to continue this institution. What is necessary for a valid Lord's Supper? Jesus said, "Do this," do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty word of consecration, "This is My body, This is My blood," which effect the presence, and distribute His true body and blood so that they may be eaten and drunk (LW 37, 187).
36. Another portion of Scripture which is important in the study of the Lord's Supper is 1 Corinthians 10:16,17: "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a participation in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all partake of the one bread." St. Paul did not say that the cup and bread are only visual aids to help us understand Christ's redemptive work. No, he said that the cup and the bread are a participation in, a real partaking of Christ's body and blood.
37. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the imperative "Do this" of the Words of Institution is particularly illuminated. Here "the cup of blessing which we bless" is explained. Notice that it is a cup which the church is to bless. Then the "Do this" is not only a command to distribute and receive but also to bless. One can distribute and receive forever, but without God's commanded blessing it is only bread and wine. It is God's blessing which causes Jesus' body and blood to be present. On the other hand, one can say God's blessing forever but if there is no distribution and reception there is no Sacrament, for Christ's full institution has not been carried out.
38. Since the Lord has commanded that the bread and wine be blessed in order to have a valid Sacrament, what is the blessing that the Lord desired His church to use? In close proximity to this Scripture, where St. Paul particularly asserts that Christ's followers bless the elements, he also gives the church a Word of the Lord in liturgical form concerning the Lord's Supper, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, etc." (1 Corinthians 11:23). These words, which Christ gave to St. Paul, He wanted delivered to the church for the celebration of the Supper.
39. In summary, how do we know that we have the true Supper today? What causes Christ's body and blood to be present in the Sacrament or what effects the presence? It is not any power or work of man but alone the Word and institution of Christ, as is the case in Holy Baptism. It is that all-powerful Word which God spoke at the creation and it was done. St. Paul says that by blessing with those words commanded in Christ's institution we have "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:16). Then it is the Words of Institution by virtue of Christ's original command which effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper. This is the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions: "For wherever we observe His institution and speak His words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ Himself is still active through the spoken words by virtue of the first institution, which He wanted to be repeated" (FC SD VII, 75, p. 583). It is alone the almighty Word of Christ which causes His presence and not our action or doing. At the same time the entire sacramental action (consecration, distribution, reception) must be carried out or there is no Sacrament, that is, no real presence, for nothing has the character of a sacrament outside its intended use. The whole sacramental action must be kept as a unit (FC SD VII, 85-87, pp. 584-585).

B. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament

40. In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper we need to be well prepared to receive it worthily, for St. Paul says, "He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). This, however, is not a worthiness brought about by the Law, but by the Gospel, and it does not consist of a perfect life and entire purity of the soul. Rather, to be worthy and well prepared means that we have a sincere sorrow over our sins, that we confess them, striving to do better, and earnestly long for forgiveness of sins.
41. At the same time this worthiness includes a confident faith in Jesus the Savior who paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross with His body and blood and who gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. With these questions Christians should examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Supper:
- Am I truly sorry for all my sins in thought, word, and deed?
 - Do I believe that Jesus my Savior paid for all these sins on the cross?
 - Do I believe that Jesus gives me in the Supper His body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins, life, and salvation?
 - Do I sincerely desire with the aid of the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend my sinful life?

C. The Blessings of the Sacrament

1. The Supper Gives the Forgiveness of Sins

42. Luther aptly summarized the blessings of the Supper in the Small Catechism: "The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: Given and shed for you for the remission of sins, namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the Sacrament, as the Words of Institution declare, and from it flow all the other blessings of the Supper.
43. The Holy Sacrament is a real impartation of the remission of sins obtained for all people on the cross. In our weaknesses and failures we can often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha kneeling before the cross embracing His dying body and drinking from His five bloody wounds. It is Jesus' body hung on the cross and His shed blood which have paid for the sins of the world. As a kidnapped child is bought back by its parents with money, so Jesus bought us back not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. His body and blood are the ransom for sin. In the Supper we receive the very thing which paid for sins, the very thing which freed us from hell's destruction. Then no matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how heavily they burden our conscience, receiving this Sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven, for within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely, His true body and blood (C. F. W. Walther, *Brosamen*, pp. 108-117).

2. The Supper Gives Life

44. The Holy Supper confers life. This is not temporal life which we received through natural birth, but it is that new spiritual life which has been regenerated in us through the new birth in Holy Baptism. Since this life is still weak and imperfect, and constant growth is necessary, the Lord Jesus has instituted this Sacrament as a true spiritual nourishment. Luther says concerning this:

Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow

continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. Meanwhile it must suffer much opposition. . . . For such time, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment (LC V, 23-26, p. 449).

45. Our Confessions quote the Early Church fathers as saying, "Christ's flesh is truly a life-giving food and His blood truly a quickening beverage" (FC SD VIII, 76, p. 606). The body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. They are never unfruitful, impotent, or useless. Here we receive the body and blood of the living God into this body made of dust. What can be more powerful? What can be more beneficial? This is the greatest treasure in the life of a Christian. It is the greatest benefit for body and soul. "This life-giving bread and cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities" (Ex. 2,491).
46. As the Christian travels in this life, he faces problems and troubles all the way. There are often financial difficulties in our home, bitterness in our family, conflicts with our friends, sickness, and even the death of those most near and dear. For this reason the German Lutheran fathers often speak of this life as the Jammertal, the "vale of tears." Yet in every difficulty and problem of life the Lord Jesus says, "Come to My Table, all you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." Through the Sacrament of His body and blood He gives us the strength to face all the problems and troubles of life and to do all things through Him. Come to this refreshing repast (LC V 66-70, p. 454). Here He give us His quickening flesh and blood which strengthens us to live a holier life and empowers us to walk in His loving footsteps (LS 191). Here is the nourishment, the heavenly manna, we need all the way through the journey of this life. This is the case in every physical need and sickness and especially at the hour of death. For there is no better help than that of the Divine Physician, who gives His life-giving flesh and blood as the soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in soul and body.
47. There are many today who are seeking a closer walk with Jesus, a closer relationship with the Savior. There are times in every Christian's life when he feels very distant from the Divine Redeemer. At such times the Christian is not to attend some wild, emotional revival to have an experience of Christ. He is not to try to wrestle with the Lord in prayer until he feels His presence. Rather, he is to go where the Lord has promised to be found, in the Word and Sacraments. In the Supper there is an intimate union with Christ, for here He comes into the believer with His body and blood and remains with him.
48. This incorporation into Christ which the Lord's Supper grants constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of His body. One cannot be united with Christ without also at the same time existing in communion with all the other members of this body. As He comes into us with His flesh and blood, uniting us with Himself, so He comes into all the other communicants drawing us together as His church. St. Paul says, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). As many kernels of wheat are ground together to form a loaf of bread and as many grapes are crushed to form one cup of wine, so in the Supper we become His one body, the church, by partaking of His one body in the Sacrament. This is a wonderful fellowship where we will bear one another's burdens by showing love and compassion to each brother and sister in need. Because this Sacrament draws us into one body, we are to receive the Sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those who teach His word in its truth and purity. Otherwise, we are really lying. We are declaring we are one when we are not one.

3. The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation

49. The Holy Supper confers salvation. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal salvation. In the Supper the believer receives the very ransom money that paid for his sins and freed him from destruction. This is what has thrown open the doors of heaven and

broken every barrier down. As we receive His body and blood in the Supper, we know that heaven is ours. "Thus the Sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life" (LW 35, 66).

50. As Christ walked among men, people were healed and raised from the dead by His very touch. His flesh and blood are life-giving. Then as we receive His body and blood into this dying body, we are assured that, even though it returns to the dust from which it was formed, on the last day it will break forth from the grave glorified like Christ's glorified body, and so we will ever be with the Lord. Because of this, the Early Church fathers have often spoken of the Supper as the viaticum, "the medicine of immortality," which is a food preparing us for eternal life. Luther clearly points to the Sacrament as a pledge and seal of the resurrection and eternal life:

Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature (LW 37: 134; see also 37:100, 132; Ex 2, 233,234).

This is the medicine of immortality, an antidote that we may not die, but live forever in Him.

51. St. Paul says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but it at the same time points forward to the final consummation of our redemption on the last day. Each time we celebrate the Sacrament, we do it eagerly awaiting the second coming as the whole Ancient Church cried, Maranatha, "Lord, come quickly." The Father then gives us His Son under the form of bread and wine as a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the Lamb which will be ours at His second coming. In the Supper we for a moment step out of our mundane workaday existence where we carry one after another to the grave, and we have a foretaste of heaven, where the Lamb once slain Himself descends and angels prostrate fall. Here is heaven on earth as the fathers prayed, "Your Supper be my heaven on earth, till I enter heaven." Then as we eat at His Table here, we have the certainty that we will be at His Table there where we will eat of the heavenly manna and drink of the river of His pleasure forevermore .

Soli Deo Gloria

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Abbreviations

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes are from the Tappert Translation unless otherwise indicated):

AC - Augsburg Confession
 Ap - Apology of the Augsburg Confession
 FC - Formula of Concord
 LC - Large Catechism
 SA - Smalcald Articles
 SD - Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

Luther's Works:

LW - American Edition
 St. L.- St. Louis Edition
 WA - Weimar Edition

Writings of Chemnitz:

LS - The Lord's Supper
 MWS - Ministry, Word, and Sacraments
 TNC - Two Natures in Christ

WE HAVE A COMMON FOUNDATION: God's Pure Word

Pastor Egil Edvardsen
Lutheran Confessional Church (Sweden and Norway)

The theme for this historic conference has a special tone for us Scandinavians. "God's Word is our great heritage" is the first line in a much-used hymn written by the Danish hymnwriter Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig. We can safely say that this hymn has been one of the most popular hymns in our countries. Therefore it is sad to observe how little is left among our peoples of the heritage of God's Word, and how few those are who truly confess the content of this hymn. For many years liberal theology and Bible criticism have had their subversive effects in such a way that God's pure and clear Word no longer is the heritage of our nations. The Scripture is no longer considered to be God's altogether trustworthy Word and the highest norm, rule, and guide for all doctrine and all life. In our so-called "Lutheran" countries the question no longer is, "What is written?" Now the only valid question is: "What do you yourself believe?" Subjectivism and therewith pluralism has replaced the testimony of the Scriptures.

Therefore it is good for our little Lutheran Confessional Church in Sweden and Norway to be part of a fellowship where we have a common foundation—God's pure Word. This fellowship encourages us not to give up but to continue to go on contending for preserving God's Word so it will become the heritage of our coming generations. It gives us strength to continue to preserve God's Word pure and clear among us.

1. The inspiration of Scripture

It is almost generally accepted among most Lutheran theologians that the Bible is not God's Word, but a product of men's thoughts. They may accept that God's Word can be found in the Bible, but they hold that these words are mixed with the authors' own words and opinions. The question then is: Which words in the Bible are God's words and which are men's words? If two theologians have different opinions on this, which one of them should we listen to?

In a little children's song it is said: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." But how can I know that Jesus loves me just because the Bible says it? Yes, can I on the whole know anything for sure about God and his love if what is written in the Bible is not his own words, but only human thoughts?

We believe that the Bible is God's Word, which means: We believe not only that the Bible contains God's Word, but that every word in the Bible is God's Word. How do we know this? Is it something we just have made up our minds to believe? We believe that the words of the Bible are God's Word because that is a claim made by the Bible itself. The Bible says it is God's Word, and therefore we believe it.

The Bible is made up of many different books, written in different times by different people. We have Moses and the prophets, the evangelists and the apostles—many writers. And still there is only one author of the whole Bible—God himself. The Bible is God's own book.

When we talk about how the Bible came into being, we usually use the term inspiration. The term itself—"inspiration"—can only be found in one place in Scripture. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes: "All Scripture is inspired by God" (quoted from Beck, *An American Translation*; the NIV has, "All Scripture is God-breathed"). The three words, "inspired by God," are a translation of theopneustos. A literal translation here says that all Scripture is God-breathed or God-inspired.

Many theologians try to explain away this passage by translating in another way: "All scripture which is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching. . . ." But even if it was possible to translate the passage in that way, still it wouldn't mean that there are parts in Scripture which are not inspired. We can find Paul's opinion on this in what he wrote to the Romans: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us . . ." (Romans 15:4).

All Scripture has come into being by means of God putting the words into the minds of the writers, in many different ways, ways we cannot understand, and the writers on their part wrote down these words in exactly that form or in exactly those words which God wanted them to be written. Therefore, the words of Scripture are God's words. They have come from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), even if they have been delivered by people. About the Old Testament and the words of the prophet it is said: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). And about the New Testament and the words of the Apostles we read: "When you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

These people who brought God's Word were chosen by him, and the Word was put in their mouths by the Holy Spirit. Pointing to David's Psalm 110, Jesus says: "David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared. . . ." (Mark 12:36). David's words are the same as the words of the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 1:16). The words of the prophets and narratives from the Old Testament are quoted as God's Word. We find examples of this in Matthew 1:22,23: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet"; Acts 4:25: "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father *David*"; . . . Acts 28:25: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet." So the words are God's own but he has spoken them through people. He has used human instruments. In Hebrews 3:7 he even fails to mention the human instrument. It is only said: "So, as the Holy Spirit says:" followed by a quote from Psalm 95.

Inspiration implies that the people God used to preach his Word wrote exactly what he wanted them to write. They did not write their own words but God's Word. "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). That Peter also had in mind the written prophetic Word is clear from the preceding verse: "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20).

The divine inspiration is a verbal inspiration, e.g., every word in Scripture is inspired by God. Inspiration applies not only to the thought content or message of the Bible, or the biblical writers only, but the Holy Spirit made them write the exact words which they wrote. This is taught both by Paul (2 Timothy 3:16) and by Peter (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus said that the disciples received the words from him (John 17:8), and Paul writes to the Corinthians that his message came to them in words he had learned from the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). God said to Jeremiah: "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9), and: "Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you" (30:2).

The fact that every word in the Bible is God-breathed does not imply that the biblical writers functioned as robots. God made use of the various gifts and distinctive character which he had given to the different writers. Because of that John's mode of expression, for example, is quite different from Luke's. The biblical writers were also fully aware of the fact that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. David said: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2).

We do not know how inspiration came about. We cannot scientifically explain it. It is a miracle of God. We believe in inspiration on the basis of the Bible's own testimony, and this testimony in itself contains a convincing power.

The Bible's own testimony is clear: It is God's Word, to the full, written down word by word in accordance with the inspiration of the Spirit.

2. The authority of Scripture

The authority of Scripture follows directly on the inspiration of Scripture. It is not founded on human beings, but on God himself. God is behind every statement, every doctrine, every promise, and every command in the Bible. The prophets received the command from God: "Speak this word to them . . ." (Jeremiah 14:17), and they were to go to the people and say: "Hear the words of the Lord!" Paul's words were not his own thoughts or opinions but "the Lord's

command" (1 Corinthians 14:37), and the Christians had received it, "not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Because the Bible is God's Word, its authority cannot be limited by human beings. It is absolute. It does not stand under any human authority. To rebel against the authority of the Bible is the same as rebelling against God himself. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18, 19). The only one who can invalidate the authority of God's Word is God himself. When God has said something is going to be valid for ever, then it is valid for ever. God may give a command or a direction with a limited validity, but then he himself has stated that in his Word. This applies, for example, to the Old Testament ceremonial law, which was fulfilled once and for all through Christ's vicarious sacrificial work (Hebrews 7-10).

The authority of the Bible is not limited in time. Neither is it limited by geographical, cultural, or social circumstances. With reference to Scriptures written down in a completely different time, under totally different cultural and social circumstances than he himself lived in, Paul still writes: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Romans 15:4). Also these "old" writings were by Paul considered "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Christ held the same view concerning the Old Testament Scriptures. In John 10:34 he quotes Psalm 82:6, and in reference to the word "gods" he says: "He called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and the Scripture cannot be broken" (10:35). He wants us to have the same obedience to his own words: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32). And Paul demands the same obedience to his words: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:8).

The Bible surely is not a textbook in geography or science. But its authority when speaking about such things is still absolute. Jesus said to the Jews: "I have spoken to you about earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?" (John 3:12). If we don't believe God when he tells us how he created the world and the human race, how could we believe him when he preaches about salvation in Christ and the forgiveness of our sins? Anyone who modifies the authority of Scripture undermines the very foundation of our salvation.

The absolute authority of Scripture implies that criticism of Scripture is the same as criticism of God. Over such criticism rests the verdict: "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (John 12:48).

3. The inerrancy of Scripture

The inerrancy of Scripture is insolubly tied to the inspiration of Scripture. If every word in the Bible is God's own inspired Word, then the Bible must be inerrant. For who would believe that God wants to deceive us? Who will say to God: "God, you are lying. This and that word in the Bible is wrong." If there is anything in his Word that is wrong, then God is only a fallible human being, and the Bible a human book.

Even if God used people as instruments in writing down his words, all these different people were compelled by the Holy Spirit when they wrote. Therefore every thinkable mistake was locked out.

God's Word is true and without mistakes not only for him who believes it (true in a subjective way), but God's Word is true by itself, even if nobody believes it (true in an objective way). The psalmist says: "All your words are true" (Psalm 119:160). "Your promises have been thoroughly tested" (Psalm 119:140). And the Savior says of God's Word: "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The truth of God's Word has nothing to do with what people may or may not believe. "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all! Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Romans 3:3, 4).

For Luther the inerrancy of Scripture was a presupposition. Even if reason says something else, we should believe God's Word, he said, for "it is not man's word, which could lie and be wrong; it

is the Word of God, who is the eternal truth" (LW 23:95). In his commentary to Psalm 112 he writes: "The Scriptures cannot lie" (LW 13:393).

The Lutheran Confessions also teach the inerrancy of Scripture. In the exposition on the first commandment in the Large Catechism it says: "These words must stand and prove to be true since God cannot lie or deceive" (Cat. Maj. I:46). "My neighbor and I—in short, all men—may deceive, but God's Word cannot err" (Cat. Maj. IV: 57).

The inerrancy of Scripture is strongly attacked in our time. Even conservative Lutheran theologians claim there are mistakes and self-contradictions in the Bible. The leaven of Bible criticism has had the chance to carry out its damaging influence for a long time. Karl Barth spoke about the miracle "that fallible men speak God's Word with fallible human words" (*Kirchliche Dogmatik* 1/2, p. 529). And the Bible commission of the Swedish episcopal council says in its report "*Bibelsyn och Bibelbruk*" (The view and use of the Bible) (1970) that one can hardly be intellectually honest and at the same time claim the view that every single little detail in the Bible necessarily must be historically correct (p. 68). Among such "little details" is also counted Christ's true and bodily resurrection from the dead.

The so-called conservatives within the Lutheran church still hold to the central truths about salvation. But they mean that we may accept a critical viewpoint on such "peripheral" things as the days of creation, the historicity of Adam and Eve, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, etc. The inerrancy of Scripture in every part is according to their opinion "a fortress impossible to defend." But in order to avoid showing openly that they are on their way to give in to Bible criticism, they put another meaning into concepts like truth and inerrancy. The fact that the Bible is true doesn't really mean anything more than that it is written by honest and truthful people. "Truthfulness" therefore is a distinctive feature of the human writers of the Bible, not of the words of the Bible. The fact that the Bible is "inerrant" only means that most of the mistakes in the Bible were not made on purpose. The different writers were ignorant of many things we know today, and they wrote what they really believed was true. Some mistakes may also have been made on purpose, but then only to glorify God or to explain one or another deeper truth.

Thus the inerrancy of Scripture is explained away. We, on the contrary, believe that the Bible is inerrant in all respects, and this inerrancy is an objective truth, either if people want to believe it or not, and we say with Luther: "The Scripture has never erred. . . . If that is not granted, what is Scripture good for?" (LW 32:11,12).

4. The clarity of Scripture

The Bible is written in a human language, and therefore we can understand its teachings. In itself it is clear and plain. God's Word is "a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). It is like "a light shining in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19). Yes, the Bible is so clear and plain that it can make wise the simple (Psalm 19:7). Even children can learn to know the Scriptures: "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation," Paul writes to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:15).

The reason why many things in the Bible are obscure and unclear to us should not be blamed on the Bible, but on us. It is impossible for human reason to explain many of the narratives in the Bible. Anyone who wants to put more trust in his own reason must look at the wine miracle at Cana as unacceptable, likewise many of the other narratives about miracles. Many of the Bible doctrines are also unacceptable to human reason. Who can fathom the nature of God (the Trinity), the creation of the world, the mystery of the person of Christ, the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, the resurrection of the bodies of all people on the last day, etc.?

Nevertheless, for the believer this is no problem. He takes "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). He knows that the natural man does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, that for him they are foolishness which he cannot understand (1 Corinthians 2:14). And with Paul he confesses: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing

out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" (Romans 11:33-35).

The Bible is in itself plain and clear. This means it is fully competent to make us "wise for salvation" (2 Timothy 3:15) and to make us "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (3:17). We do not need to supplement the Bible with, for example, oral traditions, statements from the pope, decisions made by church councils, so-called "new" revelations, etc. Together with our Lutheran forefathers 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" (Sol. Decl: Introduction Tappert, p. 503:3).

5. The purpose of Scripture

Scripture is God's Word, given to us for a very special purpose. We did not receive the Bible by accident, and God did not act without a definite purpose when he compelled inspired prophets and apostles to write down his words. When he compelled the prophets to speak and write: "Thus says the Lord . . .," and when he compelled evangelists and apostles to write "what they had seen and heard" (1 John 1:3), he did this with a special purpose in mind.

The Bible is given for our salvation. In his infinite love and grace God decided to save fallen mankind from its deep fall into sin. He sent his own, only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to this world, that he by his vicarious life and his vicarious suffering and death should redeem mankind. But what use do we humans have of this complete work that Christ has done in our place, if we do not hear about it? That is why God has given us the Bible. It can give us wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15). The Bible tells us about God's love and grace. It shows us Jesus Christ, our Savior, who he is, true God and true man, and what he has done for us.

Therefore Jesus also says to the Jews: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). And John ends his Gospel by establishing the reason for writing all this down: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Thus John summarizes the purpose of the Bible: That we may believe and live.

The Bible is also given to teach us and train us to serve God with our lives. For even if a person has come to faith in Jesus and has become a Christian, he has nevertheless not rid himself of sin. As long as we live on this earth, we are at the same time sinners and righteous, righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, and sinners because of our old nature that daily tempts us to sin. God has given us the Bible to help us in our daily battle against sin. It can guide us in living a God-pleasing life. God's Word is called "a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). The Bible lights up the way for us, so we can see where we should walk. The psalmist asks: "How can a young man keep his way pure?" And he gives the answer himself: "By living according to your word . . . Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors" (Psalm 119:9 and 24). Especially from the well-known verses in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we see what is the great and important purpose of the Bible: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that (e.g., by following the Bible as a guide) the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The Bible has been given to us for help in our daily life, to show us which way to go for help against temptation. It is our directions for life.

6. The use of Scripture

The most important purpose of the Bible—to make us wise for salvation and be a guide for our lives—can be fulfilled only if it is used. If it stands unused on the bookshelf or lies hidden in a cupboard, it cannot fulfill its purpose.

The Master himself is our best teacher in how to use the Bible. He used the Bible in his daily life. Already as a twelve-year-old boy he was familiar with the holy Scriptures (Luke 2:46, 47), and he

used them to refute Satan's temptations in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). On the cross he quoted the Bible (Matthew 27:46 and John 19:30).

But he also used the Bible in performing his prophetic office. He used it in his preaching (Luke 4:16-32) and his teaching (John 3:1-16, Matthew 21:15,16). He used it to strengthen and keep his disciples in the faith (Luke 24:25-27; 24:32 and 24:44-46) and to teach about himself (Matthew 22:41,46).

Just like Christ, we too should learn everything the Bible teaches and give prominence to what is written there (Luke 18:31; Mark 11:17; John 15:25 etc.). We ought not to exclude anything. Hence the Great Commission applies to all Christians: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19,20). Above all we should emphasize the preaching of the gospel, just as Jesus asked us to do: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15), and as he did himself (Luke 4:18,19).

Christ viewed Scripture as the absolute authority in all things. "The Scripture cannot be broken," he said pointing to one single word (John 10:35). In that way he fulfilled the important principle, not to add and not to deduct anything from what is written (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 21:18,19). Teaching something different than the Bible teaches is the same as teaching rules of men (Matthew 15:1-9).

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me!" (John 5:39). When Jesus said this to the Jews, he also said something about the use of the Bible to every human being, man, woman, and child, that the Scriptures should be studied, because there we find him. We do not find him in nature. We do not find him within ourselves, but we find him in Scripture. So it is something that concerns everybody: Search the Scriptures, study the Bible, use God's Word!

7. Conclusion

The Bible is God's inspired, inerrant Word, given to us human beings for salvation and guidance in life. It is our absolute authority for all doctrine and all of our life. Therefore we confess with the Lutheran reformers: "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" (FC, Ep, Introduction).

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WE HAVE A COMMON CONFESSION: Unity in the Spirit

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Highly esteemed members of the CELC!

By God's grace we have been led together as representatives of churches which rejoice to be in sound fellowship, founded on doctrinal agreement—something which our fathers longed to see. Our hearts are filled with gratitude. But we also feel some trembling that the Old Foe may not destroy or weaken our CELC as he has done with other federations of churches.

Since we in the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK) had to live more than forty years behind the Iron Curtain, it is a great honor and privilege to us that you have chosen Germany for the first gathering of this conference and have planned to close it in the youngest congregation of our ELFK, Immanuel Congregation at Steeden. May God pour out his richest blessings on us during these days!

The outline of this essay consists of six questions:

1. What is our common confession?
2. How did we receive our common confession?
3. What is the connection between the Bible and our common confession?
4. What is the correct use of our common confession?
5. What is the fruit of our common confession?
6. How can we preserve our common confession and unity in faith and in the Spirit?

1. What is our common confession?

Certainly every one of us has to confess his sins every day. Like the people of the Bible, we can trust in God's Word, that he will grant us forgiveness of all our sins if we ask him to be gracious to us for Christ's sake. We all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Only if we admit that we are sinners who deserve God's punishment can we hear the word of absolution to comfort our hearts and consciences. This must be the common confession of all men.

But many people don't ask for forgiveness, or they want to gain peace with God in different ways. They think they can earn forgiveness by their works and endeavors. They imagine they can please God if they at least try to become better members of the human race. They assume God will be satisfied as long as they don't live below normal moral standards. Because of the forgiveness of sins and the assurance of our salvation, it has become necessary to say in clear sentences who God is and how he will help sinful men to be accepted as his children.

If Jesus were only a human being, he could never have freed us from our debt of sins against God and from all their evil consequences. So, already the early church had confessions of faith—especially concerning the Holy Trinity—which Christendom kept in the hearts and minds of believers for many centuries. The Apostles' Creed is still our verbal confession of faith at baptism and confirmation. At the time of the Reformation, new confessional writings had to be added, so that false interpretations of the Bible and wrong ways to eternal salvation could be excluded and to help sinners find the clear way through Christ Jesus alone. Since then, the threefold sola (*sola gratia, sola scriptura, sola fide*) has been proclaimed as the main principle of the Lutheran faith.

Now, what is our common confession today? Is it "This We Believe" of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod? Or is it "We Believe, Teach and Confess" of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod? Or is it the Theses of Agreement (*Einigungssätze*) of the ELFK or some other Bible-based

statement, which one of our sister-churches has had to confess against errors which have arisen?

In the constitution of the CELC, Article II is our common confession of faith. There we read:

1. The Conference accepts the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God and submits to this Word of God as the only infallible rule and authority in all matters of doctrine, faith, and life.
2. The Conference also accepts the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, not in so far as, but because they are a correct exposition of the pure doctrine of the Word of God.

All churches who belong to the CELC subscribe to this confession of faith. We have no political or social confession, stating how we would like to change the world. Ours is a common confession showing all sinners God's way to bring them to heaven through his Word. It is not a dry doctrine with no use in practical life. As a common confession, it will show all the world what God's only-begotten Son has done so that all men might regain Paradise and will warn against errors which will mislead us to hell. Article II is our common confession *in nuce* (in a nutshell), but it is not a minimal confession, like some use for the outward unity of Christianity: Christ is Lord (nothing more!). Since it is a biblical confession, it really is an ecumenical confession for all who believe what the Bible teaches.

2. How did we receive our common confession?

It is our great heritage! Nobody among us will deny that the Planning Committee has done well to put into the constitution such a clear confession of faith in such a short form. But they could only do so because we already have this blessed heritage. We consider it a gift from God. We know that the church fathers of early Christendom had to struggle hard for the Ecumenical Creeds. Also the fathers of the Reformation and of the 16th century had no easy task to write what finally has been compiled in the Book of Concord. We praise God, who, through the faithfulness and zeal of the confessors, gave us our common confession.

We want to stress that we are not proposing a new confession. Our churches have the biblical/Lutheran doctrinal tradition. By our common confession we are unanimously connected with the apostolic church. Let us lift high our common confession, so that everybody can test if this Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference has a sound, biblical foundation.

If some churches do not have all the writings of the Book of Concord because they have not all been translated into their native languages, they still agree with us as long as they do not speak against the full Book of Concord, for the later writings are only an exposition of the former ones.

We received our common confession as a help to prevent wrong developments and false teaching. By not only showing us the affirmative but also rejecting the negative, it keeps us away from old errors, which often are repeated in church history. We value it highly and have no reason to change it in any way, because it is the correct exposition of the pure doctrine of God's Word.

We received our great heritage already long ago. The churches that are gathered here at Oberwesel these days have not come to begin seeking a common confession. We have it already in the constitutions of our churches at home. There is no envy and distrust among us, because we are thankful to God that our common heritage has brought us together in one faith and confession.

We are blessed heirs.

3. What is the connection between the Bible and our common confession?

Article II of our constitution has two sections. Holy Writ and the Confessional Writings are not on the same level. The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are the source from which the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church have been drawn. The biblical doctrine cannot be judged or overruled by the Confessions. The only foundation for everything that we believe, teach, and confess is the Bible. We will not find everything that is in the Bible in the Book

of Concord, although it is a very thick book. We are not allowed to reduce the biblical message to the articles we find in the Confessions. We have to preach the full message, as Christ says in his great mission command, “. . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 2:20), and as Paul said to Felix, “. . . believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). The Bible rules above all confession. It is the “sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas with all teachers should be estimated and judged” (*Trigl.*, page 777).

As a correct exposition of the pure doctrine, our Confessions are Christ-centered and defend the Gospel (which very often means the whole Bible). They have become necessary, because the redemptive work of Christ has been neglected and the Gospel has been preached as a new law, or the means of grace have been considered as magic means or as mere signs without any power to forgive sins and to save sinners.

You will find no special article in the Lutheran Confessions about the authority of the Bible or how much in it should be considered as God’s inerrant Word. But you can read: “We receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines should be judged” (*Trigl.*, page 851,1).

The Confessions not only show what is in accordance with Scripture; they also reject and condemn false doctrines. They do this in accordance with the pious fathers to help souls to the right knowledge of their Savior. The doctrine of the forgiveness of sins is the chief doctrine which honors Christ and “is of especial service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ and alone opens the door to the entire Bible” (Apol., IV, *Trigl.*, page 121).

4. What is the correct use of our common confession?

It is not enough to have a common confession, written down in the constitution of the CELC (*de jure*). It is not enough that all who are in the public ministry of our churches know our common confession and subscribe to it at ordination, installation, or in any other way. We do not only use it to demonstrate our churches’ and our CELC’s right to exist, or to tell the world why and how we differ from other church bodies and federations.

It is essential that we all believe, teach, preach, and confess, do mission work, broadcast, write books, etc., in agreement with our common confession. It should not be only a paper confession, but one that will be used (*de facto*).

Our common confession will help us to agree not only on doctrinal terms, but also on the matter which these terms express, *in rebus et phrasibus*. Many speak about the resurrection of Christ. Some think Christ is risen from the dead only in the thoughts of his disciples, but not in reality. But the Bible and our Confessions say that he was bodily resurrected by the power of his Father. Or take the word “creation.” Some mean by it that God used evolution to create the world. But the Bible and our Confessions say that he created the universe out of nothing by his almighty word in six normal days. You can find a similar misuse of the word “infallible.” Luther meant by it that God’s Word does not err or fail. But some theologians write that God’s Word is infallible in that it achieves its goal without fail, but not in this sense, that all the words of the Bible are really God’s words or inerrant. In so many churches pluralism rules and disturbs troubled consciences, because special biblical terms are no longer used in the real sense, but with new, different meanings.

False teachers build up a foggy wall of terms in which they hide their false doctrine. What they say is like soft soap: it always slips away until they finally explain to the people that they don’t believe all that is written in the Scripture. Paul admonishes the Corinthians and us, “Be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

Not only the name of a church or an outward obligation to an orthodox confession determines the correct use of that confession, but what is really proclaimed in the pulpits, theological schools,

and books. Orthodoxy always rejects heterodoxy. If some error comes up but is treated with church discipline, then a church can still be considered to be orthodox.

5. What is the fruit of our common confession?

Unity in the Spirit! It is true, the Holy Ghost has called us by the Gospel, enlightened us with his gifts, sanctified, and kept us in the true faith. Then he has gathered us, united us in the one true faith in Jesus Christ. His work of sanctification rules before we can do anything to and in our common confession. But this is also true, that we can harvest, as a fruit of his work which has brought us to our common confession, the unity in the Spirit. He has made us eager to pray for this unity and to work together on the basis of our common confession to establish the CELC. We have to give all honor to our gracious God.

Look around in our assembly! You will see representatives of churches from nearly all the continents. They share the same message which Luther, troubled by many afflictions but guided by the Holy Spirit, brought to light once again in Germany. Today in this country you can hardly find a church still clinging *de jure* and *de facto* to the Lutheran Confessions; only a small remnant is left. But the Holy Spirit has let two churches which are trying to stand steadfast in God's Word and Luther's doctrine grow in the U.S.A. During the last decades they have had to struggle hard not to become pluralistic church bodies. Their brotherly admonition called our church back to all the articles of faith. By the mission work of our American sister churches, the Holy Spirit has founded new churches or restored small groups which, for doctrinal reasons, had to leave their former church bodies and go a very lonesome way. Is it not amazing that we are here together in the unity of the Spirit? Is it not a miracle, in these last days of the world, that we have a common confession? Does this not show us the power of the Word which, in spite of the great apostasy, still leads small flocks to the clear well and comforts them through Christ's efficacious sacraments? Is it not a surprising gift that also in the eastern part of Germany, where Communism ruled to wipe out religion and where the blessings of the Reformation are hardly treasured, still some congregations have been spared to confess with you unity in the Spirit as a fruit of our common confession? Is it not a special present to all of us that none of our churches have to live in a country that recently has been destroyed by a war, although we have to hear of wars and rumors of wars every day, according to the prediction of Christ? Don't we have reason enough for great joy in this, that we will end this conference in a service with our Lord's Supper because we are united in the Spirit? Is this not an uplifting message, that we can bring back to the churches which sent us to Oberwesel, that we want to work together and to fight together in the future and together proclaim God's Word to a helpless world? Thanks be to God for our unity in the Spirit!

6. How can we preserve our common confession and unity in faith and in the Spirit?

Some say there is no need to preserve it, because the Gospel has the power to preserve itself. It is true that God's Word is eternal. Nobody can throw it out of this world to which God has revealed it through his Spirit. But it is also true that many false prophets will come and that the devil would also move the believers to apostasy, if this were possible. Everybody is tempted in different ways to start to argue with God's Word. Strong Lutheran church bodies which have struggled for many years against unionism and indifference have been defeated. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). We are all in danger of losing our great heritage and our common confession.

We all have the responsibility to preserve the truth and not to spoil it. We have to keep it pure for ourselves, our contemporaries, our children, and following generations. Although each generation has to appropriate our great heritage for itself ("*Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern, erwirb es, um es zu besitzen*"), we have to be careful that we hand it over in its pure form. Let us take the admonition for ourselves: "Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel and in nothing terrified by your adversaries" (Phil. 1:27,28). And "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Church history shows us that the change from one generation to the next is a dangerous time, not only in seminaries, but also in congregations and families.

To preserve our common confession, let us pray fervently and constantly. Let us use Luther's exposition of the First and Second Petitions. He himself could pray for hours and even asked the children to pray against the Pope and the Turks as enemies of the Gospel:

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word.
And curb the Pope's and Turks' dread sword,
Who'd wrest the kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.

And when the evening bells are ringing, we pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

So, we should use our common confession. The Book of Concord belongs on our bookshelves and in our hands. We could rebuke false teaching much earlier and much more easily, if only we would use and apply to certain problems of our day that which our Lutheran fathers have said.

And we should teach our common confession. By teaching others we will learn more for ourselves and appreciate all the more what has been done for us in times past. Our common confession is right in place in our instruction classes, Bible classes, congregational meetings, pulpits, pastoral conferences, doctrinal papers, mission counseling, and also in dealing with many practical problems. Especially Luther's *Small Catechism* could be quoted very often. "And because such matters concern also the laity and the salvation of their souls, we also confess the *Small and Large Catechisms* of Dr. Luther, as they are included in Luther's Works, as the Bible of the laity, wherein everything is comprised which is treated at greater length in Holy Scripture and is necessary for a Christian man to know for his salvation" (Summary Content, *Trigl.*, page 777). We marvel at the experience of our American sister churches in teaching in parochial schools and church-owned high schools, colleges, and seminaries. Education in the pure doctrine is the backbone of doctrinally sound churches.

We need constant indoctrination of our members, so that they will know why they are Lutherans and will be able to teach others. Since we cannot force hearts to believe the Christian truth but can only convince them with the help of the Holy Spirit, we should know passages of the Bible and of our common confession by heart. We can preserve our confession best if we give it to others.

Use it or lose it. In our times, it is an easy task for the devil to draw churches away from the Lutheran Confession. The ecumenical movement will have outward unity in reconciled plurality, which mostly means pluralism. If we would follow this rule and establish some kind of fellowship relations with churches who do not agree with our common confession, we would very soon lose it. The pure doctrine is so precious that we dare not mix it with impure doctrines. If you want to bring wine across the ocean, you will not pour the wine into the sea at Hamburg, expecting that the currents and winds will finally transport it to New York. You keep the wine in a bottle. But you are ready to invite thirsty people: "Come, all you who are thirsty . . .," like Jesus Christ did.

To preserve our common confession, we will have to reject and condemn false doctrine and practice. *Lehre und Wehre* (teaching and defending) was the biblical principle of our fathers in the last century and should remain the obligation of churches bound to the Confessions. So, for instance, the constitution of the ELFK says, "The church rejects all pluralism and unionism, all amalgamation of churches and beliefs, all church, pulpit and altar fellowship with false teachers and with all who outwardly acknowledge our confession, but in doctrine and practice differ from it, and we reject participation in worship services and mission work of false-teaching and unionistic denominations."

Out of love, not stubbornness, we should refuse the *communio in sacris* with false churches, in obedience to God's Word, even if it aches our hearts and feelings and will afford opportunity to some to destroy our good reputation. The doctrine belongs to God. We will receive his wrath, if

we try to change it. Nevertheless, we should be ready for doctrinal talks with everyone who asks us the reason for the hope that is in us (1 Pet. 3:15). But finally we have to make doctrinal decisions. We have to be on guard, lest captious criticism and arrogance fill our minds. We will also be ready for doctrinal talks with former sister churches who did not listen to our admonition. But these talks should take up the differences and not anything else. Otherwise we will waste our time and strength.

If we no longer have the courage to point out error, if we no longer dare to admonish one another, very soon false doctrine will raise its head and will do its destructive work like cancer in a human body (2 Tim. 2:17). We have a precious treasure in trembling hearts. If we lose our humility and reverence, we will become secure and fail to be true Lutheran Christians.

Usually, there is only a short time of peace for a church. Most of the time, we are afflicted and have to fight against enemies from inside and outside. It will be helpful if we come together often, according to our constitution. Then we will have opportunities to discuss matters of doctrine and developments in our churches and our surroundings, and to search our hearts, lest we become lukewarm.

The exchange of students, pastors, professors, missionaries, books, newspapers, theological papers, etc., may also offer possibilities to stay together in our common confession and to preserve it.

May God grant us his grace, so that by his Word we can preserve our unity in faith and spirit, and with our common confession fulfill more and more the purposes of the CELC, which are spelled out in Article III of our constitution.

Let me close with the hymn which gave the theme to this meeting and whose melody was composed by Professor Fritz Reuter, a former member of the congregation I am privileged to serve in Zwickau-Planitz.

God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure
Throughout all generations. Amen.

WE HAVE A COMMON CONCERN:

Properly Dividing the Word of Truth

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I wish to dedicate this essay to the memory of Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the first president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America who has also taught us so well the art of properly dividing between Law and Gospel.

Defining Law and Gospel

The two chief doctrines of the Bible are the Law and the Gospel. These doctrines are as opposite from each other as night is from day, and they serve a completely different function. According to our Catechism, "The Law is that Word of God which tells us how we are to be and what we are to do and not to do," while "the Gospel is that Word of God which tells us of the salvation Christ has

won for all men.” The Catechism goes on to explain the difference between these two doctrines in these words: “The Law teaches us what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches us what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God. 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” (ELS Catechism).

For a more comprehensive definition of the Law and the Gospel we go to our Confessions, where we read:

We unanimously believe, teach, and confess 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. 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 (SD V, 561-562).

Martin Chemnitz explains the difference between Law and Gospel as follows:

- I. The Law is to some extent known by nature. Ro 2:14. But the Gospel is a mystery hidden to reason, which God has revealed only through His Word. Mt 16:17; 1 Co 2:7; Eph 1:9; Ro 16:25-26.
- II. The Law is a mystery pointing out, censuring, and rebuking sins, and pronouncing all men worthy of eternal death because of them; but the Gospel is a ministry that points to true righteousness before God through Christ and through it offers and bestows life eternal to all that apprehend it by faith. 2 Co 3:7,9; Ro 1:16-17.
- III. The Law indeed itself also speaks of righteousness and salvation, but it has respect to us, and it seeks and requires to perfection that righteousness in us, in our nature, actions, and works, if we want to be saved by it. But since that cannot be rendered by us because of our corrupt nature, therefore the Gospel sets Christ before us, who by His obedience, passion, and death has purchased for us the true righteousness before God that is imputed and given to us freely, without our merit, solely for the sake of Christ and through faith. Ro 1:4; Gl 3:24 (MWS, p. 72).

From this we see that both Law and Gospel are the Word of God and that both apply to all people for all time, as Dr. Francis Pieper states: “As the Word of the Law, ‘Ye shall be holy, for I am holy,’ imposes a duty on the king and the beggar, the cultured man and the barbarian, so, too, there is not a man in all the world for whom the Word of the Gospel, releasing all men from guilt and damnation, is not intended” (Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, p. 224).

Law and Gospel also have this in common that they are to be taught side by side in the church up to the last day. “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 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” (SD V, p. 562).

Dr. Walther in the first theses of his classic book, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, states, “The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testaments of the entire Holy Scriptures, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally

from each other, viz., the Law and the Gospel,” and explains that the true points of difference between the Law and the Gospel are the following:

1. These two doctrines differ as regards the manner of their being revealed to man;
2. As regards their contents;
3. As regards the promises held out by either doctrine;
4. As regards their threatenings;
5. As regards the function and the effect of either doctrine;
6. As regards the persons to whom either the one or the other doctrine must be preached.

All other differences can be grouped under one of these six heads (Law and Gospel, p. 7).

(a) We would briefly summarize what Walther says about each point of difference. Law and Gospel differ as regards the manner of their being revealed in this that man was created with the Law written in his heart; whereas “the Gospel is a mystery hidden to reason, which God has revealed only through His Word.” St. Paul points out in Romans 2:14-15 that even blind pagans bear the Moral Law with them in their heart and conscience. The Ten Commandments were given only for the purpose of bringing out in bold outline the dulled script of the original Law written in men’s hearts. On the other hand, as the same apostle points out in Romans 16:25-26, the Gospel was given by revelation and became known only through an act of the Holy Spirit, who inspired men to write its message.

(b) Law and Gospel also differ as regards their contents. The Law tells us what we are to do; it gives commands and demands; whereas the Gospel makes no demands whatever, it only offers and gives. The Gospel contains nothing but grace and truth, as the evangelist John says, “The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17).

(c) Law and Gospel also differ by reason of their promises. The Law promises salvation, but on the condition that we fulfill it perfectly. Walther observes that “the Law offers us food, but does not hand it down to us where we can reach it.” The Gospel, on the other hand, promises us forgiveness and salvation without any condition whatsoever. We have an unconditioned Gospel.

In this connection we would do well to be reminded that the dogmaticians distinguish between legal conditional clauses and evangelical conditional clauses. The former denotes a human accomplishment, e.g.: “If you keep the Law, you will obtain eternal life,” while the latter denotes the mode and manner of appropriation, e.g., “If you believe, you will be saved,” believing does not denote a product or work of man, but merely the manner in which it is appropriated. The sense of the sentence: “If you believe, you will be saved,” is not: “If you furnish the faith, you will be saved,” but rather, “By way of faith, without any goodness or accomplishment of your own, you will be saved.” In this regard Gerhard points out: “The particle ‘if’ is either etiological or syllogistic; it names either the cause or the result. In legal statements: If you do that, you will live, the particle ‘if’ is etiological, since the obedience is the cause because of which eternal life is given to those who observe the Law; but in evangelical promises: ‘If you believe, you will be saved,’ the particle ‘if’ is syllogistic, for it denotes the divinely constituted mode of the application for which faith alone is fitted” (Pieper, Vol. II, p. 36).

(a) So far as threats are concerned, the Gospel contains no threats at all, but only words of comfort. The Law, on the other hand, is nothing but threats.

The fifth point of difference between the Law and Gospel concerns the effects of these two doctrines. The effect of the Law is threefold: First the Law tells us what to do, but does not enable us to comply with its demands; it rather causes us to become more unwilling to keep the Law, the effect being that it increases the lust of sinning. Secondly, the Law reveals our sin, but offers no help in overcoming it; rather it leaves us in despair. In the third place, the Law produces contrition, but it offers no comfort to despairing sinners.

The effects of the Gospel are of a different nature. They consist in this that the Gospel, when demanding faith, offers and gives us the faith that it demands. The Gospel, then, is not only an invitation but a transportation. Still another effect of the Gospel is that it removes fear and anguish and fills the heart with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. In the third place, the Gospel does not require anything good that man must do; it gives no orders, but quietly changes man.

Finally, there is a sixth point of difference between the Law and the Gospel; it relates to the persons to whom either doctrine is to be preached. The Law is to be preached to secure sinners and the Gospel to alarmed sinners. Inverting this order means confounding both, and by confounding them, is commingling both in the most dangerous manner. To make a crushed sinner the subject of Law-preaching is spiritual tyranny; such a one needs the comforting Gospel.

Chief Legacy of the Reformation Heritage

Dr. Walther correctly observes that “since the days of the apostles there has not been a more glorious teacher of this art than Luther.” It is therefore fair to say that the proper distinction between Law and Gospel is the chief legacy of our Reformation heritage. Walther also makes this observation: “The birth of the Reformer dates from the moment Luther understood this distinction” (L & G, p. 63). And Francis Pieper notes that “the Christian doctrine of justification is virtually identical with the discrimination between Law and Gospel” (Pieper, Vol. III, p. 244). Walther also quotes Chemnitz as saying about the same thing when he affirms that the central doctrine of Christianity, justification by grace through faith in Christ, is properly maintained when the true distinction between Law and Gospel is carefully maintained” (L & G, p. 66).

Dr. J. A. O. Preus in an article in the October 1989 issue of the *Concordia Journal* entitled, “Chemnitz on Law and Gospel,” points out that Chemnitz, who had been influenced by Luther and Melancthon, gives a thorough treatment of Law and Gospel in his *Loci Theologici*. Chemnitz was perhaps the greatest student of patristics and observed that the early church fathers were weak in this area. Walther agrees with this assessment when he writes, “In the writings of the Church Fathers we find hardly anything concerning the distinction between Law and Gospel” (L & G, p. 20).

Preus goes on to say:

Thus, we probably are correct in asserting that the doctrine of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel is a doctrine which developed almost entirely and only on Lutheran soil, as was the case also with the concept of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, the universal priesthood of believers, the peculiarly Lutheran doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, and several other points. As a person traces the development of this doctrine in early Lutheran history, he will quickly note that the concept of Law and Gospel developed along with several other doctrinal points, in which we can observe that Luther made several advances and improvements in his theology, that he and Melancthon in the early years worked closely together and supplemented one another, and that in certain points not often noted by Lutherans who have always had trouble with Melancthon the fact is that Melancthon often influenced Luther in very salutary directions, and ideas which at first were most firmly asserted by Melancthon came in time to be even more strongly promoted by Luther. Such is the case also with what we today, with Luther, hold to be one of the cornerstones of Lutheran theology: namely, the doctrine of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. The Lutherans were at odds with the enthusiasts over this question from the outset, and Calvin has no locus on the subject in his Institutes, and the doctrine has been largely unknown or ignored in Reformed circles to this day (Concordia Journal, October 1989, p 409).

It should also be noted that the Reformation not only rediscovered the Gospel, but also the Law of God. Some of the results of this are Articles IV, V, and VI of the Formula, on Good Works, Law and Gospel, and The Third Use Of The Law. These came about as a result of controversies created by antinomianism on the one hand, and pietism and synergism on the other hand. The above articles grew out of these controversies because some said too much and others not enough. Preus contends that “this is the basic reason why orthodox Lutheranism must always oppose legalism, pietism, the charismatic movement and subjectivism of every kind which obscure the Gospel and prevent it from truly being the Gospel or in any way contribute to the confusion of Law and Gospel in preaching, teaching, or parish practice. And it is also the reason why we must oppose secular humanism which is merely the old raven of antinomianism floating in the new gravy of libertinism” (*Ibid.*, p 413).

Our Confessions clearly distinguish between these two doctrines as follows: “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 words is spoken of throughout the Scriptures. One part is law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace in Christ" (Ap, Art XII, par. 53, p. 189).

Richard Warneck in an article on Law and Gospel *Preaching* correctly observes, "The Law is God's first sermon to sinful man. The Law, however, is not God's farewell sermon. God speaks his second sermon, the Gospel. In the Gospel God is the God of grace. He gives and sets before us many promises" (Concordia Journal, April 1989, p. 101). Many of our hymns strikingly set forth the distinction between Law and Gospel. There is one hymn in particular that I would like to share with you. It is found in an old Australian hymnal and it is entitled The Word of God (cf. Addendum).

The Importance of Properly Distinguishing Between Law and Gospel

Walther points out that "the primary requisite for a salutary knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is the correct understanding of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel" and that "without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book" (L & G, p. 60). He goes on to say: "But the moment we learn to know the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, it is as if the sun were rising upon the Scriptures, and we behold all the contents of the Scriptures in the most beautiful harmony. We see that the Law was not revealed to us to put that notion into our heads that we can become righteous by it, but to teach us that we are utterly unable to fulfill the Law. When we have learned this, we shall know what a sweet message, what a glorious doctrine, the Gospel is and shall receive it with exuberant joy" (*Ibid.*, p. 62). And Holsten Fagerburg in his book, *A New Look At The Lutheran Confessions*, states that "the Confessions have provided us with a key to the interpretation of Scripture by their distinction between Law and Gospel. The entire Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, can be studied from the point of view of Law and Gospel" (p. 35).

The Apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel when he writes to his younger co-worker Timothy in the well-known words, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). And in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians he speaks of the contrast between the "ministry of condemnation" and the "ministry of righteousness," pointing out that God who gives us the competency to be good pastors says that he "hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life (2 Cor. 3:6).

Shortly before his ascension Jesus spoke these words, namely, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations" (Luke 24:46). It is through the preaching of the Law that the Holy Spirit effects true contrition. Through the Law he reveals our sin problem and our inability to solve it by ourselves. The Law also reveals God's wrath against sin and works sorrow and terror in our hearts. "The chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become. So the law must tell him that he neither has nor cares for God or that he worships strange gods—something that he would not have believed before without a knowledge of the law. Thus he is terror stricken and humbled, becomes despondent and despairing, anxiously desires help but does not know where to find it, and begins to be alienated from God, to murmur, etc. This is what is meant by Rom. 4:15, 'The law brings wrath,' and Rom. 5:20, 'Law came to increase the trespass'" (SA, p. 303).

St. Paul says that the Law is to be preached in such a way that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Yes, the Law puts us all in our place and shows us that "before his bar all guilty stand" and that we stand condemned in God's sight.

We have examples of pointed Law preaching in the Scriptures. On Pentecost Day the Apostle Peter preached in such a way that his hearers "were pricked in their hearts" and asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Nathan was very specific when he pointed to David, who was guilty of adultery and murder, and said, "Thou art the man," so that he (David) exclaimed, "I have

sinned against the Lord.” And the Savior turned the searchlight of the Law on the heart and life of the woman at the well which revealed her sordid past.

The same Law of God exposes us for what we really are. It opens the book of our lives and lays bare every thought, word, and deed. Any cover-up on our part is as ridiculous as it is futile; we only deceive ourselves. Nothing lies hidden before the all-seeing God. It is true as the hymnist writes,

The law is but a mirror bright
That brings the inbred sin to sight,
That lurks within our nature.

and

The law reveals the guilt of sin
And makes man conscience-stricken.
Hymnary, 205, vs. 3 & 9

The importance of proper Law preaching is also brought out by Christ, who says, “They that be whole need not a physician but they that are sick . . . I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” And our Confessions say, “Hearts that do not feel God’s wrath in their smugness spurn consolation” (Ap., Art. XIII, p. 189). Dr. Koren, a theological leader in the Norwegian Synod, put it this way: “If we preached only concerning forgiveness of sin (righteousness) but not concerning repentance, then that doctrine would neither be understood, nor would it bear fruit. For without repentance there is no faith and consequently no justification by faith . . . and to such souls ‘justification by faith’ will be only an empty phrase or a soft pillow—oftenest both” (*Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 70). No, as long as one does not realize his lost condition, he will have no interest in the Savior of sinners. Just as one will not appreciate food unless hungry, water unless thirsty, so he will not realize the need for the “bread of life” and the “water of life.” It is only

When sinners see their lost condition
And feel the pressing load of sin
And Jesus cometh on his mission
To heal the sin-sick heart within,
All grief must flee before his grace
And joy divine will take its place.

Hymnary, 173, v. 1

Dr. Walther in a letter to a pastor emphasized the importance of preaching the Law in these words:

From all your remarks I can see with joy that through the sweet Gospel you have opened the hearts of many to your message. It is necessary that I should remind you that you must also diligently apply the salt of the Law. I do not mean that you must engage in legalistic diatribes, scolding and making of demands, but that you explain the great demands of the law and unlock the Law’s profound meaning and point out its spirituality as well as emphasizing its seriousness in its threats, so that hearers may be brought to the point that they view the Gospel not merely as a palliative for some painful sores, but view it as the cure for cleansed wounds. If the Law is not sharply in focus (which can be achieved in a quiet way without table pounding and boisterous presentations), then eventually the joy of the Gospel will be lost and the seed is sown on stony ground and the time will arise when the believers, meeting temptations and tribulations, which the world, the flesh, and Satan will never permit to be absent, will fall from the trees like unripe, wormy fruit and perish.

On this point Luther is a splendid model. As comfortingly as he preaches, each of his sermons is also a storm warning over all outward Christians, which one first notices when one really begins to actualize Luther's hearers in a lively way. At our last district convention we saw again, with joy, how profoundly Luther also grasps the Law and how carefully he thought it through, and we are encouraged also in this to follow him as well as we poor inadequate teachers are able to do (*Selected Letters*, pp. 151-152).

So we are not to confuse Law preaching with moralizing and tirading against the evils of the day. That type of preaching will only fuel the *opinio legis* in a person and make hypocrites out of people, causing the hearer to think that because he doesn't do those abominable things that he is not as sinful as others, and may even be tempted to pray as did the Pharisee in the temple, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are."

No, the Law is spiritual, and it gets to the heart of the problem, which is the heart. The Bible describes our sinful heart as being "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus says, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies, etc." (Matt. 15:19). Jesus preached pointed Law when he said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). St. Paul confessed, "I had not known lust except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet'" (Rom. 7:7b). Who of us can say that we have even come close to measuring up to the demands of God's holy Law! And in case we might be tempted to think that we are doing pretty well, then heed what the apostle says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Or as we sing in one of our hymns,

What God doth in his law demand
No man to him doth render;
Before His bar all guilty stand
His law speaks curse and thunder.
The law demands a perfect heart;
We were defiled in every part
And lost was our condition

Hymnary, 205, v. 2

Effective Law preaching is something that should concern us. It is easy to preach about the Law, but to preach the law so that it really convicts is another thing. Elmer Kettner, in an article entitled, "Are We Really Preaching the Gospel?" emphasizes the importance of proper Law preaching if we are to appreciate the Gospel. He says, "To preach the Gospel effectively does not mean that we shall abandon the Law. The seed of the Gospel can germinate only in soil that has been tilled with the sharp blade of the Law. Very often the Gospel is not received because the hearer doesn't feel any need of it" (CTM, May 1953, p. 326). Dr. Walther puts it this way, "Without the law the Gospel is not understood; without the Gospel the Law benefits us nothing" (L & G, p. 6). Kettner goes on to say: "Preaching the Law is not scolding, it is calling attention to sins of which the hearers are not unusually conscious. To prepare the soil properly the plow must go down deep. Too many sermons just scratch the surface. . . . General condemnation of sin will not convict anyone. The story of the fall of Adam and Eve, told over and over again may explain the origin of sin, but it will not make many people conscience-stricken nor receptive to the Gospel. We must be more specific than that. . . . Unless we uncover specific sins, name them, describe them, point to their consequences in the lives of the sinner and his fellow men and to the fact that these very sins nailed Jesus to the cross, the Holy Spirit will not convict many hearers of their sins" (CTM, May 1953, p. 326).

Carl Braaten opines:

If preaching is sick today, it is because we do not know how to preach the law. We are lulling people to sleep with the gospel when they should be roused by means of the law. August Tholuck, preacher and theologian in Germany in the last century, said: "If by any chance a peddler of indulgences were to appear among us, he would not do a good business; for nobody has a disquieted and alarmed conscience."

Braaten goes on to say:

If the gospel is not placed in bold relief against the background of the demonic, sin, wrath and hell, it degenerates into a saccharine-sweet message of civilizing aphorisms. When Jesus Christ is pictured in the confessional writings, he is the fulfiller of the law, the appeaser of wrath, the victor over Satan, the conqueror of death, the atoner of sin—all concepts which have suffered an erosion of meaning in our monistic universe of discourse (Principles of Lutheran Theology, pp. 111-112).

Some years ago a brother pastor in our ELS delivered a paper to the General Pastoral Conference on Sermon Preparation and Productive Preaching. In preparation for this paper he sent this question to about fifty people, mostly lay people: "What, in your opinion, is a good productive sermon?" In response to this question he stated in his paper, "It is reassuring that our people understand the Law-Gospel concept. Regarding law preaching they said they wanted the law preached in sermons not merely in a general way, 'we are all sinners,' 'we all come short,' but wanted law preaching that 'catches me in my sins in my home, in my marriage, in my relationship with my kids, my dealings in the market place, at the bank, at the gas station.'" Another responded by saying that the Law should be preached in such a way "that it unmask me, gets behind my pretensions, diagnoses the terminal disease of the soul with which I'm afflicted." Another: "Preach the law so that it stings the conscience." Still another: "It seems our pastors generally seem unwilling to get very specific in the matter of sin. What has happened to hell? We don't hear it mentioned much anymore."

The respondents also made it clear that they were concerned that the Gospel be preached in all of its saving beauty and power. Here are some of the responses: "After having my sins pointed out to me, then what I need is to have my ears filled with my Savior. I need to be told that all of my embarrassing memories, the sordidness of my own words and actions, the shames of my guilty conscience that I carry inwardly, have been set right, have been expunged from God's recollection by the heroic work of Jesus. When Christ is preached to me like this, in a setting of life-after-death, of heaven, of eternal joy and peace, only then am I comforted. Then the preaching is 'getting through,' and I must have that kind of preaching. Nothing less will do." Another: "No sermon dare be without the Gospel. We need to know that all our sins have been forgiven in Jesus Christ."

This is no doubt what Dr. Walther had in mind when he said that "the Gospel is to have a general predominance in our preaching." He goes on to advise his students: "Do not stand in your pulpits sad-faced, as if you were bidding men to come to a funeral, but like men that go wooing a bride or announcing a wedding. If you do not mingle Law with the Gospel, you will always mount your pulpit with joy. People will notice that you are filled with joy because you are bringing the blessed message of joy to your congregation" (L & G, p. 406).

These concerns about Law and Gospel preaching are certainly in keeping with the Scriptures and the Confessions. Law preaching—important as it is—is, as our Confessions say, "a foreign work," and its purpose is to lead us to Christ's "proper work," which is the proclamation of forgiveness to the penitent sinner. Luther said it so clearly: "Where the law exercises its office alone . . . 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" (SA, p. 304). If we had only the ministry of the law, then we would have only sorrow, misery, despair, and condemnation.

But Jesus says that remission of sins is also to be preached. Remission of sins is the heart and center of the Gospel, and it is to predominate in our preaching and teaching. The Gospel is the only solution to our problem of sin and death. Through the Word of the Gospel this treasure is brought to us and made our own. Yes, God is "surpassingly rich in his grace," as Luther reminds us, and brings this grace to us in various ways, through the spoken Word, Baptism, Lord's Supper, the Keys, and mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, as Luther says in the Smalcald Articles (SA, p. 310). While the Law, then, is to be preached in such a way as "to drive the greatest saint to despair," so the Gospel must be preached so as "to give the greatest sinner hope" (Walther).

Daniel March in his classic description of the Bible says among other things, "It is strict enough to denounce the very shadow and semblance of sin, yet it is liberal enough to save the chiefest of sinners." Therefore we are to open the floodgates of the Gospel and not be vague or condition it in the least, not even upon our faith. No, personalize it, as the Scriptures do. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Is. 40:1,2). Yes, "Where sin abounded grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Therefore, say to the penitent as did Jesus, "Be of good cheer, *thy* sins are forgiven." Say, as did Nathan to a repentant David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Say, as the angel who proclaimed to the frightened shepherds on Bethlehem's plain, "Fear not: for behold I bring *you* good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto *you* is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Tell penitent sinners that where they have failed in their lives—and who of us hasn't failed miserably!—they have a Savior who led a perfect life in their stead and that this counts as though they had kept it perfectly. Preach the active obedience of Christ. Heed what Walther says, "Do not be stingy with the Gospel" (L & G, p. 240).

Elmer Kettner states that "praising the Gospel is not preaching the Gospel." He correctly observes that to preach the Gospel clearly we must continually present Christ in his active as well as his passive obedience. He says: "Juxtaposition is a good word to remember in sermon preparation. Put the individual alongside of Christ. Then describe them as they trade places, the sinner as though he had done all that Christ did, and Jesus as though He had done all that the sinner did. Let us not merely refer to the Gospel, but dwell on it, develop it, repeat it, emphasize it, and apply it that our hearts may catch it" (CTM, May 1953, p. 322).

Here we have Luther as a model. In a letter to a troubled friend, an Augustinian friar by the name of Spennlein who was experiencing the same spiritual agony that he had gone through, Luther wrote:

Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him, and despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not." Beware of aspiring to such purity that you will not wish to be looked upon as sinner, or to be one. For Christ dwells among sinners. Meditate on this love of his and you will see sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if one can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions? Accordingly you will find peace only in him and only when you despair of yourself and your own good work. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours (LW Vol. 48, p. 12).

Dr. Walther commenting on this letter says, "What Luther wrote to his troubled friend was the most beautiful Gospel that can be preached. It is sterling gold and pure honey, for it declares that Christ has come in behalf of everyone, that he has born every man's sins, that he calls all to believe on him, to rejoice and rest assured that his sins are forgiven and that in the hour of death he will depart saved" (L & G, p. 111).

Kettner emphasizes the importance of Gospel preaching in these words: "If there is one message that predominates in the Scriptures, it is this, that God laid all our sins on Jesus. Our Savior bore the punishment of sins for us. Those thoughts of envy and covetousness, those angry words spoken in the heat of argument yesterday—God has forgiven them, wiped out the record of them, if you have repented of them and laid them down at the feet of Jesus. He loves you just as though you had never done them, yet, more! He loves you as though you were His only-begotten, pure, innocent Son. Jesus said, 'Thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.' With that joy you can return to your homes today knowing that before God you are as spotless as one of the holy angels" (CTM, May 1953, p. 324)!

In a sermon on New Year's Day, 1532, Luther preached a sermon based on Galatians 3:22-24, entitled, "The Proper Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel," in which he shows his keen perception of the difference between these two doctrines when he says,

When you find yourself under attack, with the Law threatening to damn you, know that God has not given only the Law, but also a far higher word, the blessed Gospel of Christ. If the two of them, the Law and the Gospel, now come into confrontation, and the Law finds me, a sinner, and accuses and condemns me, while the Gospel says (Matt. 9:2), "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven; you shall be saved": which one should I follow? Both are God's Word. St. Paul teaches you the answer: "Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian." So this is where the Law stops. For it shall and must be that the lesser word yields and gives way to the Gospel. Both are the Word of God: the Law and the Gospel. But they are not both alike. One is lower, the other higher. One is weaker, the other stronger. One is less, the other greater. If they now wrestle with one another, I follow the Gospel and say good-bye to the Law. It is better not to know the Law, than to lose the Gospel.

In that same sermon Luther says, "Dear Law, if I have failed to do your works, you do them. I am not going to allow myself to be tortured to death on your account and be taken captive and held under you, and thereby forget the Gospel. Whether I have sinned, done wrong, or not done wrong, I leave that for you, Law, to worry about. Be gone with you and leave my heart in peace; in this matter I do not know you. If you want to demand and have it that I live a godly life here on earth, I will gladly do so. But if you want to climb up and break in on me so that I lose what has been given me, then I would much rather not know you at all than lose the gift."

The Difficulty of Properly Distinguishing Between Law and Gospel

It is easy in theory but difficult in practice. Walther devotes an entire thesis to this very point. It reads: "Rightly distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel is the most difficult and the highest art of Christians in general and theologians in particular. It is taught only by the Holy Spirit in the school of experience." Any catechumen can recite the difference between the Law and the Gospel, but applying it and using it is another matter and can be learned only in the school of experience. The practical application of this doctrine presents difficulties which no man can surmount by reasonable reflections. Yes, the proper distinction between Law and Gospel is the highest art which a person can learn. That is why Luther says, "Place any person who is well versed in this art of dividing the Law from the Gospel at the head and call him a Doctor of Holy Writ."

This difficulty is brought out in passages such as 1 John 3:20 which reads, "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart." When our heart does not condemn us, it is easy to distinguish between Law and Gospel. But there are times when our heart does condemn us, and know this, that Satan is a master of conjuring up past sins in our lives, and on top of that the Law accuses and condemns us. It is at such times that we are seized with a terrible fright.

Luther understood the difficulty of properly distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel. In one of his sermons he says, "In your tribulations you will become aware that the Gospel is a rare guest in men's consciences, while the Law is their daily and familiar companion." That is why we are more inclined to give ear to the Law than the Gospel. We must admit that we are far oftener troubled and worried than comforted. There is only one explanation, and that is because the Law is a constant guest in our hearts. Therefore, it is vital that we learn to look outside of ourselves, to the Gospel and listen to the soothing voice of the Gospel, which is greater than our heart and which says, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven."

Here I would call attention to something that Dr. Sigurd Ylvisaker, one time vice president of the Synodical Conference, wrote on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. He says that "the preaching of the Law is a terrible thing, for the Law terrifies, drives us away from God, destroys hope, kills without mercy, demands its cruel pound of flesh, leads to the brink of hell and thrusts us down into its eternal despair. The Law puts before man an impossible perfection, reveals the holiness and justice of God, and robs us of every merit and worthiness. It reveals God in his glorious majesty, but leaves us in that dark night out from which we see as from a deep pit of misery and defeat." On the other hand, he writes about the gospel: "The Gospel opens wide the glory of heaven, clothes the meanest sinner with the righteousness which Christ has wrought as a heavenly garment—unsullied, seamless, pure, bright, fit for heaven. The Gospel breathes

hope as a life-giving breath, and causes the water of life to spring forth among men to refresh and renew to eternal life." Ylvisaker goes on to say, "To preach the Gospel then is more than talking about it. It is more than an objective statement of the doctrines involved, no matter how carefully exact, orthodox and Biblical each statement may be. The Gospel is that green pasture of which the Bible speaks. It is that banquet table of Christ, that living water with which Christ identifies Himself—in other words, to preach the Gospel is to preach Christ."

Indeed, the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is properly learned only in the school of the Holy Spirit, in tribulation.

One of the books which I have my students read for homiletics class is *The Hammer of God* by Bo Giertz, former bishop in the State Church of Sweden. He writes about a curate named Dr. Savonius who had graduated from the school of theology at the University of Upsala. The first night in his parish he was called to minister to a dying man, Johannes, who was almost at the point of despair over his sins. The poor curate stood at his bedside not knowing what to say; he simply could not cope with the situation. Finally, a neighbor lady, named Katrina, happened to stop by. She not only knew her Bible, but also knew the distinction between Law and Gospel. Here is a brief presentation of how she responded to this despairing man:

Johannes: "I am a great sinner."

Katrina: "Then your repentance is as true as it can be in a corrupt child of Adam."

Johannes: "But what shall I believe?"

Katrina: "The Word of God: But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is counted to him for righteousness. Do you have sin in your heart?"

Johannes: "Yes, much."

Katrina: "Then it is clear that God has not forsaken you. Only he can see his sin who has the Holy Spirit."

Johannes: "Could it be a work of God that my heart is so unclean?"

Katrina: "Not that your heart is unclean, but that you see that it is."

Johannes: "Then why have I not received a clean heart?"

Katrina: "That you might learn to love Jesus. If you had received a clean heart and trusted in that to earn your salvation, to what end would you need a Savior?"

Katrina: "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

Johannes: "Do you mean that He takes away sin that dwells in my unclean heart?"

Katrina: "Yes, He atoned for all sin."

Johannes: "But I have it with me still."

Katrina: "Yes, just as surely as Paul had it with him. He said: I know that in me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me but how to perform that which is good I find not."

Johannes: "Give me one more word, Katrina, and I will believe it."

Katrina: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Johannes: "Amen. I believe."

Katrina: "Now ask the pastor to give you communion.."

Dr. Savonius did this.

(*The Hammer of God*, pp. 28-29)

Conclusion

We conclude this paper by reminding ourselves again of the importance of preserving the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Our Confessions sum up this importance by saying that this is "an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly" (SD, V, p. 558). And again: "We believe and confess that these two doctrines must be urged constantly in the church of God until the end of the world, but with due distinction" (SD, V, p. 562). If the proper distinction between these two doctrines is not maintained, the results are disastrous for the Christian; the Gospel is made into a new Law, the merits of Christ are obscured, and troubled consciences are robbed of the comfort of the Gospel promises.

True Law and Gospel preaching is becoming more of a rarity in our day. Instead of Law preaching we hear much moralizing and tirading against the evils of the day. But the Law is spiritual, and it must be preached in such a way that “every mouth is stopped and all the world become guilty before God,” as Paul says in Romans. Luther says somewhere that if you were to go up to a heathen and tell him that his sins were forgiven without first showing him his need, he would stare at you like a cow stares at a new barn door; he wouldn’t know what you were talking about.

The Gospel is the only solution to man’s problem of sin and death, and therefore we cannot emphasize enough the importance of preaching the good news of forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. While the Law must be preached in all of its sharpness and severity, the Gospel must always predominate. Walther said it so well: “So preach the law that it drives the greatest saint to despair; so preach the Gospel that it gives the greatest sinner hope.” True Law and Gospel preaching must always be a top priority for a Lutheran pastor. Then God will be glorified and His people edified!

2. But none can know this difference,
Unless God grants them light,
Until His Holy Spirit
Illumine their nature’s night.
Yet both by man are needed
Throughout his earthly course,
And lead, if duly heeded,
To life’s true Fount and Source.
3. The Law’s demands and precepts
Are written in man’s heart;
For God at the Creation
The knowledge did impart.
The teaching of the Gospel
Man never could have known,
Had God not in His mercy
Revealed it by His Son.
4. The Law prescribes our duty:
To do what God commands;
“Love God and love thy neighbor,”
These are its strict demands.
The Gospel tells of Jesus,
Of His unfathomed love,
Who came to save, and lead us
to our blest home above.
5. The Law’s conditional blessing
God can to none impart,
Unless they keep His precepts
With all their mind and heart.
The Gospel’s blessed promise
God freely doth bestow
To all who cry to Jesus
To save from sin and woe.
6. The Law proclaims God’s anger
And curse, because of sin;
Convicting mind and conscience,
It leaves no peace within.
The Gospel offers pardon,
And calms the guilty soul;
Through Jesus’ blood and merit
It makes the sinner whole.
7. The Law’s terrific threatenings
For stubborn hearts are meant,
Who, trifling with God’s goodness,
Of sin will not repent.

The Gospel's balm of healing
To sinners doth apply
Who, all their burdens feeling,
For grace and pardon cry.

8. The Law's work is accomplished
When sinners feel their need,
When at the feet of Jesus,
Their hearts for mercy plead.
The Gospel's work commences
When sinners sue for peace,
It then confers salvation,
From sorrow sweet release.
9. This difference, blessed Saviour,
Lead me to understand,
That by Thy Law and Gospel
I reach the promised land.
Thy Law, O may it show me
Thy wrath, my sin, and woe,
And may Thy blessed Gospel
Thy grace and peace bestow.
10. Grant also by Thy Gospel
The power to do Thy will,
And in my life and station,
My duty to fulfil.
All sin and evil hating,
May I serve Thee alone,
And, when life's course is ended,
Rejoice before Thy throne.

Amen

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