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Theses on the Meaning of Lutheran Confessional Subscription

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A. THE PURPOSE OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

1. In subscribing its confessions, our Church's primary purpose is to confess and affirm its faith publicly with clarity and unanimity.

"In testimony that this is the doctrine, faith, and confession of all of us as we shall give account of it on the Last Day before the righteous Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ... we have advisedly... subscribed our signatures with our own hands." Ep. XII, 31, pp. 500-501.

"... in the presence of God and of all Christendom among both our contemporaries and our posterity, we wish to have testified that the present explanation... and none other, is our teaching, belief, and confession... In view of this we have advisedly, in the fear and invocation of God, subscribed... S.D. XII, 40, p. 636.

"... it was our purpose not only to declare our unanimous opinion... but to present a clear, lucid and unmistakable exposition of all the articles which were in controversy..." S.D. XII, 4, p. 633.

"In testimony whereof we have with one mind and heart subscribed our names hereto and ordered our privy seals impressed hereon." B. of C., Pref., p. 14. (Signators include counts, dukes, margraves, bishops, barons, chamberlains, mayors and city councils.)

"... We pledge ourselves again to those public and well known symbols of common confession which have at all times and in all places been accepted in all of the churches of the Augsburg Confession..." S.D. Summ., 2, p. 503.

Abbreviations in reference to the Book of Concord are as follows:

B. of C. the Book of Concord, cited according to Tappert, Ed.
A.C. Augsburg Confession
S.A. Smalcauld Articles
S.C. Small Catechism
S.D. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration

Ap. Apology
Tr. Treatise
L.C. Large Catechism
Ep. F of C, Epitome
2. In subscribing its confessions, our Church’s purpose is to assert its continuity with the historic Christian faith by affirming the doctrines of the sacred scriptures as explained in the Confessions and also as witnessed in many writings of the Church Catholic.

“This is about the sum of our teaching. As it can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church or the church of Rome, in so far as the ancient church is known to us from its writers.” A.C. (L) XXI, Summ., 1, p. 47.

“Only those things have been recounted which it seemed necessary to say in order that it may be understood that nothing has been received among us, in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Scripture or to the church catholic. For it is manifest that we have guarded diligently against the introduction into our churches of any new and ungodly doctrines.” A.C. (L), Concl., 5, p. 95.

“... necessity requires that such controverted articles be explained on the basis of God’s Word and of approved writings ...” S.D., Intro., 10, p. 503.

3. In subscribing its confessions, our Church’s purpose is to preserve concord in its midst and to transmit truth to posterity by clearly distinguishing true doctrine from false.

“The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God. For this same purpose the ancient church always had its dependable symbols.” S.D., Summ., 1, p. 503.

“... in ancient times Christian symbols and confessions were formulated in the church of God when great controversies broke out, and orthodox teachers and hearers pledged themselves to these symbols with heart and mouth.” S.D., Intro., 4, p. 502.

“We ... subscribed this Christian confession (AC) ... in order thereby to warn and, as far as we might, to secure our posterity in the future against doctrine that is impure, false, and contrary to the Word of God.” B. of C., Pref., p. 5.

“... so that no adulterated doctrine might in the future be hidden thereunder and that a pure declaration of the truth might be transmitted to our posterity as well.” B. of C., Pref., p. 7.

“This symbol (AC) distinguishes our reformed churches from the papacy and from other condemned sects and heresies.” S.C., Summ. III, 5, p. 504.

“Such an explanation must be thoroughly grounded in God’s Word so that the pure doctrine can be recognized and distinguished from adulterated doctrine and so that the way may not be left free and open to restless, contentious individuals, who do not want to be bound to any certain formula of pure doctrine ...” B. of C., Pref., p. 13.
4. In subscribing its confessions, our Church's purpose is to provide a standard for its ministry of preaching and teaching and an evangelical pattern for professing consensus.

"... in ancient times ... orthodox teachers and hearers pledged themselves to these symbols (the Creeds) with heart and mouth." S.D., Intro., 4, p. 502.

"Our intention was only to have a single ... common form of doctrine which all our Evangelical churches subscribe ..." S.D., Summ., 10, p. 506.

"Nor do we want to have rejected or condemned any other profitable writings ... in so far as (German "wofern", Latin "quatenus") they are in agreement with the norm incorporated in the (Formula of) Concord." B. of C., Pref., pp. 9-10. "Norm" is included in the sub-titles of both the Epitome (p. 464) and the S.D. (p. 503).

"... gladly and with heartfelt thanks to almighty God testified that of their own volition and with due consideration they accepted, approved, and subscribed this Book of Concord as the correct Christian interpretation of the Augsburg Confession and publicly attested this with hearts, lips, and hands ... the unanimous and concordant confession not only of a few of our theologians but generally of each and every minister and school master in our lands and territories." B. of C., Pref., p. 8.

"... we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teaching and of our own faith ..." A.C., Pref., 8, p. 25. (Signators include dukes, princes, landgraves, senates, and magistrates.)

"... they (A.C., Ap., S.A., L.C., S.C.) have always and everywhere been accepted as the common and universally accepted belief of our churches, that the chief and most illustrious theologians of that time subscribed them, and that all Evangelical churches and schools received them." S.D., Summ., 11, p. 506.

"The Summary Formulation, Basis, Rule, and Norm, Indicating how all Doctrines should be Judged in Conformity with the Word of God and Errors are to be Explained and Decided in a Christian Way." S.D., sub-title, p. 503.

"The Comprehensive Summary, Rule, and Norm according to which all Doctrines should be Judged and the Errors which Intruded should be Explained and Decided in a Christian Way." Ep., sub-title, p. 464.

B. THE SCOPE OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

1. The scope of confessional subscription includes all of the contents of the Book of Concord of 1580 as contained in the authoritative texts and editions cited in the Formula of Concord (Epitome, Summary 1-8 and Solid Declaration, Summary 4-9). These are:

b. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession "... in the form in which it was set down in writing in the year 1530 and submitted to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg ... as the common confession of the reformed churches ..." S.D., Intro., 5, p. 504.

c. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession "... prepared and published in 1531 to set forth clearly the true and genuine meaning of the Augsburg Confession ..." S.D., Summ., 6, p. 504.

d. The Smalcald Articles "... as it was initially prepared and published for presentation ... as an explication of the Augsburg Confession ..." S.D., Summ., 7, p. 505.

e. The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope "which constitutes an appendix to the Smalcald Articles and which all the theologians assembled in Smalcald subscribed ..." S.D., X, 21, p. 614.

f. Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms of 1529-1530 "as he prepared them and incorporated them in his published works ..." S.D., Summ., 8, p. 505.

g. The Formula of Concord as "A Thorough, Pure, Correct, and Final Restatement and Explanation of a Number of Articles of the Augsburg Confession ..." F. of C., Title, p. 463. It includes Part I - Epitome, and Part II - Solid Declaration.

2. Confessional Subscription affirms the primacy of The Augsburg Confession among the Lutheran symbols.

"A Summary Epitome of the articles in controversy among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession ..." Ep., Title, p. 464.

"... the explanation of the dissensions (in the Formula) ... was agreeable and conformable first of all to the Word of God and then to the Augsburg Confession as well ..." B. of C., Pref., pp. 7-8.

"A General, Pure, Correct and Definitive Restatement and Exposition of a Number of Articles of the Augsburg Confession ..." S.D., Title, p. 501.

"... we have in what follows (the Formula) purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God, to that Augsburg Confession, which was submitted ... in the year 1530 ..." B. of C., Pref., p. 8.

"... we consider this (Augsburg) Confession a genuinely Christian symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God ..." S.D., Summ., 4, p. 502.
“... refuted at length in the common Confession of our churches ...” S.D. VII, 110, pp. 588-9, CF. Ftn. 5.

“... subscribed this Book of Concord as the correct Christian interpretation of the Augsburg Confession ...” B. of C., Pref., p. 8.

C. THE MEANING OF CONFESSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

1. Subscribing the Confessions means affirming that The Holy Scriptures are the only source and norm of Doctrine and that the Confessions themselves are a secondary or derived standard of Faith.

“... the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel.” S.A., Part II, 15, p. 295.

“... the distinction between Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule and norm ...” Ep., Summ., 7, p. 465.

“Other writings ... should not be put on a par with Holy Scriptures. ... and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses ...” Ep. Summ., 2, pp. 464-5

“Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith ...” Ep., Summ., 8, p. 465.

2. Subscribing the Confessions means affirming that the central and summary theme of the scriptures is the gospel of justification by the Grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and that the proper interpretation of all scriptures requires the use of the principle of the distinction between law and gospel.

“In this controversy (concerning Justification) the main doctrine of Christianity is involved; when it is properly understood, it illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings to pious consciences the abundant consolation that they need.” Ap.IV, 2, p.107. (German reads: “The controversy concerns the highest and chief article of the whole Christian teaching ... which pre-eminently serves the clear and correct understanding of the whole sacred Scriptures.”)

“Nothing in this article (on the work and office of Christ) can be given up or compromised (Latin adds: “nor can any believer concede or permit anything contrary to it) ... On this article rests all that we teach and practice ...” S.A., Part II, 5, p. 292.

“In the words of the Apology, this article of justification by faith is ‘the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine’, ‘without which no poor conscience can have any abiding comfort or rightly understand the riches of the grace of Christ.’ In the same vein Dr. Luther declared: ‘Where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure ...’” S.D. III, 6, p. 540.
“All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises. In some places it presents the law. In others it presents the promise . . . that the Messiah will come . . . or when, in the New Testament, the Christ who came promises forgiveness of sins, justification and eternal life. By ‘law’ in this discussion we mean the commandments of the Decalogue, where they appear in the Scriptures.” Ap. IV, 5-6, p.108.

“. . . we call upon devout minds to consider the promises . . . Later we add the teaching of the law. And we must distinguish between these, as St. Paul says (II Tim. 2:15). We must see what the Scriptures ascribe to the law and what they ascribe to the promises.” Ap. IV, 188, p. 133.

“These are the two chief works of God in men, to terrify and to justify and quicken the terrified. One or the other of these works is spoken of throughout Scripture. One part is the law, which reveals, denounces, and condemns sin. The other part is the Gospel, that is, the promise of grace granted in Christ.” Ap. XII, 53, p. 189.

“The distinction between law and Gospel is an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly. We must therefore observe this distinction with particular diligence lest we confuse the two doctrines and change the Gospel into law.” S.D. V, 1, p. 558.

“Dr. Luther very diligently urged this distinction in nearly all his writings . . . Since the beginning of the world these two proclamations have continually been set forth side by side in the church of God with proper distinction . . . We believe and confess that these two doctrines must be urged constantly and diligently in the church of God until the end of the world, but with the due distinction . . . This distinction between the law and the Gospel is thoroughly and mightily set forth by St. Paul in II Cor. 3:7-9. For this reason and in order that both doctrines, law and Gospel, may not be mingled together and confused so that what belongs to one doctrine is ascribed to the other, it is necessary to urge and to maintain with all diligence the true and proper distinction between law and Gospel, and diligently to avoid anything that might give occasion for a confusion between them . . .” S.D. V, 22-27, pp. 562-3.

3. Subscribing the confessions means affirming with the confessors that these confessions present a summary of the Scriptures which, though comprehensive, is not exhaustive.

“The Catechism which is a brief compend and summary of all the Holy Scriptures.” L.C., First Preface, 18, p. 361.

“These are the most necessary part of Christian instruction . . . these three parts (Commandments, Creed, Lord’s Prayer) in which everything contained in Scripture is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms . . .” L.D., Second Preface, 15-19, p. 363.
“In our (Augsburg) Confession we covered almost the sum total of all Christian doctrine.” Ap. XII, 124, p. 201.

“These are the chief articles that are regarded as controversial. Although we could have mentioned many more abuses and wrongs, to avoid prolixity and undue length we have indicated only the principal ones. The others can readily be weighed in the light of these . . . All these things we have discreetly passed over for the common good in order that the chief points at issue may be better perceived . . . we have related only matters which we have considered it necessary to adduce and mention . . . If anyone should consider that it is lacking in some respect, we are ready to present further information on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture.” A.C., Concl. I, 3-7, pp. 94-6.

4. Subscribing the confessions means affirming that, in addition to the Scriptures, the Church’s basic tools for Christian education are Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms.

“Dr. Luther’s Small and Large Catechisms . . . are the Layman’s Bible and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation.” Ep., Summ., 5, p. 465.

“. . . they formulate Christian doctrine on the basis of God’s Word for ordinary laymen in a most correct and simple, yet sufficiently explicit, form.” S.D., Summ. VI, 8, p. 505.

“It is not for trivial reasons that we constantly treat the Catechism and strongly urge others to do the same.” L.C., Longer Preface, 1, p. 358. (The entire Longer Preface urges the centrality of the Small Catechism for all Christian instruction.)

5. Subscribing the Confessions means affirming that we stand with the Confessors in their witness to the abiding faith of the Church, recognizing that this witness is given amidst the controversies and in the historical setting of the sixteenth century.

“. . . many churches and schools committed themselves to this (Augsburg) confession as the contemporary symbol of their faith in the chief articles in controversy . . .” B. of C., Pref., p. 3.

“We regard . . . as the symbol of our time, the first and unaltered Augsburg Confession . . .” Ep., Summ. III, 4, p. 465.

“We therefore declare our adherence to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession . . . as our symbol in this epoch . . .” S.D., Summ., 5, p. 504.

“Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no
further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times.” Ep., Summ. I, 2, pp. 464-5. (This is to be noted as the most explicit statement from the confessions themselves on the meaning or nature of confessional subscription.)

“Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood (German and Latin “and explained”) in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned.” Ep., Summ., 8, p. 465.

“This agreement (the Formula) we have set forth as a certain and public testimony, not only to our contemporaries but also to our posterity, of that which our churches believe and accept with one accord as the correct and abiding answer in the controverted issues...” S.D., Summ., 16, p. 507.

6. Subscribing the Confessions means affirming that their doctrinal content is accepted because (“Quia”) it is in agreement with the Scriptures.

“They have held fast and loyalty to the doctrine that is contained in it (the AC), that is based solidly on the divine Scriptures... recognizing the doctrine as the ancient consensus which the universal and orthodox church... repeatedly affirmed.” B. of C., Pref., p. 3.

“Nor do we want to have rejected or condemned any other profitable writings (of Melanchthon, Brenz, Bugenhagen and others)... insofar as (German: "wofern", Latin: "quatenus") they are in agreement with the norm incorporated in the (Book of Concord).” B. of C., Pref., pp. 9-10.

“This, of course, does not mean that other good, useful, and pure books, such as interpretations of the Holy Scriptures, refutations of errors, and expositions of doctrinal articles, should be rejected. If (German: wofern, Latin: quatenus) they are in accord with the aforementioned pattern of doctrine they are to be accepted and used as helpful expositions and explanations. Our intention was only to have a single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine which all our Evangelical churches subscribe and from which and according to which, because (German: well, Latin: cum) it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated.” S.D., Summ. VI, 10, p. 506.

A Brief Statement (1932 - Missouri Synod) “Of the Symbols (etc.)” “48. The confessional obligation covers all doctrines, not only those that are treated ex professo, but also those that are merely introduced in support of other doctrines. The obligation does not extend to historical statements, purely exegetical questions, and other matters not belonging to the doctrinal content of the symbols. All doctrines of the symbols are based on clear statements of Scriptures.” (Quoted from Doctrinal Declarations (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, (n.d.)), p. 59.)
7. Subscribing the Confessions means identifying with the Confessions in an act of repentance and faith, humility and doxology, loyalty and courage, in the profession of truth.

"... we are not minded to permit any doctrine in our lands, churches, and schools other than in the form in which it was once confessed at Augsburg... By the help of God's grace, we, too, intend to persist in this confession until our blessed end and to appear before the judgement seat of our Lord Jesus Christ with joyful and fearless hearts and consciences." B. of C., Pref., p. 9

"What are the symbols of the Lutheran Church? They are, first of all, confessions in the full implications of the German word "Bekenntnis". They are confessions of sin whereby the confessors, realistically conscious of their sinfulness, humbly themselves before God in deep repentance and acknowledge their own bankruptcy in his presence. Secondly, the symbols are confessions of faith, as the expression of total trust in God's gracious forgiveness in Christ. Thirdly, the symbols are confessions of praise, the free, spontaneous, uninhibited doxology of pardoned sinners to an unimaginably merciful God." (Quoted from Herbert J.C. Bouman, "In Nomine Jesu, Thoughts on the Significance of Confessional Subscription" Essays on the Lutheran Confessions Basic to Lutheran Co-operation (National Lutheran Council, 1961), p. 38.)

8. Subscribing the Confessions means engaging continually in a joyous and voluntary act of consensus which is made intelligently and wholeheartedly.

"... gladly and with hearthelt thanks to almighty God testified that of their own volition and with due consideration they accepted, approved, and subscribed this Book of Concord as the correct Christian interpretation of the Augsburg Confession and publicly attested this with hearts, lips, and hands. Therefore this Christian agreement is called and also is the unanimous and concordant confession not only of a few of our theologians but generally of each and every minister and schoolmaster in our lands and territories." B. of C., Pref., p. 8.

"We... again unanimously subscribed this Christian (AC) confession, based as it is on the witness of the unalterable truth of the divine Word, in order thereby to warn and, as far as we might, to secure our posterity in the future against doctrine that is impure, false, and contrary to the Word of God." B. of C., Pref., p. 5.

"... we are not minded to manufacture anything new by this work of agreement (the Formula) or to depart in any way at all, either in content or formulation (German: weder in rebus noch phrasibus), from the divine truth that our pious forebears and we have acknowledged and confessed the past..." B. of C., Pref., p. 13.

"... what we now repeat in this document... that it is the same simple, unchanging, constant truth." S.D., Summ., 20, p. 508.

"... this is the doctrine, faith and confession of all of us as we shall give account of it on the Last Day before the righteous judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we shall neither secretly nor publicly say or write anything contrary to it but
intend by the grace of God to abide by it, we have advisedly, in true fear and invocation of God, subscribed our signatures with our own hands.” Ep. XII., 31, p. 500.

“Hence if any shall say after my death, ‘If Dr. Luther were living now he would teach or hold this or that article differently, for he did not consider it sufficiently’, etc., let me say now as then, and then as now, that by the grace of God I have most diligently traced all these articles through the Scriptures, have examined them again and again in the light thereof, and have wanted to defend all of them . . .” S.D. VII, 29-30, p. 574.

D. SUGGESTED FORMULA OF SUBSCRIPTION

In view of the foregoing theses, we recommend that a contemporary formula of subscription:

1. incorporate the confessional modes of expression wherever possible.
2. acknowledge the distinction of Holy Scriptures as the only source and judge of doctrine.,
3. incorporate the ranking and distinctive roles of the various symbols as evidenced in the Confessions themselves.

The following formula incorporates these principles.: 

This Church with all its members joyously receives, unanimously accepts, and wholeheartedly confesses:

1. The prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired, written Word of God, the only source of the Church’s doctrine, and the authoritative standard for the faith and life of the Church;
2. The following symbols, comprising the Book of Concord of 1580, which it subscribes specifically as witnesses to the way in which the Holy Scriptures have been correctly understood and explained and confessed for the sake of the Gospel, namely
   a. The Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds as the chief confessions of the Christian faith,
   b. The Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530 as its basic formulation of Christian doctrine,
   c. Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism as a clear summary of Christian doctrine,
   d. The Apology, the Large Catechism, the Smalcald Articles with the Treatise, and the Formula of Concord as further witnesses to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.

Adopted by the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships, November 5, 1975.
Anti-Christian Ideologies

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, preached by the Apostles and believed by the Church, has been subjected to attacks since earliest days. There were outright attacks by the priestly aristocracy following the day of Pentecost. A native of Tarsus, Saul, was prominent among those who actively sought to destroy the followers of Jesus and so silence the message. Before long the Church faced an attack on two fronts. The overt aggressive attack continued against the Church now including this Saul, later called Paul (Acts 9:23; 17:1-10). There was also a covert attack which sought to dilute the Gospel and threatened to destroy it (Galatians 2). However, the clear teaching of the New Testament is that man is justified by grace through faith, apart from human works (Ephesians 1, 2). This New Testament teaching was re-affirmed by the reformers and in the confessional writings of the Church of the Reformation. The new Lutheran Church in Canada faces the challenge to continue both in its public proclamation and in its practice to give a clear witness to all concerning the Gospel.

This witness involves not only a public declaration of the content of the Gospel, but also a public dissociation from any group or organization which seeks to combine syncretistically a theology of works with a theology of grace, or which seeks to replace the theology of grace with some man-made philosophy. Practically, the question of witness must be faced by the challenge of the presence of certain organizations, some of which designate themselves as lodges, which are from the standpoint of basic New Testament theology either unchristian or anti-Christian.

The existing Lutheran Churches in Canada have a similar position regarding their relationship to anti-Christian organizations while at the same time exhibiting some variety in pastoral practice. The positions of each of the churches can be summarized as follows:

In the Lutheran Church in America the constitution forbids ordination for anyone who is a member of any organization which claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to His Church. Any minister who may join such an organization after his ordination is subject to discipline. In the model constitutions of the synods and the congregations, no further statement is made. The model constitution for congregations provides for discipline for any confirmed member for a variety of reasons, the first mentioned being denial of Christian faith.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada likewise forbids ordination of anyone affiliated with anti- or un-Christian organizations. The official documents furthermore admonish pastors and members to testify against the sin of lodgery
and to seek to persuade any persons who are members to sever their connections with such organizations. The congregational constitution usually includes an article which rejects fellowship with organizations which do not confess the triune God and Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God. It also forbids the use of the church or church premises for such ceremonies.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has a rather extensive section in its Handbook dealing with Fraternal Organizations. It rejects any association with such organizations for both clergy and laity. It forbids the administration of Holy Communion to anyone who may become a lodge member and forbids receiving into communicant membership anyone who is a lodge member. Recognition is also given to exceptional cases where the rule may be waived, and this is spelled out in some detail. Congregational constitutions usually declare, in briefer form, the position set forth in the Handbook.

There is no general disagreement to be seen in the principles which the churches declare in their official documents. There is a difference in the extent to which they specify the application of the principles. The issue which now must be faced is how specifically shall the position of the new Lutheran Church in Canada be stated. A Statement of Principles and Criteria drawn up by the representatives of the LCA, ALC, and LC-MS is worth considering as a prolegomenon to such a stated position (See attached appendix 1).

In addition to this, we would recommend that in the constitution of the new church a specific statement, rejecting any and all association with anti-Christian organizations, should appear.

This statement should guard against any member who belongs to such an organization being an ordained minister of the church.

We also recommend that congregations be required to include in their constitutions an article which rejects all relationships which imply compromise with an anti-Christian organization which, in its documents or rites and practices, contradicts the Gospel of Salvation, or which in any way conflicts with obedience to the Word of God.

The congregation should be urged to minister also to those who may be members of such an anti-Christian organization to show them the inconsistency of their dual position and to seek to lead them to a consistent Christian practice.

It would seem unwise to prescribe the specific details for a ministry to such persons. At the same time, it should be made clear that the Christian faith is an exclusive commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Adopted by the Joint Commission on Inter-Lutheran Relationships, November 6, 1975.
REPORT
OF THE
CONSULTATION ON A UNITED LUTHERAN WITNESS
REGARDING MEMBERSHIP IN ANTI-CHRISTIAN AND
UNCHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS
(1971)

Gratefully recognizing our common witness in the matter before us, we, the representatives of the presidents of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, The Lutheran Church in America and The American Lutheran Church, submit the following document to our church officials. It is our hope that this consensus may foster greater agreement among Lutherans in this country and that it may be found acceptable for wide distribution for study and effective implementation.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

I. As representatives of The American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, we recognize and acknowledge the consensus expressed in the official pronouncements of our respective church bodies regarding our opposition to all such organizations, agencies, and associations which are inimical to the faith and life of the Christian church.

II. There can be only one Gospel, namely, that which is set forth in the Scriptures, the Word of God, and witnessed to in the historic confessions of our church.¹ This Gospel proclaims that man is saved from condemnation time and eternity and called to serve in God’s Kingdom by grace alone through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Any practice - ritualistic or ethical - which involves a denial or at least a blunting of our commitment or witness to this one and only Gospel, must be avoided by pastors and laymen alike.

STATEMENT OF CRITERIA

I. As Lutheran Christians we, therefore, recognize and acknowledge that any organization is an anti-Christian organization which in its basic documents or in its rites, ceremonies, and practices explicitly contradicts the Christian

¹ Note the meaning of the term “Gospel” in the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article V, 3, 4, as well as Luther’s application of it in the Smalcald Articles, Part III, Articles I-IX, and in the Small Catechism, especially the explanations to the articles of the Apostles’ Creed.
Gospel of salvation,\(^2\) or which in any way conflicts with obedience to the
Word of God.\(^3\)

II. Other organizations which may not overtly deny or repudiate the Christian
Gospel but by life-style, objectives, ceremonies, or literature implicitly
compromise or negate that Gospel are inimical to the faith and witness of
the Christian church and must, therefore, be considered anti-Christian.

III. We recognize and acknowledge also that any organization which embraces
ideologies or principles that violate the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, the
Word of God, concerning the relationship of men to each other, either
individually or corporately, must be regarded as inconsistent with the
Christian faith and life.\(\text{ALC Commentator, Feb. 5, 1971}\)

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

God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the
man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16. Cf. Also John