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THE WORD AND THE CONFESSIONS IN THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA CONFESSION OF FAITH OF 1962--
A HISTORICAL APPROACH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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SHORT TITLE

WORD AND CONFESSIONS IN THE LCA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

In 1962 a merger took place between the American (Danish) Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish (Suomi) Evangelical Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church in America to form the Lutheran Church in America. The merger was significant in several respects: (1) it constituted the largest single body of Lutherans in America; (2) it combined at least four nationality backgrounds--German, Swedish, Danish and Finnish; (3) it incorporated various tenors of piety and churchmanship including Grundtvigianism and Finnish Pietism; (4) it comprehended divergent systems of policy from ULCA synodical government to Augustana central government; and (5) it represented the achievement of a theological consensus on such a crucial problem as the nature and function of the Word and the Lutheran Confessions.

It is the purpose of this study to examine this last point, the Lutheran Church in America's position on the Word and the Confessions, as this is established in its "Confession of Faith" of 1962.¹ Such an

¹Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. II, Sections 1-7, Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Constituting Convention, Detroit, Michigan, June 28-July 1, 1962 (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, n.d.), p. 279; R. C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 227, pp. 566-567.

examination, however, poses certain difficulties because of the merger and consensus nature of the Lutheran Church in America. The "Confession of Faith" was not drafted in a theological and historical vacuum. Behind it stand several major theological controversies and almost one hundred and fifty years of doctrinal development within the Muhlenberg strain of American Lutheranism, and shorter but no less important developments within the Swedish, Danish and Finnish Lutheran experience in both Europe and America.

The Method

Our study will devote considerable time to a historical examination of how this process of development may have influenced the shaping of the "Confession of Faith" in the hope that such an examination will give us important clues to its proper interpretation. We will briefly examine the evolution of the doctrinal articles of the Lutheran Church in America's predecessor bodies beginning with the General Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of 1820, with the United Lutheran Church in America being given proportionally more attention because of its larger size and theological influence. After tracing the doctrinal development of each of the predecessor bodies we shall examine how the historical positions of these groups were represented on the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity and the extent to which they exerted significant influence on the drafting of the 1962 "Confession of Faith." Finally, we shall attempt to interpret the LCA doctrinal article on the Word and the Confessions in the light of our historical analysis.

The Sources

For our study of the doctrinal evolution of the Lutheran Church in America's predecessor bodies we have restricted ourselves almost exclusively to constitutional doctrinal articles and official doctrinal declarations. In our study of the merger negotiations we have relied on the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity official minutes and on the several official reports which the commission made to its constituent bodies. Secondary sources have been utilized for general background material or where little was available in terms of primary data, as was the case for the Suomi Synod and the American (Danish) Evangelical Lutheran Church. In general we have restricted ourselves to material which has a direct bearing on the Word and the Confessions, and no attempt has been made to consider the question of practice or discipline within the LCA or its predecessor bodies. Inasmuch as many of the sources with which we shall be working are available in Richard C. Wolf's Documents of Lutheran Unity, we shall cite all primary sources contained in Wolf's collection by including in the footnotes the document number which Wolf assigns to it.

Some Definitions

For the purpose of this study we shall use the term "Confessions" to designate those symbols contained in The Book of Concord of 1580.²

²Formula of Concord, Epitome, Introduction, pp. 3-5, The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 465.

The term "Word" is more problematic and less liable to a single definition. Just what is meant by the phrase "Word of God" was one of the major issues in contention during the LCA's doctrinal development. At various points in our study it will become increasingly obvious that there is no one definition of the term "Word" that can be accurately applied to every stage of development or in every historical situation. The principal ways in which the sources use the term "Word" are as follows: (1) Person of Jesus Christ; (2) the Gospel about Jesus Christ; (3) the whole revelation of God in history; and (4) the written revelation or Holy Scriptures.³ The reader is cautioned, therefore, to let the sources themselves define what is meant by "Word" in each context.

³"The Word of God and the Scriptures," Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Baltimore, Maryland, October 5-12, 1938 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.), p. 473; Wolf, Document 150, pp. 357-358.

PART I

THE WORD AND THE CONFESSIONS

IN THE PREDECESSOR BODIES OF THE LCA

The date given for the founding of the church body is 1869, which is the year of the General Synod of 1869, which was the first national assembly of the church in the United States since the Revolution.

R. M. Fisher, "The Confessionalism of American Lutheran Church Bodies of German Background," *The Church and the Confessions*, edited by F. F. Kelly and H. W. Kretschmer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 74.

CHAPTER II

THE MUHLENBERG STRAIN, 1820-1918

The United Lutheran Church in America, the largest party to the LCA merger, was itself a merger consisting of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America (1820), the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South (1863), and the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (1867).¹ As a necessary prelude to our study of The United Lutheran Church in America, we now turn to an examination of the doctrinal evolution and interaction of these three bodies.

The General Synod

The General Synod was organized in a period notable for its confessional laxity and neglect. By 1792 even the large and influential Ministerium of Pennsylvania had deleted from its constitution all mention of the Lutheran Confessions.² Since the Ministerium of Pennsylvania was the original driving force behind the organization of the General Synod, it is not surprising that the General Synod of 1820 was founded

¹The dates given are for the founding of the church body which eventually bore the name cited. See R. C. Wiederaenders and W. G. Tillmanns, The Synods of American Lutheranism (Lutheran Historical Conference, Publication No. 1, 1968).

²R. H. Fischer, "The Confessionalism of American Lutheran Church Bodies of German Background," The Church and the Confessions, edited by V. Vajta and H. Weissgerber (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 74.

without any explicit confessional subscription being required of its member synods. Rather, the constitution specifically denied the General Synod the power "to introduce such alterations in matters appertaining to the faith, or to the mode of publishing the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . . as might in any way tend to burden the consciences of the brethren in Christ."³ Each member synod was responsible for establishing its own "confession of faith" concerning which the General Synod was granted the power only of "advice, counsel or opinion."⁴ Moreover, that "advice" was further qualified by the following warning:

The General Synod may give advice or opinion . . . concerning doctrine or discipline. They shall however be extremely careful, that the consciences of the Ministers of the Gospel be not burdened with human interventions, laws of devices, and that no one be oppressed by reason of differences of opinion on nonfundamental doctrines.⁵

The constitution did not specify what was meant by a nonfundamental doctrine.

In 1829 the General Synod adopted a recommended constitution for member synods, in which a "ceremony for ordination" included the following ordination vow:

³Constitution of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, Art. III, Sec. II, 3, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifth General Synod of the Ev. Luth. Church in the United States, Convened at Hagerstown, Md., October, 1829 (Gettysburg: Printed at the Press of the Theol. Seminary, 1829), p. 42; Richard C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 27, p. 69.

⁴Constitution of the General Synod, Art, III, Sec. II, 1; Wolf, Document 27, p. 68.

⁵Constitution of the General Synod, Art. III, Sec. III, 1, p. 43; Wolf, Document 27, p. 70.

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you believe that the fundamental doctrines of the word of God, are taught in a manner substantially correct, in the doctrinal articles of the Augsb. Confession?⁶

Doctrine was further discussed under the heading of "Process against a Minister," which provided that any minister who confessed or was found guilty of "circulating fundamental error in doctrine"⁷ or "fundamental heresy"⁸ was liable to suspension, "And he cannot be restored by any adjudicatory but the Synod, or by the Ministerium, if his case was one of fundamental heresy."⁹ Again, no definition was offered as to what constituted fundamental doctrine.

Samuel Simon Schmucker, the chief architect of the recommended synod constitution, described his attitude toward its doctrinal position in the 1829 "Pastoral Address of the General Synod" which he wrote at the request of that body.

On the one hand we are not able to go with those who renounce unconditionally all creeds and confessions, because we cannot see how Socinians could be effectually excluded from the Church without them. But we feel well assured that the great majority of creeds in the Christian Church, by entering far too much into minor ramifications into doctrine and attaching too great importance to

⁶Constitution of Synods, Chapter XIX, II, 2, p. 39.

⁷Constitution of Synods, Chapter XII, 6, p. 35.

⁸Constitution of Synods, Chapter XII, 14, p. 35.

⁹Ibid.

subordinate and even doubtful points, have cherished in the most direct manner, and from their very nature must cherish the unhallowed spirit of bigotry and sectarianism. . . .¹⁰

Note the reason S. S. Schmucker gives for retaining creeds and confessions, namely, the exclusion of rationalist and Unitarian heresy. This is the key to understanding the tenor of the otherwise cryptic phrases "fundamental doctrines of the word of God" and "in a manner substantially correct, in the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession." A. R. Wentz, Schmucker's most recent biographer, puts the matter well, and in the opinion of this writer, correctly when he writes:

In 1829 these terms were intended to provide a platform that would distinguish between evangelical Christians and persistent non-Christians. They were not intended to distinguish between Lutherans and other Protestants. . . . A fundamental doctrine is one that is "essential to the Christian scheme." What doctrines are essential to Lutheranism is a question that did not arise at that time. If it had arisen it would have been regarded as unimportant.¹¹

In 1835 a subtle but significant change was made in the General Synod constitution with the addition of a paragraph which defined eligibility for membership in terms of fundamental doctrine.

¹⁰Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifth General Synod of the Ev. Luth. Church in the United States, Convened at Hagerstown, Md., October, 1829, pp. 15-16.

¹¹A. R. Wentz, Pioneer in Christian Unity: Samuel Simon Schmucker (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 207. The Constitution of the Gettysburg Seminary (1826), Art. I, quoted by P. Anstadt, Life and Times of Rev. S. S. Schmucker, D.D. (York, Pa.: P. Anstadt and Sons, 1896), p. 179, cites Deists, Unitarians, Arians and Antinomians as "fundamental errorists." Cf. the Oath of Office for a Gettysburg Seminary Professor (1826), quoted by A. R. Wentz, History of the Gettysburg Theological Seminary (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, 1926), p. 101.

All regularly constituted Lutheran Synods, holding the fundamental doctrines of the Bible as taught by our Church, may, at any time, become associated with it, by adopting this Constitution . . .¹²

This is the first time that the phrase "fundamental doctrine" appears in the General Synod constitution. Note that the Augsburg Confession is not mentioned, even though it had appeared in the model synod constitution six years before. It cannot be determined with certainty whether the 1835 phrase "as taught by our Church" may be taken as a synonym for the 1829 phrase "taught in a manner substantially correct in the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession." In view of Schmucker's understanding of fundamental doctrine and his use of creeds and confessions only to the extent that they are useful for excluding fundamental errorists, this writer is of the opinion that they may be considered equivalent, or at least were considered so in 1835. In any event, the General Synod's doctrinal basis was commonly explained by reference to the ordination oath of 1829, even though it was (strictly speaking) not a part of the General Synod constitution.

After 1835 the General Synod doctrinal basis remained unchanged for twenty-nine years. During this period its intent is better defined by its limitations than by its affirmations: (1) It does not adopt all of the Lutheran Confessions--only the Augsburg Confession; (2) It includes only the twenty-one doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession (as

¹²Constitution of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of North America (as Amended), Art. III, Sec. III, Proceedings of the Tenth Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, convened at Chambersburg, Pa., June, 1839 (Gettysburg: Printed by H. C. Neinstedt, 1839), p. 49.

opposed to the articles on abuses corrected); (3) It binds only to fundamental doctrines of the Bible; (4) It presupposes that fundamental doctrines are only those doctrines accepted by all evangelical Christians; (5) It leaves undecided the question as to which (if not all) of the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession are to be considered "fundamental doctrines of the Bible"; and (6) It regards those doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession which are considered fundamental to be only "substantially correct."¹³

The wide latitude of private judgment which the 1835 doctrinal basis (including the synodical ordination oath of 1829) permitted was both the great strength and the fatal weakness of the General Synod. On the one hand it permitted such widely disparate personalities as Benjamin Kurtz and W. J. Mann¹⁴ to exist side by side in the same

¹³F. Bente, American Lutheranism: The United Lutheran Church (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), II, 39. For the views of the chief protagonists in the doctrinal basis struggle, see S. S. Schmucker, "The Doctrinal Basis and Ecclesiastical Position of the American Lutheran Church," The American Lutheran Church, Historically, Doctrinally, and Practically Delineated, in Several Discourses (5th edition; Philadelphia: E. W. Miller, Ranstead Place, 1852), pp. 155-246, see especially pp. 226-246; Charles Porterfield Krauth, "The General Synod," "The Doctrinal Basis of the General Synod," "The Duty of the General Synod at the Present Crisis," quoted from the Missionary, April 30-May 14, 1857, by A. Spaeth, Charles Porterfield Krauth (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1898), I, 381-409. Cf. J. L. Neve, The Formulation of the General Synod's Confessional Basis (Burlington, Iowa: The German Literary Board, 1911), pp. 17-22.

¹⁴Benjamin Kurtz, editor of the Lutheran Observer from 1833 to 1861, was a leader of the American Lutheran faction and one of its most radical advocates; see Charles E. Hay, "Kurtz, Benjamin," The Lutheran Cyclopedia, edited by H. E. Jacobs and J. A. W. Haas (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), p. 268; W. J. Mann was a leading figure in the confessional movement and one of S. S. Schmucker's most accomplished critics; see Adolph Spaeth, "Mann, Wm. Julius," The Lutheran Cyclopedia, pp. 302-303.

ecclesiastical body, yet it was at the same time a source of no little controversy and hostility.¹⁵

In 1855 the struggle between the more strictly confessional faction and the less confessional "American Lutherans" reached a new level of intensity with the anonymous publication of a pamphlet entitled the Definite Platform.¹⁶ In many ways this proposal was an honest attempt to replace the unclear and indefinite General Synod doctrinal basis with a more "definite synodical platform," namely, with what the author called an "American Recension of the Augsburg Confession." The "Recension" purported to purge the doctrinal articles of the 1530 Augsburg Confession of certain "errors"¹⁷ and thereby make it a suitable instrument for a clear and unambiguous confessional subscription. In addition to an expurgated version of the Augsburg Confession the definite platform included both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. The full text of the proposed doctrinal basis is as follows:

¹⁵The standard work on this controversy within the General Synod is Vergilius Ferm, The Crisis in American Lutheran Theology: A Study of the Issue between American Lutheranism and Old Lutheranism (New York: The Century Co., 1927); Cf. Henry Eyster Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, in The American Church History Series (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893), IV, 415-434, 455-470.

¹⁶Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinary, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General Synod (2nd edition; Philadelphia: Miller and Burlock, 1856); Wolf, Document 44, pp. 100-104. S. S. Schmucker was later identified as the author of this work.

¹⁷Five errors were alleged: (1) the approval of the ceremonies of the Mass; (2) private confession and absolution; (3) denial of the divine obligation of the Christian Sabbath; (4) baptismal regeneration; and (5) the real presence of the body and blood of the Savior in the Eucharist. Wolf, Document 44, p. 103.

the so-called Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the American Recension of the Augsburg Confession, as a more definite expression of the doctrinal pledge prescribed by the General Synod's Constitution for District Synods, and as a correct exhibition of the Scripture doctrines discussed in it: and that we regard agreement among brethren on these subjects as a sufficient basis for harmonious cooperation in the same church.¹⁸

While many in the General Synod were eager for a more definite doctrinal basis, few were prepared to accept the all too clear suggestion that the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession actually contained errors.¹⁹ The more strictly confessional faction within the General Synod hotly contested the point, and the controversy raged on in such periodicals as The Lutheran Observer, The Lutheran Standard, The Missionary, and The Evangelical Review.

In 1864 the General Synod's doctrinal basis was explained and amended at its York, Pennsylvania, convention. Seriously shaken by the controversy over the Definite Platform and its allegation of errors in the Augsburg Confession, the General Synod passed the "York Declaration."

while this Synod, resting on the word of God as the sole authority in matters of faith on its infallible warrant, rejects the Romish doctrine of the real presence of Transubstantiation, and with it the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Two notable examples are W. J. Mann, A Plea for the Augsburg Confession, in Answer to the Objections of the Definite Platform: an Address to All Ministers and Laymen of the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the United States (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1856), and John N. Hoffman, The Broken Platform: or, A Brief Defence of Our Symbolical Books against Recent Changes of Alleged Errors (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1856).

doctrine of Consubstantiation, rejects the Romish mass, and all the ceremonies distinctive of the mass; denies any power in the sacraments, as an opus operatum, or that the blessings of Baptism, and the Lord's Supper can be received without faith; rejects auricular confession and priestly absolution; holds that there is no priesthood on earth, but that of all believers; and maintains the divine obligations of the Sabbath, and while we would with our whole heart reject any part of any Confession which taught doctrines in conflict with this, our testimony; nevertheless, before God and his Church, we declare, that in our judgment, the Augsburg Confession, properly interpreted, is in perfect consistency with this our testimony and with the Holy Scriptures as regards the errors specified.²⁰

In addition to disclaiming the opinion that the Augsburg Confession "properly interpreted" contained errors in its doctrinal articles, the York convention passed the following amendment to the General Synod constitution:

All regularly constituted Lutheran Synods, not now in connection with the General Synod, receiving and holding with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of our fathers the Word of God, as contained in the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the Augsburg Confession, as a correct exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of the Divine Word, may at any time, become associated with the General Synod, by complying with the requisitions of this Constitution, and sending delegates to its Convention . . .²¹

²⁰Proceedings of the Twenty-First Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Assembled in York, Pa., May, 1864 (Gettysburg: H. C. Neinstedt, 1864), p. 40. The "York Declaration," with the exception of five minor word changes, was a declaration prepared by Charles Porterfield Krauth and adopted by the Pittsburg Synod at Zellenople in 1856; see Henry Eyster Jacobs, "York Declaration," The Lutheran Cyclopaedia, p. 554, for the precise word changes. Cf. Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, IV, 459-460.

²¹Proceedings of the Twenty-First Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Assembled in York, Pa., May, 1864, p. 39. The amendment was declared adopted in 1869.

Note that the phrase "substantially correct" as found in the 1829 ordination oath is here superceded by the phrase "as a correct exhibition," and that there is no mention of the subscription being limited to only the doctrinal articles of the Augsburg Confession. As in the 1835 constitution the accent is on "fundamental doctrines" of the Bible. Note, too, that the Word of God is described as being "contained" in the Scriptures, and that the Scriptures themselves are referred to as "the only infallible rule of faith and practice"--the same words used in 1829.

The York convention was notable for still another reason. The Franckean Synod, a synod whose doctrinal basis did not even mention the Augsburg Confession,²² was admitted into membership in the General Synod over the vigorous objection of the delegation from the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. As a protest and in accordance with the stipulation which the Ministerium had made upon its rejoining the General Synod in 1853,²³ the delegation withdrew from the convention to report to the next meeting of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania. When the Ministerium's delegation attended the next General Synod convention at Fort Wayne in 1866, it was refused a seat and vote, the chair ruling that it was in a state of

²²Arthur S. Hardy, "Synods (I.)--The Franckean Synod," The Lutheran Cyclopedia, pp. 479-480; the Franckean Synod's "Declaration" or confession of faith is given in Jacobs, History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, IV, 457-458.

²³S. E. Ochsenford, Documentary History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1912), pp. 66-67; Wolf, Document 59, pp. 92-93.

separation from the General Synod. Angry and insulted, the Ministerium's delegation withdrew again--this time for good.²⁴ The same year the Ministerium of Pennsylvania sent out a call to all Lutheran bodies which held the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to meet together for the purpose of forming a new union of Lutheran Synods--the result was the organization of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.²⁵

After 1864 the evolution of the doctrinal article of the General Synod progressed in the form of resolutions which were passed as answers to ad hoc questions. This happened on three separate occasions: (1) at Hagerstown in 1895; (2) at Des Moines in 1901; and (3) at Richmond in 1909.²⁶

In 1895 at its Hagerstown convention the General Synod responded to the insistence of the General Council that confessional subscription include not only the Augsburg Confession, but all of the Lutheran Symbols in the Book of Concord.²⁷ Less confessional elements within the General Synod feared that it too might extend its confessional subscription

²⁴For a full discussion of the dispute from the Ministerium's point of view, see Ochsensford, pp. 71-94; for a brief statement of the General Synod's point of view, see F. W. Conrad and J. A. Brown, "Remarks," First Free Lutheran Diet in America, edited by H. E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: J. Frederick Smith, 1878), pp. 137-141.

²⁵This was not, however, the first defection from the General Synod. Five southern synods had withdrawn in 1863 and organized the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America.

²⁶Neve, pp. 14-16.

²⁷Fundamental Principles of Faith, IX; Ochsensford, pp. 138-139; Wolf, Document 63, p. 145.

beyond the Augustana and asked for reassurance. The result was the "Hagerstown Resolution."

Whereas, A fear is expressed by some that the basis of the General Synod may be changed by enlargement so as to include other symbolical books beside the Augsburg Confession, and
 Whereas, A conviction is held that an effort is in progress to reduce to a lower standard, in thought and spirit, the present form of acceptance of the Augsburg Confession by the General Synod; therefore,
 Resolved, That in order to remove all fear and misapprehension, this Convention of the General Synod hereby expresses its entire satisfaction with the present form of doctrinal basis and confessional subscription, which is the Word of God as the infallible rule of faith and practice, and the unaltered Augsburg Confession as throughout in perfect consistence with it--nothing more, nothing less.²⁸

The resolution adds nothing new with regard to the Word of God. As for the Augsburg Confession, it adds the word "throughout" to describe the extent of the Confession's "perfect consistence" (the phrase used at York in 1864) with the Word. The Augsburg Confession is further qualified as the "unaltered" edition. The general thrust of the resolution is the phrase "nothing more, nothing less," the principle which limited the General Synod's confessional subscription to only the Augustana. Note that the phrase "fundamental doctrines" does not appear.

In 1901 at its Des Moines convention the General Synod addressed itself to the "fundamental doctrine" question once and for all by abandoning the position which distinguished between fundamental and

²⁸Proceedings of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, In Session at Hagerstown, Md., June 5-13, 1895 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1895), pp. 62-63.

non-fundamental doctrines in the Augsburg Confession. The "Des Moines Resolution" is as follows:

in these days of doctrinal unrest in many quarters, we rejoice to find ourselves unshaken in our spiritual and historic faith, and, therefore, we reaffirm our unreserved allegiance to the present basis of the General Synod, and we hold that to make any distinction between fundamental and so-called non-fundamental doctrines is contrary to that basis as set forth in our formula of confessional subscription.²⁹

With the abandonment of the distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines in the Augsburg Confession, the only major difference between the General Synod and the rest of the Muhlenberg strain of American Lutheranism with regard to its doctrinal basis was the General Synod's refusal to enlarge its confessional subscription beyond the Augsburg Confession.³⁰ In reply to the General Council's 1907 "Theses on the Relation of the General Council to the General Synod,"³¹ which raised among other issues the question of the status of the rest of the symbolical books, the Richmond convention of the General Synod passed a resolution entitled "Statements Relative to the General Synod's Doctrinal Basis." The paragraph on the "Secondary Symbols" is as follows:

²⁹Proceedings of the Fortieth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, In Session at Des Moines, Iowa, May 29 to June 6, 1901 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1901), pp. 83-84.

³⁰The United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South subscribed to all of the Lutheran Symbols in its constitution of 1886; Wolf, Document 57, p. 133.

³¹Ochsenford, pp. 405-409; H. E. Jacobs was its author.

The Augsburg Confession is the original and generic Lutheran Confession, accepted by Luther and his coadjutors, adopted by all Lutheran bodies the world over, and is therefore generally recognized as the adequate and sufficient standard of Lutheran doctrine. As to the Secondary Confessions of the Lutheran Church the General Synod in no wise ignores, rejects, repudiates or antagonizes them, nor forbids any of her members from accepting all of them, if they so desire. On the other hand, she holds those Confessions in high esteem, regards them as a most valuable body of Lutheran belief, explaining and unfolding the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession, and she hereby recommends that they be diligently and faithfully studied by our ministers and laymen.³²

Note that while this statement speaks highly of the so-called "Secondary Confessions," it does not repudiate or change the "nothing more, nothing less" principle established at Hagerstown in 1895 with regard to the sufficiency of the Augsburg Confession as a confessional standard.

The 1907 General Council "Theses" raised another issue to which the General Synod responded at Richmond, namely, the question as to just what the General Synod meant when it said that the Canonical Scriptures "contained" the Word of God.³³ Eager to clarify its position on this point, the Richmond convention responded:

³²"Statements Relative to the General Synod's Doctrinal Basis," par. 2, Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, In Session at Richmond, Ind., June 2-10, 1909 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909), pp. 57-58.

³³Constitution of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, As amended and declared adopted at Washington, D.C., May 14, 1869, Art. II, Sec. III, Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Assembled in Dayton, Ohio, June, 1871 (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication House, 1871), p. 66; cf. Supra, p. 14.

When our fathers framed this language, the theological distinction between the two statements, "The Bible is the word of God," and "the Bible contains the word of God," had not yet been made, or at least, was not yet in vogue; therefore, there could have been no intention on their part of committing the General Synod to lax or heretical views of the inspiration of the sacred Scriptures, but, on the contrary, a sincere purpose to plant her firmly on the basis of their true and full inspiration. Since that time the General Synod has ever occupied the same position with reference to the canonical Scriptures. We solemnly declare, therefore, our adherence to the statement, "The Bible is the word of God," while we reject the error implied in the statement, "The Bible contains the word of God."³⁴

The statement does not elaborate on what it means by the phrase, "true and full inspiration."

With these statements the General Synod felt that it had successfully refuted all charges of ambiguity against its doctrinal basis. The Richmond convention consequently turned its attention to the possibilities of Lutheran fellowship and further cooperation. However, the "nothing more, nothing less" principle, while softened in tone, remained unchanged. If fellowship was to be furthered, it would have to be on the basis of the Augsburg Confession alone.

On the basis of these principles she desires to cultivate fellowship and cooperation with all Lutherans who likewise accept, ex animo, the Augsburg Confession, whether or not they accept confessionally the other symbols of the Book of Concord.³⁵

By 1909 the General Synod had reached the point where the explanatory resolutions which had been offered over the years to clarify its

³⁴"Statements Relative to the General Synod's Doctrinal Basis," par. 4, Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, p. 58.

³⁵Ibid., p. 59.

doctrinal basis constituted a body of material over twelve times as long as the doctrinal basis itself! So complex had the process of clarification become, that the Richmond convention resolved that all future editions of the Augustana published by the General Synod should have as an appendix to the Confession the full texts of the York Resolution (1864), the Hagerstown Resolution (1895), the Des Moines Resolution (1901) and the Richmond Resolution (1909).³⁶

Faced with this ponderous collection of "explanatory statements" it soon became obvious that something had to be done to simplify matters. It was to this end that the following resolution was adopted at Richmond:

That the Common Service Committee be and hereby is instructed to codify the several resolutions and statements explanatory of the Doctrinal Basis of the General Synod . . . and incorporate the substance of the same into one clear and definite statement of our Doctrinal Basis, and to report the same at the next meeting of the General Synod with a view to placing it in the Constitution . . . there being no intention in this action in any way to change our Doctrinal Basis.³⁷

The result of this resolution was the adoption of a new Doctrinal Basis for the General Synod, or more precisely, the incorporation of the various "explanatory statements" passed since 1864 into one coherent statement of the General Synod's doctrinal position as it came to be understood by 1909.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid., p. 115; this motion was made by J. A. Clutz, a leading figure in unity negotiations between the General Council and the General Synod.

DOCTRINAL BASIS

With the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Fathers, the General Synod receives and holds the Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and it receives and holds the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine of our Church as founded upon the word.

The Secondary Symbols

While the General Synod regards the Augsburg Confession as a sufficient and altogether adequate doctrinal basis for the cooperation of Lutheran Synods, it also recognizes the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalkald Articles, the Small Catechism of Luther, the Large Catechism of Luther, and the Formula of Concord as expositions of Lutheran doctrine of great historical and interpretative value, and especially commends the Small Catechism as a book of instruction. (Italics mine.)³⁸

The new Doctrinal Basis and statement on The Secondary Symbols was declared adopted in 1913. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this document. Not only was it the culmination of ninety-seven years of doctrinal development, but it closed the confessional breach between the General Synod and the rest of the Muhlenberg strain of American Lutheranism and made possible the successful reunification of those elements of the General Synod which were estranged in the 1860's. Though in force only five years, the 1913 statement was to

³⁸Constitution of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, As amended and declared adopted at Washington, D.C., 1869, and at Atchison, Kan., 1913, Arts. II, III, Proceedings of the Forty-Sixth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America, In Session at Atchison, Kan., May 14-21, 1913 (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1913), pp. 387-388. Italics indicate words or phrases incorporated into the ULCA doctrinal basis.

live on as the greater part of the 1918 Doctrinal Basis of The United Lutheran Church in America.

The General Council

Unlike the General Synod, whose doctrinal basis went through a period of painstaking development, the General Council was established on a firm doctrinal basis from its inception. Already in 1866, the same year in which the Ministerium of Pennsylvania withdrew from the General Synod and called for the formation of a new union of Lutheran synods, the doctrinal basis of the nascent General Council was established in a collection of theses prepared by Charles Porterfield Krauth entitled Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church Policy.³⁹ In 1867, the year in which the General Council was formally organized, the Fundamental Principles were incorporated into the constitution of the new Lutheran body with the following stipulation:

The Fundamental Articles of Faith and Church Policy shall not be changed, and if it shall be proposed to add any articles to the Constitution, to fix their meaning still more precisely, or secure their object more thoroughly, such Articles shall require the assent of every Synod within the General Council.⁴⁰

Throughout its fifty-one year history there were no changes or additions to the General Council's doctrinal basis.

The Fundamental Principles were drafted at a time when feelings ran deep with regard to the admission of the non-confessional Franckean

³⁹Ochsenford, pp. 135-141; Wolf, Document 63, pp. 143-148.

⁴⁰Constitution of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Art. IV, Sec. II; Ochsenford, p. 172; Wolf, Document 67, p. 152.

Synod into the General Synod and the way in which the Ministerium of Pennsylvania was treated at the 1866 Fort Wayne convention.⁴¹ The Principles, therefore, should be read as a response to what were considered to be abuses in doctrine and policy within the General Synod.⁴²

The Fundamental Principles of Faith (part one of the document) is generally based upon Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, which makes agreement in the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments the basis for true Church unity.⁴³ According to the Principles, that agreement is witnessed to and manifested in two classes of creeds-- general and specific.

The Unity of the Church is witnessed to, and made manifest in, the solemn, public and official Confessions which are set forth, to wit: The generic Unity of the Christian Church in the general Creeds, and the specific Unity of pure parts of the Christian Church in their specific Creeds . . .⁴⁴

For such Confessions to be meaningful witnesses to real doctrinal agreement, the nature of the confessional subscription must be such that it is clear and unambiguous. The Principles attempt to eliminate once and for all the kind of equivocation what had characterized the General

⁴¹Supra, p. 15.

⁴²In accordance with the scope of this study we shall deal only with the doctrinal issue.

⁴³Augsburg Confession, Art. VII, 1, 2; The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 32.

⁴⁴Fundamental Principles of Faith, III; Ochsenford, p. 137; Wolf, Document 63, p. 144.

Synod's confessional subscription in the 1860's. When subscription is made to the Confessions, therefore,

they must be accepted in every statement of doctrine in their own true, native, original and only sense. Those who set them forth and subscribe them, must not only agree to use the same words, but must use and understand those words in one and the same sense.⁴⁵

Repudiated is any scheme to "Americanize" the Confessions as S. S. Schmucker had attempted in his "American Recension" of 1855. Rather, they must be subscribed to in "their own true, native, original and only sense." Repudiated too is the kind of subscription which permits the acceptance of some articles and the rejection of others. To subscribe to a Confession is to subscribe to "every statement of doctrine."

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession, according to the Principles, is by "pre-eminence" the specific confession of faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The acceptance of its doctrine and the avowal of them without equivocation or mental reservation make, mark and identify that Church which alone in the true, original, historical and honest sense is the Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁴⁶

This article seems to echo the Ministerium of Pennsylvania's charge that the Franckean Synod was not and could not be a "regularly

⁴⁵Ibid., IV.

⁴⁶Ibid., VI.

constituted Lutheran Synod"⁴⁷ as long as it did not subscribe to the Augsburg Confession or did so only with equivocation or mental reservation.

Having established the above prior premises, the Fundamental Principles drew a conclusion that might well be termed the General Council's "Principle of Church Fellowship."

The only churches, therefore, in any land which are properly in the Unity of that Communion, and by consequence entitled to its name, Evangelical Lutheran, are those which sincerely hold and truthfully confess the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. (Italics mine.)⁴⁸

The last two sections of the Fundamental Principles of Faith, Articles VII and IX, constitute what is more typically thought of as a doctrinal basis, that is, these articles constitute the General Council's formal subscription to the Confessions and are a statement as to how the General Council understands that subscription. Because of the crucial importance of these two articles, we quote them in full.

We accept and acknowledge the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession in its original sense as throughout in conformity with the pure truth of which God's Word is the only rule. We accept its statements of truth as in perfect accordance with the Canonical Scriptures: we reject the errors it

⁴⁷This phrase appears in the 1839 and 1864 General Synod constitutional paragraph (Art. III, Sec. III) dealing with membership eligibility. The Ministerium of Pennsylvania had charged that the Franckean Synod was not a "regularly constituted Lutheran Synod" and its admission to the General Synod, therefore, was unconstitutional. See Jacobs, A History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, IV, 458-459.

⁴⁸Fundamental Principles of Faith, VII; Ochsensford, p. 138; Wolf, Document 63, p. 145. Italics indicate words or phrases incorporated into the ULCA doctrinal basis.

condemns, and believe that all which it commits to the liberty of the Church of right belongs to that liberty.

In thus formally accepting and acknowledging the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, we declare our conviction that the other Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, inasmuch as they set forth none other than its system of doctrine, by their intrinsic excellence, by the great and necessary ends for which they were prepared, by their historical position, and by the general judgment of the Church, are these: The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord, all of which are, with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, in the perfect harmony of one and the same scriptural faith. (Italics mine.)⁴⁹

Even if it is granted that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is the "specific confession" of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the issue remains--what of the other Symbols in the Book of Concord of 1580? The Principles assert that these other Symbols are also "Confessions" because they: (1) present the same doctrine; (2) are excellent in and of themselves; (3) were originally prepared and used as "confessions" of the faith of the Lutheran cause; (4) are included in the Book of Concord; and (5) are generally held by Lutherans. Having said that much, the Principles assert what they mean when they subscribe to these Confessions, namely, that they too, like the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, are in conformity with the Word of God and are "in the perfect harmony of one and the same scriptural faith."

⁴⁹Ibid., VIII, IX. Italics indicate words or phrases incorporated into the ULCA doctrinal basis.

In view of the General Synod Hagerstown principle of "nothing more, nothing less"⁵⁰ than the Augsburg Confession as a sufficient confessional subscription, we might do well to pause here and ask the question: For the General Council--are the "other Confessions" beyond the Augustana an essential part of the confessional subscription of authentic Lutheranism? On the basis of Article VI of the Fundamental Principles,⁵¹ which identifies the true Evangelical Lutheran Church as that Church which sincerely subscribes to the Augsburg Confession (alone), the answer must be, NO. Then what is the significance of the General Council's subscription to the "other Confessions?" Simply this--they present the same system of doctrine as is found in the Augsburg Confession and are, therefore, not only a fuller development of the doctrines of the Augustana, but they are a standard for the proper interpretation of those doctrines as well.⁵² In the opinion of

⁵⁰Supra, pp. 18-19.

⁵¹Supra, p. 27.

⁵²This is really what was at issue in the debate between the General Synod and the General Council over the proper role of the "other Confessions" or "Secondary Symbols." The General Synod staunchly adhered to the principle which held the Augustana to be the only essential mark and standard of authentic Lutheranism. As is asserted above, Article VI of the Principles says essentially the same thing. What the General Council was getting at was the interpretative value of the "other Confessions" for a proper understanding of the pre-eminent Augsburg Confession. For the General Synod's position, see James W. Richard, The Confessional History of the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1909); for the General Council's position, see Theodore E. Schmauk, The Confessional Principle and the Confessions of the Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1911).

this writer, the Fundamental Principles of Faith do not insist upon a confessional subscription beyond the Augsburg Confession, but they do insist upon a subscription to the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession as these doctrines are interpreted and developed in the "other Confessions." In this sense the 1913 General Synod concept of "Secondary Symbols" as "expositions of Lutheran doctrine of great historical and interpretative value"⁵³ is not inimical to the letter and spirit of the Fundamental Principles of the General Council. We will have more to say about this problem when we discuss the 1918 Doctrinal Basis of the ULCA

While the Fundamental Principles only make passing reference to the "general creeds,"⁵⁴ it should not be supposed that they did not form an integral part of the confessional subscription of the General Council. The recommended constitution for congregations adopted by the General Council in 1880 provided that pastors be required at their ordination and installation to subscribe to

the Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, namely: the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord, and solemnly promise to perform the duties of his office in conformity with the same, as a pure and correct presentation of the doctrine of Holy Scripture.⁵⁵

⁵³Supra, p. 23.

⁵⁴Supra, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Constitution Recommended for Adoption by Evangelical Lutheran Congregations, Art. IV, 3; Ochsenford, p. 198; cf. "The Ordination of Ministers," Church Book for the Use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations, By Authority of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran

In 1907, in addition to its "Theses on the Relation of the General Council to the General Synod,"⁵⁶ the General Council adopted a statement entitled "Theses on the Holy Scriptures the Rule of Faith and Life."⁵⁷ These Theses purported to answer the "question concerning the authority of the Word of God [which is] chief among the questions of modern theology."⁵⁸ The study is divided into four sections dealing with: (1) biblical inspiration; (2) biblical criticism; (3) the Bible as source and norm of doctrine; and (4) the Bible as source and norm of ethical conduct.

Section 1, "The Inspired Word," suggests three general views of biblical inspiration: (a) negative criticism, which treats the Bible as it would any other book and denies it any divine causation; (b) the doctrines of Quenstedt and Calovius, which developed a "mechanical theory" of inspiration; and (c) the Old Lutheran view, which did not develop a "fixed theory," but nonetheless assumed "the fact of inspiration."⁵⁹

The Theses rejected both negative criticism and mechanical inspiration as two unacceptable extremes and endorsed instead what it

Church in North America (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1915), pp. 423-424. A model constitution for district Synods of the General Council was never issued.

⁵⁶The pertinent sections of which have already been discussed, Supra, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁷Ochsenford, pp. 398-405.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 398.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 399.

understood as the Old Lutheran view "from Luther to Gerhard inclusive," namely, "that it is God's Word though in human form, and that it presents the believer with objective certainty."⁶⁰ Thus, "the Lutheran Church . . . has from the outset insisted that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God, because of its divine inspiration."⁶¹ Moreover, the Theses held that the Lutheran Confessions "presuppose inspiration," but, "they formulate no theory."⁶²

According to the Theses, the "strictly Lutheran view" includes three elements: (1) the divine impulse for writing, which the Theses accept as proven from Scripture itself;⁶³ (2) the divine suggestion of the facts, which is likewise accepted as a "natural conclusion from the passages referred to";⁶⁴ and (3) the divine suggestion of the words, which the Theses accept, but in a manner less convincing than the former two points, concluding only that, "A certain suggestion of words must be assumed from the manner in which, e. g. Paul builds up an argument upon a single word as in Gal. 3:16, and from the argument in 1 Cor. 2:13."⁶⁵

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 398.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 399.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 399-400.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 400.

⁶⁵Ibid.

The major thrust of Section 1 of the Theses is its firm stand against both negative criticism and mechanical inspiration.

the inspiration cannot be only a mechanical one, reducing the operation to a mere dictation of the matter and the holy writers to mere "clerks, secretaries and stenographers of the Holy Spirit," nor can it be a mere literary exaltation, or an activity of the Holy Spirit which merely suggests or informs in parts and in other parts only assists, nor can it be possible to distinguish between things inspired and things uninspired.⁶⁶

The Theses go on to define more precisely the position that they find acceptable.

The spiritual life of the holy writers is dynamically interpenetrated by the Holy Spirit. He controls them so completely that by His impulse and power He compels them to record what is His will to have recorded, and in such manner that the corresponding expression occurs to them spontaneously. As thought and speech cannot be separated, the correct and exact expression of the thought will call for the proper word in which to clothe it.⁶⁷

Section 2 of the Theses, "Criticism," vigorously argues for the "doctrine of the integrity of the Bible," that is, "Holding to the fact that the divine Providence gave the inspired Word, she [that is, the Church] maintains that the same also preserved it incorrupt."⁶⁸

Textual errors of reproduction have occurred through the centuries of transmission, but "no passage is so corrupt that it cannot be restored by criticism."⁶⁹ On this basis a constructive textual criticism which

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 401.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 401.

attempts to sift out errors and restore the original text is heartily approved. Repudiated, however, is negative or destructive criticism, which proceeding from rationalistic or pantheistic presuppositions denies the inspiration of Scripture in any form and holds that the Bible is a "profane book . . . to be examined by the same methods as any other book."⁷⁰

The section concludes with a bitter renunciation of "this destructive criticism" and notes that it

is everywhere in evidence and insidiously creeping in at every hand in books and ephemeral literature, [this kind of criticism] the Church emphatically repudiates because of the false premises from which it starts and of the subversive conclusions to which it leads.⁷¹

Section 3, "The Rule of Faith," asserts that the Holy Scriptures are both source and norm of all doctrine. In drawing doctrine from the Scriptures, "the literal sense of the Word" is to be accepted "in opposition to all fanciful interpretations."⁷² This operation assumes the principle that "in all matters pertaining unto salvation the Holy Scriptures are clear, perspicuous and self-explanatory . . ."⁷³

Proceeding from the prominent and clear passages, the whole Bible is apprehended according to the analogy of faith. Thus, "It is the glory of Lutheran doctrine that it is based upon the whole Scriptures

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 402.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 403.

⁷³Ibid.

and accepts nothing unless it be in harmony with the general truth proclaimed by the Bible."⁷⁴

The last section, "The Rule and Source of Life," is an apology for the use of the Scriptures as a deposit of ethical instruction. The Law and the Gospel are to be applied to modern problems, which "would all find a readier and safer solution if men made the Word their controlling force."⁷⁵

As this brief survey of the doctrinal basis and declarations of the General Council suggest, the position of the General Council on the Word and the Confessions was significantly more static than that of the General Synod. When the negotiations which led to the 1918 ULCA merger began, the General Council occupied a position that was essentially the same as the one she had adopted in 1867.

The United Synod in the South

In 1863 five Southern synods, the Synod of North Carolina, the Synod of South Carolina and Adjacent States, the Synod of Virginia, the Synod of Southwestern Virginia and the Georgia Synod, agreed by the General Synod's 1862 resolutions condemning the Southern secession⁷⁶

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 404.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶For a full text of these harshly worded resolutions, which were offered by Wm. A. Passavant as chairman of the Committee on the State of the Country, see Proceedings of the Twentieth Convention of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States, Assembled at Lancaster, Pa., May, 1862 (Gettysburg: H. C. Neinstedt, 1862), pp. 29-32; Wolf, Document 47, pp. 119-120.

and physically and politically cut off from the North, withdrew from the General Synod and formed The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America. Inasmuch as the 1863 schism was of a political and not a doctrinal nature, it is not surprising that the doctrinal basis of the General Synod in the Confederate States should simply reflect doctrinal conditions as they had existed in the General Synod before the Civil War. The 1863 doctrinal basis is as follows:

We receive and hold that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

We likewise hold that the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Augsburg Confession, contain the fundamental doctrines of the Sacred Scriptures, and we receive and adopt them as the exponents of our faith.

Inasmuch as there has always been, and still is, a difference of construction among us with regard to several articles of the Augsburg Confession; therefore, we, acting in conformity with the spirit and time-honored usage of our Church, hereby affirm that we allow full and free exercise of private judgment in regard to those articles.⁷⁷

Note the use of the familiar General Synod phrase "fundamental doctrines" and the explicit reservation clause that permits the "full and free exercise of private judgment" with regard to certain disputed articles in the Augustana.

With the Civil War ended and the union of the States restored, the General Synod in the former Confederate States was faced with the

⁷⁷The Constitution of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America, Art. II, Secs. 1-3; Wolf, Document 51, p. 123.

question as to whether it should maintain a separate organizational existence or return to pre-war patterns and rejoin the General Synod in the North. It was a difficult decision, for in a real sense there was no going back to pre-war conditions for anyone connected with the General Synod. Too much had happened in the years 1864-1866 to make a simple reunion of synods possible. Instead of one great union of Lutheran synods as there had been before the war, there were now two--the General Synod and the nascent General Council. While the war between the states was just ending, the ecclesiastical civil war between the General Synod and the General Council was just getting underway. In an attempt to avoid being embroiled in the General Synod--General Council conflict, the southern synods which had separated from the General Synod during the Civil war maintained their separation and organized the Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America.⁷⁸

In 1866, the same year in which the name of the union of Southern synods was changed from The General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Confederate States of America to The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America, the constitution was revised by omitting the reservation paragraph which permitted private judgment in

⁷⁸Edward T. Horn, "The United Synod in the South," The Distinctive Doctrines and Usages of the General Bodies of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1893), pp. 171-172; cf. Charles Wm. Heathcote, The Lutheran Church and the Civil War (New York: Fleming H. Revel Co., 1919), pp. 127-132; and J. L. Neve, History of the Lutheran Church in America (3rd revised edition; Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), pp. 142-144.

interpreting certain articles of the Augsburg Confession.⁷⁹ Six years later it passed a resolution affirming its unequivocal adherence to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession stating that The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America

was designed to nurture and secure unity "in the one true faith." To promote this end it has placed itself unequivocally upon the Ecumenical Creeds and the Augsburg Confession, "in its true native and original sense."⁸⁰

The latter phrase is taken from Article IV of the Fundamental Principles of Faith of the General Council.

In 1876 the name of The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod in North America was changed to The Evangelical Lutheran General Synod South. Four years later the General Synod South took a further step in the direction of a confessional position more closely approximating that of the General Council when it adopted a statement "concerning our estimation of the symbols adopted subsequently to the Augsburg Confession." The statement began, "we acknowledge said additional testimonies as in accord with an unfolding of the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession . . ."⁸¹ The statement goes on to say that both these "additional testimonies" and the Augsburg Confession itself "have not the authority of a judge, for this honor belongs to Sacred Scripture alone; but that they only bear witness to our holy faith . . ."⁸² and

⁷⁹Neve, History of the Lutheran Church in America, p. 148.

⁸⁰Quoted in ibid.

⁸¹Quoted by Horn, p. 174.

⁸²Ibid.

are to be held and acknowledged in that manner which the Formula of Concord directs, namely, as a witness to how "the Holy Scriptures were understood and set forth in all articles contested in the Church of God by teachers who then lived."⁸³

As wider confessional consensus was achieved, prospects for a larger fellowship of Lutheran Southern synods improved. Finally on November 12 and 13, 1884, delegates from the Synods of North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Virginia, Southwestern Virginia, Georgia and the Holston Synod came together for a Diet at Salisbury, North Carolina, and agreed upon a doctrinal basis to be used as the foundation for the organic union of the participating synods. This agreement was all the more significant because of the participation of the traditionally confessional Tennessee Synod, which had never joined the General Synod and was one of the first Lutheran bodies to criticize it for its weak confessional subscription. The full text of the doctrinal basis agreed upon at Salisbury in 1884 is as follows:

The Confessional Basis

1. The Holy Scriptures, the Inspired Writings of the Old and New Testaments, the only standard of doctrine and church discipline.
2. As a true and faithful exhibition of the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures in regard to matters of faith and practice, the three ancient symbols, the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, and the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of Faith. Also the other Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, viz.: the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Smaller and Larger Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord,

⁸³Ibid.

consisting of the Epitome and Full Declaration, as they are set forth, defined and published in the Christian Book of Concord, or the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church, published in the year 1580 (see the Epitome, of the Compendious Rule and Standard, and the Solida Declaratio, Preface), as true and Scriptural developments of the doctrines taught in the Augsburg Confession, and in the perfect harmony of one and the same pure, Scriptural faith.⁸⁴ (Italics mine.)

The Confessional Basis is largely a reshaping of the doctrinal basis of the Tennessee Synod, the most notable adaptation being the addition of the General Council Fundamental Principles phrase, "in the perfect harmony of one and the same pure, Scriptural faith."

The Salisbury agreement became part of the 1886 constitution of the United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South and united all of the participating synods present at the Salisbury Diet with the addition of the Mississippi Synod, which sent delegates to the constituting convention. In the thirty-two years in which the United Synod in the South constitution was in effect, no changes or additions were made in its Confessional Basis.

The United Synod in the South experienced definite doctrinal development between the years 1863 and 1884, but it demonstrated a high regard for the Lutheran Confessions at a much faster pace than did the General Synod in the North. A full twenty-five years before the General Synod was willing even to talk about the role of "secondary

⁸⁴Basis for a More General Union Among the Evangelical Lutheran Synods in the South, I, The Confessional Basis; Wolf, Document 57, pp. 132-133. Italics indicate words or phrases incorporated into the ULCA doctrinal basis.

symbols" the United Synod in the South had with the General Council acknowledged all of the Confessions as "in perfect harmony of one and the same pure, Scriptural faith." Long before the ULCA merger was underway, the United Synod in the South stood very close to the doctrinal position of the General Council on the Word and the Confessions.

With our survey of the doctrinal development of the three predecessor bodies to the ULCA complete, we now turn to an examination of the Doctrinal Basis of The United Lutheran Church in America and the various doctrinal declarations which it made during its forty-four year existence.

CHAPTER III

THE UNITED LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1918-1962

After a series of Free Lutheran Diets, General Conferences and numerous cooperative projects, a rapprochement between the three alienated branches of the Muhlenberg strain resulted in their merger into the United Lutheran Church in America in 1918.¹ All three bodies came into the merger intact except for the loss of the Augustana Synod, which had been a member of the General Council until she withdrew in 1918.

The most formidable barrier to reunion and the major source of strife between the General Council and the General Synod had been the question as to what is the nature and extent of confessional subscription necessary for an adequate Lutheran doctrinal basis. As we have shown above, the General Synod clung to the 1895 "nothing more, nothing less" principle in insisting that the Augsburg Confession alone was a sufficient confessional subscription. The General Council, while not rejecting this principle out of hand, insisted that the other Confessions, in that they contained the same system of doctrine and were in fact

¹The First Free Lutheran Diet was held in 1877; the Common Service was published in 1888; General Conferences met in 1898, 1902, and 1904. For a history of the merger proceedings, see J. A. Clutz, "The United Lutheran Church in America," The Lutheran Quarterly, XLIX (January and July 1919), 1-22, 313-329; Cf. Theodore E. Schmauk, "Historical and Explanatory Report on the Merger," Minutes of the First Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, New York City, November 14-18, 1918 (no imprint), pp. 37-42.

nothing more than a further development of the Scriptural doctrines of the Augustana, should also be acknowledged as "in the perfect harmony of one and the same Scriptural faith."² The General Council feared that if subscription was limited to the Augustana alone, the interpretation of the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession would be, as it had been in the early years of the General Synod, far from the Confession's "own true, native, original and only sense."³

The adoption of the 1913 General Synod Doctrinal Basis with its subscription to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as "a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine of our Church as founded upon the word"⁴ and its recognition of the "Secondary Symbols" as "expositions of Lutheran doctrine of great historical and interpretative value"⁵ virtually closed the gap between the General Synod and the General Council on the question of confessional subscription.⁶ Four years later on the occasion of the joint celebration of the quadricentennial of the Reformation, a call for the organic union of the General Synod, General Council and the United Synod in the South elicited an immediate positive response.

²Fundamental Principles, X; Supra, p. 28.

³Fundamental Principles, IV; Supra, p. 26.

⁴Fundamental Principles, II; Supra, p. 23.

⁵Fundamental Principles, III; Supra, p. 23.

⁶The United Synod in the South had already adopted the General Council position in 1886.

In preparation for the merger Henry Eyster Jacobs, formerly a professor at the General Synod Gettysburg College and later successor to Charles Porterfield Krauth at the General Council Philadelphia Seminary, drafted a proposed doctrinal basis for the new united Lutheran body. To his surprise and great satisfaction, the Joint Committee accepted the new doctrinal basis without a dissenting voice or vote.⁷ The full text of the 1918 Doctrinal Basis is as follows:⁸

Doctrinal Basis

Section 1. The United Lutheran Church in America receives and holds the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the INSPIRED Word of God, and as the only infallible rule and STANDARD of faith and practice, according to which all doctrines and teachers are to be judged.

Section 2. The United Lutheran Church in America accepts the three ecumenical creeds: namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as important testimonies drawn from the Holy Scriptures, and rejects all errors which they condemn.

Section 3. The United Lutheran Church in America receives and holds the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, founded upon the

⁷J. A. Clutz, secretary to the Joint Committee reported that there was more discussion about the name of the new Lutheran body than there was about Jacobs' proposed doctrinal basis. See Clutz, XLIX, 321.

⁸To visually demonstrate the various sources that stand behind the 1918 Doctrinal Basis, we shall underline with an unbroken line those words and phrases which were drawn from the 1913 General Synod Doctrinal Basis. A broken line will indicate those words and phrases drawn from the General Council doctrinal basis of 1867. Words drawn from the UNITED SYNOD IN THE SOUTH'S Confessional Basis of 1886 will be rendered in all capital letters. All other words and phrases were newly drafted for the 1918 Doctrinal Basis.

Word of God; and acknowledges all churches that sincerely hold and faithfully confess the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confessions to be entitled to the name of Evangelical Lutheran.

Section 4. The United Lutheran Church in America recognizes the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Large and Small Catechisms of Luther, and the Formula of Concord, as in the harmony of one and the same PURE Scriptural faith.⁹

While the Doctrinal Basis of 1918 has the appearance and flow of an organic whole, it is actually a skillful collage of the doctrinal articles of the three predecessor bodies. Section 1 is taken directly from the General Synod Doctrinal Basis of 1913, with the exception of the words "inspired" and "standard" which are drawn from the Confessional Basis of 1886 of the United Synod in the South. The last phrase of section 1 is not found in any of the predecessor documents and appears to have been taken from the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 17.¹⁰ Section 2 was a wholly new composition. The three ecumenical creeds were never an object of controversy. Section 3 is a combination of the terminology used by both the General Synod and the General Council in describing the nature of their subscription to the Augsburg Confession. The first phrase is wholly drawn from the General Synod 1913 Doctrinal Basis and characterizes the Unaltered Augsburg Confession as "a correct exhibition of the faith and doctrine . . .

⁹Constitution of the United Lutheran Church in America, Art. II, Secs. 1-4, Minutes of the First Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, New York City, November 14-18, 1918, p. 63; R. C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 119, p. 273.

¹⁰The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 507.

founded upon the Word." The second phrase of section 3 is drawn from the General Council 1867 Fundamental Principles and grants the name "Evangelical Lutheran" to those churches "that sincerely hold and faithfully [the Fundamental Principles had "truthfully" here] confess the doctrines of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession." Section 4 is of some importance because it dealt with the whole problem of the "Secondary Symbols." The matter was tactfully settled by using the General Synod term "recognize" to characterize the new church body's approach to the symbols in question while at the same time using the General Council phrase "as in the harmony of the one and the same [the Confessional Basis of the United Synod in the South of 1866 added "pure"] Scriptural Faith" to describe the nature of that recognition.

Was the 1918 Doctrinal Basis a compromise? In spite of the fact that it was a "scissors and paste" production, it is the opinion of this writer that the 1918 statement was simply attempting to capitalize on the historical development that had brought the three Lutheran groups to a point of confessional convergence. None of the cherished principles of the participating groups was sacrificed or even compromised. Section 3 establishes the principle that a faithful and sincere acceptance of the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession is a sufficient confessional subscription "to be entitled to the name of Evangelical Lutheran." This assertion agrees completely with both the General Synod 1895 Hagerstown Resolution and the General Council 1867 Fundamental Principles of Faith (Article VIII). Section 4 moves beyond the Augsburg Confession as a sufficient confessional subscription to what the General Synod called the "Secondary Symbols" and what

the General Council called the "other Confessions." Without in any way implying that these additional Symbols are essential to an adequate Lutheran doctrinal basis, section 4 affirms that they are with the Augsburg Confession "in the harmony of one and the same pure Scriptural faith." This assertion concurs with the General Council Fundamental Principles of Faith (Article IX) without in any way compromising the General Synod "nothing more, nothing less" principle of 1895. In thus establishing both the sufficiency of the Augsburg Confession as a confessional subscription and the role of the other Confessions as one with it in pure Scriptural faith, the 1918 Doctrinal Basis proved satisfactory to all parties to the merger.

Throughout its forty-four year history the ULCA issued several resolutions or declarations that have a direct bearing on our present study. The first of these was passed at the ULCA's second biennial convention in Washington, D. C., in 1920. Operating from the principle established in section 3 of the Doctrinal Basis as to what constitutes an authentic Evangelical Lutheran Church, the ULCA stated its position on its relationship to other Lutheran bodies which subscribe to the Confessions in these terms:

Concerning the Relation
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Bodies
to One Another

In the case of those Church Bodies calling themselves Evangelical Lutheran, and subscribing the Confessions which have always been regarded as the standards of Evangelical Lutheran doctrine, The United Lutheran Church

in America recognizes no doctrinal reason against complete cooperation and organic union with such bodies.¹¹

This statement has come to be called the "Washington Declaration" and was the principle which the ULCA followed throughout its existence in dealing with other Lutheran groups in the United States.

In 1934 the ULCA passed a resolution in response to numerous memorials calling for more vigorous action on the question of American Lutheran unity. Without changing the position that it had adopted at Washington in 1920, the "Savannah Resolution" of 1934 explains that position in greater detail.

We recognize as Evangelical Lutheran all Christian groups which accept the Holy Scriptures as the only rule and standard for faith and life, by which all doctrines are to be judged, and who sincerely receive the historic confessions of the Lutheran Church (especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession) "as a witness of the truth and a presentation of the correct understanding of our predecessors" (Formula of Concord, Part II, Introd.; ed. Jacobs, p. 538); and we set up no other standards or tests of Lutheranism apart from them or alongside of them.

We believe that these Confessions are to be interpreted in their historical context, not as a law or a system of theology, but as "a witness and declaration of faith as to how the Holy Scriptures were understood and explained on the matters in controversy within the Church of God by those who then lived" (Formula of Concord, Part I, Introd.; ed. Jacobs, p. 492).

Inasmuch as our now separated Lutheran church bodies all subscribe these same Confessions, it is our sincere

¹¹"Declaration of Principles Concerning the Church and Its External Relationships," Minutes of the Second Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Washington, D. C., October 19-27, 1920 (no imprint), p. 96; Wolf, Document 148, p. 350.

belief that we already possess a firm basis on which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America and that there is no doctrinal reason why such a union should not come to pass.¹²

A careful reading of the "Savannah Resolution" is essential if the confessional spirit of the ULCA is to be properly discerned. In the first place, it restates section 3 of the 1918 Doctrinal Basis and insists that no barrier to Lutheran church union exists between Lutheran bodies that accept the Holy Scriptures as "the only rule for faith and life," and sincerely subscribe to at least the Augsburg Confession. Note, however, that there are few details given as to what the ULCA understands the Holy Scriptures to be. Not even the adjective "inspired" (though it is used in the 1918 Doctrinal Basis) is found in the 1934 statement. The ULCA's subscription to the Confessions is more carefully delineated. First, they are to be "interpreted in their historical context . . ." Presumably this means that they are to be read as sixteenth century documents, which were drafted for certain specific reasons and situations. On the face of it nothing new is being said that was not already implicit in the Fundamental Principles (Article IV) phrase "in their own true, native, original and only sense." The resolution goes on, however, to define more precisely what is meant by an interpretation in their historical context, namely, "not as a law or system of theology," but as a witness and confession as to how the Reformers understood the Scriptures on

¹²Minutes of the Ninth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Savannah, Georgia, October 17-24, 1934 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House), p. 416; Wolf, Document 149, p. 356.

those points of doctrine in dispute at the time of the Reformation. The authority of the Confessions is strictly limited, therefore, by their historical purpose and situation. To use the Confessions as an absolute "law" or timeless summa theologica apart from their historical purpose is to misuse them. To support this claim the resolution quotes the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm, 8.¹³ Finally, the resolution renews the principle laid down in 1920 at Washington to the effect that all Lutheran bodies which subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions already possess a sufficient doctrinal basis for organic union. Moreover, "no other standards or tests of Lutheranism apart from them or alongside of them" will be asked or given.

If the ULCA was unwilling to be explicit about what it understood the Word of God to be in 1934, that deficiency was more than made up for at its 1938 Baltimore convention. The "Baltimore Declaration" on The Word of God and the Scriptures was drawn up by a committee of eleven theological professors for the expressed purpose of explaining and clarifying the ULCA's position on such important topics as biblical inspiration and the manner in which the Scriptures can be properly called the Word of God. The Declaration affirms that the Scriptures and

¹³"Other symbols and other writings are not judges like Holy Scripture, but merely witnesses and expositions of the faith, setting forth how at various times the Holy Scriptures were understood in the church of God by contemporaries with reference to controverted articles, and how contrary teachings were rejected and condemned." The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert, p. 465.

the Confessions use the phrase "Word of God" in more than one sense. In its most proper sense the Word of God is the Gospel, that is, "the message concerning Jesus Christ . . ."14

We believe that in and through this Gospel the Holy Spirit comes to men, awakening and strengthening their faith, and leading them into lives of holiness. . . . For this reason we call the Word of God, or the Gospel, a means of grace.¹⁵

In a wider sense the Word of God is the whole revelation of God in human history from its beginning to its culmination in Jesus Christ; "this revelation was given to men chosen and inspired by God Himself to interpret the historical events in which God made Himself known."¹⁶

According to the Baltimore Declaration, this whole revelation of God "is faithfully recorded and preserved in the Holy Scriptures, through which it alone comes down to us."¹⁷ The Declaration does not hesitate to use the adjective "infallible" with reference to the Scriptures, but does so with the stipulation that it refers to only those "matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation."¹⁸ It is because God is revealed in the Scriptures and continues to reveal

¹⁴"The Word of God and the Scriptures," Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, Baltimore, Maryland, October 5-12, 1938 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.), p. 473; Wolf, Document 150, p. 357.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

himself there that the Scriptures themselves, in the third sense of the term, may be called the Word of God.

The Declaration affirms the unity of Scripture and sees its center in Jesus Christ, "Therefore we believe that the whole body of the Scriptures in all its parts is the Word of God."¹⁹ While there may appear to be more or less important sections of Scripture, "Nevertheless, every portion of the Scripture has its own place in God's total revelation of Himself."²⁰

Perhaps the most important part of the Baltimore Declaration dealt with the whole question of biblical inspiration.

We believe that the whole body of the Scriptures is inspired by God.

God's saving truth, which comes to us through the Scriptures, and not otherwise, is God's own revelation of Himself. The writers of the Scriptures have been His agents in its transmission. The power to receive and record it has been bestowed by Him. The act of God, by which this power was conferred, we call by the Scriptural name of inspiration (II Tim. 3:16).²¹

Having thus generally defined inspiration, the Declaration refuses to be more specific.

We do not venture to define the mode or manner of this inspiration, since God's ways of using human instruments are past our finding out. But we accept the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact of which our faith in God, through Christ, assures us, and this assurance is supported by words of Scripture

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 474.

²¹Ibid.

in which the fact of inspiration is asserted or implied (I Cor. 2:12; II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21).²²

The Baltimore Declaration leaves the question of inspiration affirming the fact, but refusing to assert the mode.

In spite of the fact that both Washington and Savannah had rejected the principle that extra-confessional tests of doctrinal agreement were necessary for Lutheran church union, the ULCA violated its position and entered into an extra-confessional doctrinal agreement with the American Lutheran Church in 1940 called the "Pittsburg Agreement." The ULCA had hoped that this would satisfy the ALC as to the Lutheran orthodoxy of the United Lutheran Church, but the entire project proved to be an abysmal failure.²³

The Pittsburg Agreement consisted of three articles. The first dealt with the lodge issue and admonished all Pastors and laymen associated with "organizations injurious to the Christian faith"²⁴ to sever their connection with all such organizations. The second article condemned what is called "indiscriminate altar and pulpit fellowship."²⁵

²²Ibid.

²³For a contemporary commentary on the whole question from the point of view of the ULCA, see H. C. Alleman, "The Pittsburg Agreement," The Lutheran Church Quarterly, XIII, 4 (October 1940), 343-359.

²⁴Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Omaha, Nebraska, October 9-16, 1940 (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.), p. 264; Wolf, Document 157, p. 378. The phrase "organizations injurious to the Christian faith" originated with the 1920 Washington Declaration.

²⁵Ibid.

The third and by far the longest article dealt with the Bible. Much of the reasoning and sometimes the very language of the Baltimore Declaration was incorporated into this third article. The Pittsburg Agreement, however, goes further than did Baltimore in discussing the inspiration of Scripture.

by virtue of a unique operation of the Holy Spirit (II Tim. 3:16; II Peter 1:21) by which He supplied to the Holy Writers content and fitting word (II Peter 1:21; I Cor. 2:12,13) the separate books of the Bible are related to one another, and, taken together, constitute a complete, errorless, unbreakable whole of which Christ is the center (John 10:35). They are rightly called the Word of God. This unique operation of the Holy Spirit upon the writers is named inspiration. We do not venture to define its mode or manner, but accept it as a fact.²⁶

The Pittsburg Agreement articles were hotly debated on the floor of the 1940 ULCA convention. It is impossible to be certain, but it appears that most of the opposition to the Pittsburg Agreement stemmed from concern over articles 1 and 2 dealing with the lodge and pulpit and altar fellowship, respectively. In an effort to reassure the delegates and restore calm to the convention, President F. H. Knubel issued a statement in which he interpreted articles 1 and 2 as "Christian counsels for conscientious consideration by all," and article 3 as NOT "being contrary in any sense to the positions set forth in the Baltimore Declaration of 1938."²⁷ The convention was satisfied,

²⁶Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Omaha, Nebraska, October 9-16, 1940, p. 264; Wolf, Document 157, p. 379.

²⁷Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, Omaha, Nebraska, October 9-16, 1940, p. 565.

but the American Lutheran Church was not. No altar and pulpit fellowship was declared on the basis of the 1940 Pittsburg Agreement.

After 1940, and seemingly as a result of that disastrous attempt to enter into extra-confessional doctrinal agreements, the United Lutheran Church in America issued no new declarations of a doctrinal nature. For the next twenty-two years it stood firmly on the principle set down at Savannah in 1934, namely, that "no other standards or tests of Lutheranism apart from them [that is, the Confessions] or alongside of them" shall be asked or given as a prelude to Lutheran church union.

CHAPTER IV

THE AUGUSTANA EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1860-1962

The original elements of what later became the Augustana Synod were drawn from the Scandinavian immigrants who had come to the Midwest in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1851 a small band of Swedish and Norwegian congregations joined together with other Lutherans to organize the Synod of Northern Illinois, but the Scandinavians joined only with the expressed stipulation that the minutes record the doctrinal position of their churches:

We adopt these principles: that the Holy Scriptures, The Old and New Testaments, are the inspired Word of God; that it is of the highest authority, and contains a sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice for mankind, so that what is not contained therein, and cannot be proved thereby, is not required to be believed or practiced to salvation; that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule whereby to test and decide all controversies, opinions and discussions in religious matters, and that no form of tradition is adopted or maintained that is contrary to the Scriptures; that Symbols, resolutions of Synods, and human opinions are maintained only so far as they agree with the Word of God; and finally, that the symbolical books of the Lutheran Church contain a correct summary and exposition of the divine word, wherefore we declare and adopt them as the foundation of our faith and doctrine, next to the Holy Scripture.¹

In assessing this doctrinal article it would be a mistake to emphasize the "only so far as" or quatenus clause, especially since it is clearly

¹Synod of Northern Illinois, Minutes, 1851, p. 5, quoted by Oscar N. Olson, The Augustana Lutheran Church in America: Pioneer Period, 1846-1860 (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1950), pp. 244-245.

stated that the Lutheran Confessions, "contain a correct summary and exposition of the divine word." The really important thrust of this statement is its deliberate contrast to the doctrinal article of the Synod of Northern Illinois, which held that "This Synod regards the Word of God as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the Augsburg Confession as containing a summary of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion, mainly correct."² The Scandinavian doctrinal position clearly rejected the "mainly correct" clause and substituted the unequivocal phrase "correct summary and exposition." In the context of American Lutheranism at the middle of the nineteenth century, the Scandinavian doctrinal statement placed them squarely within the camp of those who opposed what Esbjorn, an early Augustana leader, characterized as "the loose unconventional spirit prevalent among some of the General Synod's members and churches."³ In view of this confessional attitude, it is not surprising that we find in the 1852 resolution by which the Synod of Northern Illinois joined the General Synod the following reservation clause: "Provided that this union shall not be construed into an acknowledgment on the part of all members of the

² Ibid., p. 244. See also "The Sources of the Original Constitution of the Augustana Synod," edited by Conrad Bergendoff, Augustana Historical Society Publications, edited by O. Fritiof Ander (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Historical Society, 1935), V, 85-106.

³ Quoted by Conrad Bergendoff, "Ecumenical Experiences," Centennial Essays, edited by Emmer Engberg, Conrad Bergendoff, and Edgar M. Carlson (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1960), p. 93.

Synod of Northern Illinois in the precise doctrinal basis of the General Synod."⁴

By 1860 the Scandinavians were ready to establish their own synod. They did so for a number of reasons,⁵ not the least of which was the doctrinal position of the Synod of Northern Illinois. In describing the Scandinavians' experience as a member of that body Eric Norelius wrote:

above all, we were driven to a deeper appreciation than ever before of our evangelical Lutheran confession, since within the Synod of Northern Illinois we saw and experienced the regrettable results of laxity in doctrine and practice, and the impossibility of united cooperation within such an association.⁶

When the new synod was organized in June of 1860, its constitution closely followed the constitution of the Synod of Northern Illinois with only a few significant changes--the most important of which was the doctrinal article.

As a Christian body in general, and particularly as Evangelical Lutheran, this synod acknowledges that the holy Scriptures, the revealed word of God, are the only sufficient and infallible rule and standard of faith and practice, and also retains and confesses not only the three oldest symbols (the Apostolic, the Nicene and the Athanasian), but also the unaltered Augsburg Confession as a short and correct summary of the principal

⁴Synod of Northern Illinois, Minutes, 1852, p. 7, quoted by Olson, Pioneer Period, p. 243.

⁵See G. Everett Arden, Augustana Heritage (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1963), pp. 75-90.

⁶Eric Norelius, De svenska luterska formsamlingarnas och svenkarnas historia i Amerika, I, 814, translated and quoted by Arden, p. 78.

Christian doctrines, understood as developed and explained in the other symbolical books of the Lutheran Church. This article shall never be changed.⁷

A full seven years before the organizing of the General Council, the Augustana Synod established itself firmly on the unaltered Augsburg Confession, "as developed and explained in the other symbolical books" To further underline the new synod's firm adherence to the Augsburg Confession, it was called the Augustana Synod, from the Latin title for the Augsburg Confession--Confessio Augustana.

In founding the Augustana Synod the Scandinavians⁸ also severed their relationship with the General Synod. Thus when the Ministerium of Pennsylvania issued an invitation in 1866 to all Lutheran bodies which held the Augsburg Confession for the purpose of founding a new general organization, the Scandinavians responded favorably. After a brief delay in translating the General Council's Fundamental Principles into Swedish, the Augustana Synod voted full membership in 1870.⁹

The Augustana Synod remained an active and enthusiastic member of the General Council until 1918, when the latter became part of the United Lutheran Church in America. Just why Augustana did not participate in

⁷Constitution of the Scandinavian Ev. Lutheran Augustana Synod of North America, Chapter I, Art. 2, quoted by Bergendoff, "The Sources of the Original Constitution of the Augustana Synod, 1860," p. 89. For a good analysis of the doctrinal article of 1860, see Oscar N. Olson, The Augustana Lutheran Church in America, 1860-1910. The Formative Period (Davenport, Iowa: Arcade Office and Letter Service, 1956), pp. 2-3, 31-33.

⁸The synod was still Swedish and Norwegian. The latter withdrew in 1870.

⁹Olson, The Formative Period, pp. 39-42.

the ULCA merger cannot be stated simply, but it appears that the principal reason was that Augustana was not ready to surrender her emphasis on Swedish culture and tradition. Whatever the reason, it was not of a doctrinal nature.¹⁰

Augustana had no occasion to clarify further her doctrinal position until 1930 when she endorsed the "Minneapolis Theses"¹¹ and the constitution of the newly-formed American Lutheran Conference. The Minneapolis Theses became the doctrinal foundation of the American Lutheran Conference. Together with the Norwegian Lutheran Church, the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church (a 1930 merger of the Lutheran Synod of Buffalo, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Ohio and Other States, and the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Ohio and Other States), the Augustana Synod endorsed the following position on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions:¹²

I The Scriptures

The synods signatory to these Articles of Agreement accept without exception all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole, and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submit to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.

¹⁰Arden, pp. 253-260.

¹¹The Minneapolis Theses were essentially an elaboration and extension of the unofficial "Chicago Theses" of 1919. The text of the latter is found in R. C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 133, pp. 298-301.

¹²For a review of the negotiations and resolutions concerning Augustana's joining the ALConf., see Arden, pp. 277-278.

II
The Lutheran Symbols

1. These synods also, without reservation, accept the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, not insofar as, but because they are the presentation and explanation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a summary of the faith of the Lutheran Church, as this has found expression in response to the exigencies arising from time to time.

.....

2. Adherence to our confessions pertains only to their doctrinal content (i.e., the doctrines declared to be the divine truth and the rejection of opposite doctrines), but to these without exception or limitation in all articles and parts, no matter whether a doctrine is specifically cited as a confession or incidently introduced for the purpose of elucidating or proving some other doctrine. All that pertains to the form of the presentation (historical comments, questions purely exegetical, etc.) is not binding.¹³

In addition to the Minneapolis Theses, the Augustana Synod endorsed the constitution of the American Lutheran Conference which claimed as its "Confession of Faith" the acceptance of:

the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired word of God and the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life; and the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as the true presentation of the pure doctrine of the Word of God and a summary of the faith.¹⁴

¹³Report of the Third General Triennial Convention of the Norwegian Lutheran Church of America, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1926 (Minneapolis, Minnesota: n.d.), pp. 80-81; Wolf, Document 146, pp. 340-341. Cf. Article II, 2 of these Theses with the Savannah Declaration, *Supra*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁴Constitution and By-laws of the American Lutheran Conference, As Finally Adopted by the Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 28-30, 1930 (no imprint); Wolf, Document 147, p. 343.

Augustana's membership in the American Lutheran Conference implied a position on the Word and the Confessions that was in conscious opposition to that espoused by the United Lutheran Church in America.¹⁵

However, it would be a mistake to assume that Augustana's doctrinal position remained static from 1930 to 1962. On the contrary, less than ten years after Augustana joined the Conference a new theological climate, which G. Everett Arden describes as "essentially incompatible with the 'exclusive confessionalism' espoused by the American Lutheran Conference"¹⁶ was beginning to make itself felt in the Augustana Synod. The principal source of this new theological attitude was the Augustana Seminary at Rock Island, Illinois. In 1931, following the death of C. E. Linberg, who had been head of the theological faculty since 1900, four new faculty members were called to the Seminary. Karl E. Mattson, president of Augustana Seminary at the time of the LCA merger and the man who represented the Augustana Synod on the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition, described the changing situation at the Seminary during the thirties this way:

These men belonged to the new generation, and their whole theological orientation was therefore different. The old Scholasticism was no longer in the ascendancy,

¹⁵It should be noted that the Augustana Synod did not participate in the actual drafting of the "Minneapolis Theses" in 1925, though an Augustana committee which examined the Theses in 1929 found them completely acceptable. See Arden, pp. 277-278. Note too, that Augustana's membership in the Conference did not mean the end of active negotiations with the ULCA. See The Report of the Commission on Lutheran Unity, 1930; Wolf, Document 153, p. 373.

¹⁶Arden, p. 283.

since there was a conviction that it did not answer the problems of contemporary man and contemporary society.¹⁷

Combined with this shift in theological outlook and perhaps as a corollary to it, Augustana participated officially in the formation of both the World Council of Churches (1948) and the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America (1950).¹⁸ In the realm of inter-Lutheran relations and church union, Augustana adopted the position that no new doctrinal formulations beyond subscription to the Lutheran Confessions were necessary. In this respect she completely agreed with the United Lutheran Church in America.

In view of Augustana's shift in theological position since 1930 and her firm commitment to full participation in the ecumenical movement, she found herself more in agreement with the confessional and ecumenical positions of the ULCA than with those adopted by her fellow members of the American Lutheran Conference. Thus, when merger negotiations among the members of the Conference made it clear that the

¹⁷Karl E. Mattson, "The Theology of the Augustana Lutheran Church," Centennial Essays, p. 48. For an analysis in detail of the "new outlook" of the faculty at Augustana Seminary, see Arden, pp. 283-297.

¹⁸Augustana was the only member of the American Lutheran Conference to join the WCC or the NCCC. While she was not a member of the Federal Council of Churches, she was associated with the Foreign Missions Conference of North America, the Home Missions Council of North America, the International Council of North America, the International Council of Religious Education, and the United Stewardship Council--agencies which were merged into the NCCC. For Augustana's participation in the ecumenical movement, see Arden, pp. 297-325.

invitation to organic union would not be open to all Lutheran bodies, that it was unlikely that the new church body would participate in the World Council or the National Council of Churches, and that an extra-confessional doctrinal statement was deemed necessary before church union could be accomplished, Augustana withdrew from the Joint Union Committee negotiations and turned to the ULCA in her quest for wider Lutheran unity.¹⁹

¹⁹Augustana withdrew from the JUC negotiations in 1952. Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church Report of the Ninety-third Synod, Des Moines, Iowa, 1952 (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1952), p. 374. For this and the JUC reply see Wolf, Document 214, p. 511. Though no longer a member of the JUC, Augustana remained in the ALConf. until its dissolution in 1954.

CHAPTER V

THE AMERICAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, 1872-1962

On September 7, 1872, two Danish pastors met in Neenah, Wisconsin, and organized the Kirkelig Missionsforening (Church Mission Society). In the first issue of the periodical of the society, Kirkelig Samler (Church Gatherer), the following doctrinal position was established:

The Church Mission Society is founded on the holy catholic (almindelig) church's baptismal covenant and the Holy Scriptures as God's word to the Church, and intends to stand in full agreement with the confessions of our Danish Lutheran Mother Church.¹

The Church Mission Society, renamed the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1874, had within it two distinct groups or parties: the Grundtvigians and the Indre Mission (Inner Mission). Both of these elements had their origin in movements within the European Danish Church.

Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) had an enormous effect on the Danish Lutheran Church in the nineteenth century. On the one hand he battled against Rationalism and sterile Orthodoxy, and on the other he sought to check the subjectivism and separatism that characterized much of Danish Pietism. Eager for revival and renewal in the Danish Church, Grundtvig rejected any stringent emphasis upon "pure doctrine," ecclesiastical office, subjective individualism, or even the Scriptures. Instead he looked to the living community of the

¹Kirkelig Samler (October 1872), p. 1, translated and quoted by Enok Mortensen, The Danish Lutheran Church in America (Philadelphia: Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America, 1967), p. 47.

Church--the historic and confessing fellowship guided by the Holy Spirit. It was for this reason that Grundtvig emphasized the centrality of the Apostles' Creed as the living baptismal covenant of a confessing Christian within the fellowship of the Church. In this manner the Apostles' Creed was considered even more important than the Scriptures, because the Creed, unlike the Bible, constituted the living confession of the faithful in the Church. Johannes Knudsen, a vigorously sympathetic biographer of Grundtvig, characterizes his controversial position on the role of the Scriptures in the Church this way:

He corrected what he believed to be a fundamental mistake of seventeenth-century Lutheran Orthodoxy in making doctrine, and the Bible as the source of doctrine, the primary evidence of Christianity. He replaced the primacy of the Bible with the primacy of the Church. . . . On the other hand, his emphasis upon the historic Church did not carry him into the realm of papacy or Catholicism. It was not the institutionalized Church which was in his mind but the living and confessing Church.²

To use Grundtvig's own words, "We shall not stand on the Bible and search for the faith, but stand on the faith and read the Bible."³ For Grundtvig it was not the Bible which created the Church, but the Church which created the Bible.

At the same time that Grundtvig was active in his attempts at "churchly" reform, revival movements of a decidedly pietistic stamp were afoot in the Danish Lutheran Church. One such movement was "The

²Johannes Knudsen, Danish Rebel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1955), p. 51.

³Quoted by Mortensen, p. 12.

Association for Indre (Inner) Mission in Denmark" founded in 1853.

The avowed purpose of the association was "to arouse life among those who are sleeping in sin, to counteract the formation of sects, and if possible to lead those who have strayed back to the Father's house whence they have drifted."⁴ While sharing many of Grundtvig's concerns, the Indre Mission attempted to emphasize the inward spiritual life almost to the exclusion of the secular and cultural. Moreover, they tended to reject Grundtvig's position on Scripture, taking instead the more traditional approach of viewing Scripture as infallible rule and norm of faith and practice.⁵ Wilhelm Beck, a leading figure in the Inner Mission movement in Denmark in the middle of the nineteenth century wrote of Grundtvig's approach to the Scriptures:

It is to the credit of N. F. S. Grundtvig that at the beginning of the century he raised his mighty voice courageously against the spiritual stagnation which the rationalistic caricature of Christianity and the abuse of the Word of God in the Scriptures had laid upon the people. . . . Later, at the time of his "discovery," many of Grundtvig's earlier beliefs changed. The Holy Scriptures were declared to be "dead words," while only the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the words of institution in Holy Communion were the living word. We who worked with the Inner Mission could not accept these "discoveries."⁶

It was only a matter of time before these two contending parties within the Danish Lutheran Church in America should clash. The occasion

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

⁵Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁶Vilhelm Beck, Memoirs: A Story of Renewal in the Denmark of Kiekegaard and Grundtvig, edited by Paul C. Nyholm, translated by C. A. Stub (Seminar edition; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), pp. 161-162.

was the adoption of a new constitution in 1894. The pietism and doctrinal traditionalism of the Inner Mission faction stood in direct opposition to the culture affirming Grundtvigians. Schism resulted and the pietist element withdrew. This latter group reorganized and eventually became the United Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁷

With the withdrawal of the Inner Mission, the Grundtvigians gained complete control of the Danish Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the spirit of N. F. S. Grundtvig dominated its theology and practice. For this reason great care should be taken in interpreting the AELC's doctrinal basis. The AELC "Confession" presented to the first session of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity is a case in point.

Confession

1. We confess that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise, unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Tim. 3:15.
2. As a part of the Holy Christian Church, we, in accord with our mother church, The Church of Denmark, subscribe to the Apostolic Creed as the confession of faith, and to the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530, and Luther's Small Catechism as doctrinal confessions.

NOTE: With reference to this paragraph, the convention held in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1929, decided that the four last-named symbols shall be considered as historical expressions of the paths our church has trod, without, however, demanding acceptance of all their specific terms, as for example, the condemnation of those who think otherwise.⁸

⁷For a complete discussion of the schism, see Mortensen, pp. 97-121.

⁸Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, Dec. 12, 1956. The full text of this constitution is found in Report to the 79th Annual Convention of American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan, 1956 (no imprint), Appendix, p. 3.

The Grundtvigian outlook of this statement is evident in what is left unsaid about Scripture and in the explicit distinction made between the Apostles' Creed and the other symbols. Note especially the characterization of the remaining two ecumenical creeds and the Augsburg Confession and Small Catechism as "historical expressions of the path our church has trod."

In the last revision of the AELC doctrinal article in 1956, an attempt was made to move closer to the doctrinal statements of other American Lutheran bodies. Still evident, however, is the centrality of the Apostles' Creed and the guarded manner in which the Scriptures are referred to as the "word of God."

Confession and Doctrine

1. We confess our faith in the Triune God through the Apostles [sic] Creed which is the covenant word of our baptism.
2. We believe that the Word of God, which was Jesus Christ in the flesh, is living and active for salvation in God's people, the Church, in the proclamation of the gospel and in the salutary acts of the sacraments. We believe that the Bible (the prophetic and apostolic scriptures of the Old and New Testament and the God-inspired, recorded proclamation of the Church) is the word of God, normative for faith and practice.
3. We receive and hold the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds as important and guiding testimonies drawn from Holy Scripture.
4. We receive and hold Luther's Small Catechism and the unaltered Augsburg Confession as a correct exhibition of the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, founded upon Holy Scripture. We acknowledge all churches faithful

to the doctrines of the unaltered Augsburg Confession to be entitled to the name Evangelical Lutheran.⁹

The 1956 Confession and Doctrine drew heavily on the ULCA 1918 Doctrinal Basis for some of its terminology, but the basic Grundtvigian thrust remained intact. Note that section 2 applies the title "Word of God" first to Jesus Christ and then only to the Bible. This usage is a reflection of the Grundtvigian struggle with the Inner Mission at the end of the nineteenth century. One of the major issues at that time was whether the Bible could be properly called the "Word of God." True to Grundtvig's emphasis on the life of the Church and its sacraments, the Grundtvigians replied in the negative, insisting that only the living Lord who comes to his Church in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments is properly called the "Word of God."¹⁰ Finally, note that the 1956 Confession and Doctrine describes the Bible as the "God-inspired, recorded proclamation of the Church." Here we have still another example of Grundtvig's emphasis on the Church's proclamation as prior to the written Word. Thus, in spite of efforts to bring the AECL's doctrinal article more in line with other American Lutheran church bodies, when the AELC entered into negotiations in preparation for the 1962 LCA merger, she was still decidedly Grundtvigian in her doctrinal outlook.

⁹Minutes of the 79th Annual Convention of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan, 1956 (Blair, Nebraska: Lutheran Publishing House, n.d.), p. 33. A. C. Kildegaard chaired the committee which revised this article. It was Kildegaard who represented the AELC on the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

¹⁰Mortensen, p. 100.

CHAPTER VI

THE FINNISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1890-1962

Of the four groups which merged into the LCA in 1962, the Suomi Synod was the product of the most recent immigration. Organized in 1890, the Synod was almost exclusively dependent on Finnish immigrants for her members.

As was the case of the Danes in America, the Finns were divided along lines that owed their origins to movements within the Church in Europe. Three strains or parties were generally represented among the Finnish immigrants: the National Church or Orthodox party, the Pietist party, and the Laestadian or Apostolic party.¹

The Suomi Synod, while reflecting the influence of all three movements, was composed largely of the Pietist strain of Finnish immigrants. As might be expected of an organization with a basically Pietist orientation, Walter J. Kukkonen described Suomi's approach to doctrine by saying that, "Above correct doctrine and form we place living faith; doctrine and form are in the service of faith."² Yet it would be a mistake to

¹Walter J. Kukkonen, "The Suomi Synod's Stream of Living Tradition," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (February 1958), 33-38. This was the document which Kukkonen prepared for the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition. Kukkonen represented the Suomi Synod on this committee throughout the merger negotiations.

²Kukkonen, X, 45.

conclude from Suomi's pietist emphasis that her faith was of a subjective or sectarian spirit. On the contrary, the Suomi Synod's doctrinal article displays a character that might well be described as a kind of "churchly Pietism."

The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of America confesses the Christian Faith that is based upon the Word of God, the prophetic and apostolic books of the Old and New Testaments, and published in the three Ecumenical Creeds of the Early Church, in the Augsburg Confession, and in the other symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and maintains as the highest principle of confession that the Holy Word of God is the only rule and standard by which all doctrines of the Church are to be tried and judged.³

In discussing Suomi's attitude toward the Lutheran Confessions, Dr. Kukkonen underlines the fact that the Confessions must be considered as secondary standards which build on the biblical witness to Jesus Christ. "They are not an agent alongside the Bible but an assistant that leads to an understanding of the message of the Bible."⁴

In a similar manner Kukkonen talks about Suomi's "historical approach to the confessions."

The historical approach to the confessions recognizes that the church which produced these statements of faith was engaged in a life and death struggle with regard to certain central truths of the Christian faith: the doctrine of justification by faith and the doctrine of the Bible as the sole norm of Christian faith and life. These questions demanded that most earnest attention of the Reformers, and so in regard to them--and those vitally related to them--the confessions have significant authority. . . . In matters

³Constitution and By-laws of the Suomi Synod or the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Art. II (Hancock, Michigan: Suomi. - Lut. Kustannusliikkeen Kirjapainossa, 1940), p. 31.

⁴Kukkonen, X, 50.

which lie more on the periphery of the area of crucial concern, the confessions have less value. Other elements in them, which belong in the realm of general human knowledge, have no particular importance at all. Thus a certain amount of freedom must be granted in the use of the confessions. They must not be made a lex doctrinae. At the same time, however, members and especially ministers and teachers of the Lutheran Church are bound to the confessions, for the church is also an empirical organization or institution that must protect itself by clearly defining its confessional stand.⁵

Kukkonen describes the Suomi Synod's position on the Word of God by appealing to the Finnish theologian Pietila's analysis of the Word as both "revelation" and "means of grace."⁶ In this scheme there is no simple identification of the Bible with the Word of God.

Suomi's position on the necessary doctrinal agreement which must exist before church union can take place is briefly stated like this:

Perfect agreement in doctrine is possible only if there is perfect understanding of the truth of revelation or if imperfect understandings match perfectly. Since neither is possible, it is futile to attempt church union on perfect agreement in doctrine.⁷

In this manner the Suomi Synod approached the merger negotiations within the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity more pious than orthodox and more interested in Christian life than doctrine, but generally grounded in both pious life and orthodox doctrine.

⁵Ibid., X, 49-50.

⁶Ibid., X, 47.

⁷Ibid., X, 40.

PART II

**THE WORD AND THE CONFESSIONS
IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

CHAPTER VII

THE JOINT COMMISSION ON LUTHERAN UNITY, 1956-1962

On December 12, 1956, representatives of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish (Suomi Synod) Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the United Lutheran Church in America met in Chicago for the first session of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity.

One of the major items on the agenda for this meeting was a presentation by Dr. Johannes Knudsen on the "Doctrinal Statements of the Four Participating Church Bodies."¹ Actually Knudsen's presentation consisted of little more than the briefest description of the doctrinal articles of the four churches and the distribution of two mimeographed sheets on which were produced the four pertinent constitutional articles. This was followed by interpretive remarks by representatives of the four church bodies in which they attempted to explain their churches' doctrinal positions. Unfortunately the minutes of the JCLU do not record what was said during the discussion that followed Knudsen's presentation of the four doctrinal articles. Dr. Knudsen later reported

¹Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, December 12, 1956, I, 15. See also "Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity to the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Suomi Synod and the United Lutheran Church in America," Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church Report of the Ninety-Eighth Synod, held in Omaha, Nebraska, June 17-23, 1957 (Rock Island, Illinois: Augustana Book Concern, 1957), p. 459.

that what impressed him about the reception of his presentation was that there was so little discussion. The general tenor of the conversation was that since all four church bodies accepted the Augsburg Confession, that was all that need be said.²

Following the discussion Franklin Clark Fry, then president of the ULCA, proposed the following resolution:

After hearing the reading and interpretation of the doctrinal statements of the four churches here presented, the Commission rejoices to note that we have among us sufficient ground of agreement in the common confession of our faith, as witnessed by the Lutheran confessions, to justify further procedure in seeking for a basis for the organic union of our churches, including the formulation of a proposed constitution for a United church having in it articles on doctrine and practical matters of organization.²

The 1962 Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity to the Constituting Convention of the Lutheran Church in America was quick to point out that this initial resolution of the JCLU did not mean that some kind of extra-confessional doctrinal basis was necessary before organic unity could be established. On the contrary, "From the beginning we accepted each other as Lutherans, differing, perhaps in tradition, but not in doctrine."⁴ Agreement in doctrine among the four Lutheran

²Interview with Johannes Knudsen, February 17, 1970.

³Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, December 12, 1956, I, 16.

⁴"Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity to the Constituting Convention of the Lutheran Church in America," Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Constituting Convention, Detroit, Michigan, June 28-July 1, 1962 (Philadelphia: Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, n.d.), p. 40.

church bodies was considered established and assured in their common subscription to the Augsburg Confession. "Apart from this initial agreement, there would have been a long and frustrating examination of the confessional correctness of each of the four bodies."⁵ The differences that did exist among the participating churches were described as differences in tradition. On this point the Commission warned, "let us remember that tradition--even 'living tradition' . . . is still only tradition. We must never give it the status of doctrinal truth."⁶

With the unanimous passage of the Fry resolution, the Commission agreed to proceed with the appointment of a Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition, the sub-committee that was assigned full responsibility for the drafting of a new doctrinal article.⁷ The members of this important committee were nominated by the presidents of the four church bodies. In spite of the unequal sizes of the participating churches, each church was to have one representative. The entire membership of the committee consisted of T. A. Kantonen for the ULCA, A. C. Kildegaard for the AELC, W. J. Kukkonen for the Suomi Synod, and K. E. Mattson for the Augustana Synod.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 41.

⁷"Living Tradition" was understood by the JCLU to mean "the actual life of the congregation and the relationship of formal doctrine to actual practice." See the remarks of T. A. Kantonen, The United Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Twenty-First Biennial Convention, Dayton, Ohio, October 8-15, 1958 (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.), p. 695.

The Fry resolution proclaiming doctrinal agreement set the tempo for the doctrinal discussions that followed. Not once did the question arise as to whether there was full doctrinal agreement among the members of the Commission. The only question with which the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition wrestled was just how to manifest their assumed doctrinal agreement in a doctrinal article for the constitution of the new united church.⁸

As a prelude to the drafting of a preliminary doctrinal article, each member of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition was asked to prepare a paper in which he dealt with his church body's attitude toward the Word of God and the Confessions, as well as with matters which were generally classified as "living tradition," namely, the role of worship and liturgical forms, the influence of national background, peculiar forms of piety, attitudes toward ecumenical activity, policy and general church practice and discipline.⁹

The committee next turned to the actual formulation of a preliminary doctrinal article. The first draft was prepared by T. A. Kantonen and submitted to the March 8, 1957 meeting of the JCLU. The document bore

⁸There was one issue on which there was profound practical disagreement, the issue of lodge membership for ministers. See Fry's interesting discussion of the struggle over ordination qualifications in his 1958 Report of the President, The United Lutheran Church Minutes of the Twenty-First Biennial Convention, Dayton, Ohio, October 8-15, 1958, pp. 51-54.

⁹These are all available in the uncatalogued files of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition, JCLU files, box 14 of 22, Lutheran Church in America archives, Lutheran School of Theology Library, Chicago, Illinois.

the title "A Preliminary Doctrinal Statement on the Word of God and the Confessions" and consisted of eight paragraphs--one of a general introductory nature, three on the Word of God, three on the Creeds and Confessions, and one paragraph of conclusion.

The introductory paragraph stated that "the constitutive factor of the Church is . . . the activity of the Holy Spirit through the Word and the Sacraments, whereby men are united to Christ by faith and live in the fellowship of that Christian faith."¹⁰ It is impossible to be certain whether this paragraph was inspired by any of the statements of the predecessor bodies, whether it draws on some new source, such as the Large Catechism, Third Article,¹¹ or whether it is a totally new composition without immediate reference to any single source. It is certainly capable of a generally Grundtvigian interpretation¹² to the extent that it emphasizes the actual activity of the Holy Spirit in the Word and the Sacraments as opposed to any preoccupation with the purity of doctrine or the right administration of Sacraments.¹³

¹⁰Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, March 8, 1957, Report of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

¹¹The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 415-420.

¹²See the AELC 1956 Confession and Doctrine, 2, Minutes of the 79th Annual Convention of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan, 1956 (Blair, Nebraska: Lutheran Publishing House, n.d.), p. 33. For a discussion of this point, see Supra, p. 70.

¹³As did, for example, The Fundamental Principles, I, II; S. E. Ochsenford, Documentary History of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America (Philadelphia: General Council Publication House, 1912), p. 137; R. C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 63, p. 144.

The first paragraph on the Word of God consists wholly of a definition of what the church bodies represented by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity understand the phrase "Word of God" to designate.

We hold with Luther that the Word of God is essentially "the Gospel of God concerning His Son," i.e., the good news of God's saving grace made manifest in Christ. The title "the Word of God" belongs primarily to Christ Himself, the Word incarnate, who is God's self-revelation to men. It applies derivatively to the Christ-centered apostolic message, first communicated by word of mouth. Since this message has been preserved for us in its purity in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, we accept them as the Word of God.¹⁴

It is unclear what importance is to be given to the fact that this paragraph distinguishes between what the Word of God "is essentially" and how the "title" Word of God may be variously used. In any event, the designation "Word of God" is understood in four senses: (1) Christ himself as Word incarnate; (2) the Gospel concerning Christ; (3) the oral transmission of the Gospel; and (4) the written account of the Gospel in the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

The second paragraph emphasizes the use of the Holy Scriptures as "means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ."¹⁵ It is further emphasized that "Only in and through the Church . . . do the Scriptures serve their basic purpose as Word of God, means of grace, the power of God unto salvation."¹⁶

¹⁴Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, March 8, 1957, Report of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

The last paragraph dealing with the Word of God is a statement more typical of the "rule and norm" language found in the doctrinal bases of the predecessor bodies. The Word of God, that is, the Scriptures, are to be adhered to "as the supreme authority for the preservation of the pure evangelical faith."¹⁷ Moreover, "They are the standard of faith and practice, according to which all doctrines and teachers are to be judged."¹⁸

All three paragraphs in the "Word of God" section of the 1957 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" betray a heavy dependence on the ULCA 1938 Baltimore Declaration on The Word of God and the Scriptures. The Baltimore Declaration outlined the several senses of the phrase "Word of God" and spoke of its use as "means of grace."¹⁹ The 1957 Statement did add the designation of the title "Word of God" to Christ himself, something which was not in the Baltimore Declaration. This may have been inspired by the 1956 AELC Confession and Doctrine, which provided that the Word of God was "Jesus Christ in the flesh . . ."²⁰ In view of the historic importance of the "Word of God" issue for the AELC, this whole section was considered a matter of no small consequence.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See especially Articles III, IV, and V, Minutes of the Eleventh Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, Baltimore, Maryland, October 5-12, 1938, p. 473; Wolf, Document 150, pp. 357-358.

²⁰ Minutes of the 79th Annual Convention of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan, 1956, p. 33.

The three paragraphs dealing with the "Word of God" took up over a third of the length of the entire document--a sharp contrast to the brief paragraphs assigned to the Word of God in the doctrinal statements of the predecessor bodies.

The next three paragraphs deal respectively with: (1) the Ecumenical Creeds; (2) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism; and (3) the other Lutheran Symbols. In the first paragraph the three Ecumenical Creeds are accepted as "important testimonies drawn from the Holy Scriptures and true declarations of the faith of the Church."²¹ This terminology is taken from the 1918 ULCA Doctrinal Basis, which held that the Ecumenical Creeds were "important testimonies drawn from the Holy Scriptures."²² To this affirmation was added a statement that is unmistakably Grundtvigian in character:

The Apostles' Creed, commonly used in our congregations in the sacrament of baptism and in the service of worship, serves both as confession of our faith and as covenant word of our baptism.²³

Here we have a direct citation from the AELC 1956 Confession and Doctrine, which held that the Apostles' Creed is "the covenant word of our baptism."²⁴

²¹Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, March 8, 1957, Report of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

²²Minutes of the First Convention of The United Lutheran Church in America, New York City, November 14-18, 1918, p. 63.

²³Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, March 8, 1957, Report of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

²⁴Minutes of the 79th Annual Convention of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, Muskegon, Michigan, 1956, p. 33.

The next paragraph states that the church bodies represented in the JCLU "receive and hold" (1918 ULCA Doctrinal Basis terminology) the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism (the only confessions to which the Danish Church subscribed) "as correct summaries [Augustana Confession of Faith terminology] of the doctrine of the Gospel and witnesses to its truth."²⁵ What follows is adapted from the 1918 ULCA Doctrinal Basis, "We acknowledge all churches that sincerely hold and faithfully confess the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism to be one with us in faith and doctrine."²⁶

The last paragraph in this section deals with the remaining Symbols of the Book of Concord of 1580. These Confessions are subscribed to as "further true interpretations of the Word of God and faithful exponents of the confession of the Church."²⁷ This latter phrase is apparently a new composition and has no precedent in the doctrinal statements of the predecessor bodies.

The concluding paragraph serves as a kind of summary in which the various elements discussed in the prior seven paragraphs are related to one another and placed in the larger context of the Church's mission and purpose.

We affirm that the saving Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures and witnessed by the creeds and confessions is the true treasure of the Church, the

²⁵ Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, March 8, 1957, Report of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

substance of its proclamation, and the basis of its unity and continuity through the ages. Through His Holy Spirit God uses the Church's witness to the Gospel to create Christian faith and fellowship. When this occurs the Church fulfills its divine mission and purpose.²⁸

The March 8, 1957 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" was revised at the June 5, 1957 meeting of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition by the omission of certain phrases and the reduction of the number of paragraphs from eight to seven. The two most significant changes in this revision were the elimination of the paragraph which described the Scriptures as "the standard of faith and practice"²⁹ and the elimination of the Grundtvigian characterization of the Apostles' Creed as the "covenant word of our baptism."³⁰ This second draft was submitted to the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity at its September 20, 1957 meeting.³¹ Still another revision of the "Preliminary Statement" was made at the November 2, 1957 meeting of the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition. This revision consisted of minor stylistic changes and made no changes of a substantive nature in the document. Finally on December 12, 1957--just one year to the day after the first

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Supra, p. 81. The phrase, "As such they are normative for the faith and life of the Church" was added to the previous paragraph as a substitute for the paragraph that was deleted. See Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, September 20, 1957, I, Appendix H.

³⁰ Supra, p. 82.

³¹ For the full text, see Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, September 20, 1957, I, Appendix H.

session of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition submitted a fully revised draft of the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement on the Word of God and the Confessions." It was this draft that was forwarded to the conventions of the participating church bodies in the 1958 Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity. For the sake of completeness and clarity we will quote the 1958 draft of the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" in its entirety.

1. The church bodies represented by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity hold in common that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains the Church through the Gospel and thereby unites men with Christ through faith and to one another in the fellowship of that faith.
2. They further hold that the Word of God is essentially "the Gospel of God concerning His Son," i.e., the good news of God's creative and saving grace made manifest in Christ. The title "Word of God" belongs primarily to Christ Himself, the Word Incarnate, for in Him God reveals and imparts Himself to men. It applies derivatively to the Christ-centered message of the Old and New Testaments, as well as to the proclamation of the Gospel in the Church.
3. They treasure the Holy Scriptures, therefore, as the primary witness to God's redemptive act in Christ, for which the Old Testament prepared the way and which the New Testament proclaims. In the Church's continuing proclamation of this Gospel the Holy Scriptures fulfill their basic purpose as Word of God. As such they are normative for the faith and life of the Church.
4. They accept the three ecumenical creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian, as true declarations of the faith of the Church.
5. They accept the Unaltered Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Gospel, and acknowledges as one with them in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of these symbols.

6. They accept the other symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran church, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord as further valid interpretations of the confession of the Church.
7. They affirm that the Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures, to which the creeds and confessions bear witness, is the true treasure of the Church, the substance of its proclamation, and the basis of its unity and continuity. The Holy Spirit uses the Church's witness to the Gospel to create Christian faith and fellowship. When this occurs the Church fulfills its divine mission and purpose.³²

The 1958 draft is considerably more polished than the March 8, 1957 document. The declaration on the nature of the Church in paragraph 1 remained essentially unchanged. Paragraphs 2 and 3 combine the formerly three paragraphs which discussed the various senses of the term "Word of God." Paragraph 2 still reflects the ULCA Baltimore Declaration of 1938, while paragraph 3 is a combination of various influences--the AELC emphasis on the Word of God as the Church's proclamation and the traditional ULCA and Augustana emphasis on the Scriptures as normative for faith and life. Paragraph 4 has been shorn of its Grundtvigian emphasis on the Apostles' Creed, while paragraph 5 still displays a recognition of the AELC tradition which follows the practice of the Church of Denmark in requiring subscription to only the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism. The designation "witnesses" when applied to the Lutheran Symbols, as it is in paragraph 5, conforms to

³²1958 Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, The United Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Twenty-First Convention, Dayton, Ohio, October 8-15, 1958, pp. 672-673; Wolf, Document 226, pp. 555-556.

the usage of the Formula of Concord, Epitome, Rule and Norm, 8.³³ Paragraph 6 includes the remaining symbolical books but does so without offending the Danish position by calling them "further valid interpretations of the confession of the Church." Just what is meant by the phrase "confession of the Church" is uncertain. It appears nowhere else in the statement. Since this phrase does appear in T. A. Kantonen's first draft of the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement," one possible explanation may be found in this comment of Kantonen's in his "Living Tradition in the United Lutheran Church in America": "The confessions are witnesses to the confession, the professed faith of the Church, which is founded on the Word of God alone."³⁴ If in accordance with Kantonen's statement, we define the term "confession of the Church" as equivalent to "faith of the Church," it is perfectly compatible with the use of the term "faith of the Church" in paragraph 4 of the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" and forms a perfect parallel to it. Thus in paragraph 4 we can speak of the ecumenical creeds as "true declarations of the faith of the Church," and in paragraph 6 refer to the Lutheran Symbols (except the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism) as "further valid interpretations of the confession of the Church." The terms in Kantonen's usage become interchangeable. Paragraph 7 is both a description of the dynamic relationship between Gospel, Scripture, Creed and Confession, and a summary of the entire

³⁴The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert, p. 465.

doctrinal statement. Note the progression that is followed and leads up to this paragraph. The Gospel is "the good news of God's creative and saving grace made manifest in Christ" (paragraph 2). The Scriptures are crucial because they are "the primary witness to God's redemptive act in Christ" (paragraph 4). The Creeds and Confessions are important because they are "true witnesses to the Gospel" (paragraph 5), "true declarations of the faith of the Church" (paragraph 4), and "further valid interpretations of the confession of the Church" (paragraph 6). Thus, "the Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures, to which the creeds and confessions bear witness . . . is the basis of its [that is, the Church's] unity and continuity (paragraph 7). Through the means of Scripture, Creed and Confession the Church witnesses to and proclaims the Gospel, and by these means the Holy Spirit creates faith and fellowship. In this manner "the Church fulfills its divine mission and purpose" (paragraph 7).

Before we leave the 1958 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" we might do well to examine one more item--Karl E. Mattson's account of the presuppositions and progression of thought that guided the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition in their formulation of the 1958 Statement. On April 28, 1958, in preparation for his presidential report to the 1958 ULCA convention, Franklin Clark Fry wrote a letter to Mattson, then chairman of the JCLU Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition, and asked for some clarification on the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement." Fry asked:

Will you please set down on paper for me a few paragraphs describing the principal factors that influenced the formulation, its choice of materials, its progression of thought, the accents in it distinctive of the twentieth century and anything else that you would be moved to write.³⁵

Mattson responded with a statement that dealt with the presupposition with which the preliminary article was drafted and the committee's progression of thought as this developed paragraph by paragraph.

The Committee, I believe, shared the following insights as the statement was formulated. 1. . . . Our primary purpose was to make an honest theological statement without reference to political implications or whether this or that group might like it. . . . 2. We also believed that there is a solid, dynamic core in the Lutheran view of the Gospel that transcends our theological differences. . . . 3. The statement includes within itself the results of Biblical scholarship. . . . 4. The statement also includes the results of Luther research. Closer acquaintance with Martin Luther has issued in a more dynamic concept of Lutheranism, the Word and the Confessions. . . . If we wish to state it another way we might say that the mighty acts of God among us, the living God at work in Jesus Christ and His gospel, is a better bond of union than any ideas that we may share about him. This dynamic view is also more ecumenical and true to the nature of confession than any static concept. 5. We also attempted to make the statement relevant at two points. There was an attempt to state the Lutheran insights in the language of the day. In so far as is possible in a short statement, we tried to answer living questions. . . . We asked for criticism and disagreement with the hope that the statement could be refined at a level where Lutherans and, of course, a host of other Christian brethren could no longer argue. . . . your Baltimore declaration was extremely helpful. . . .

Now as to the progression of thought:

1. Answers the question as to the nature of the church, the fellowship we share together.

³⁵Franklin Clark Fry to Karl E. Mattson, April 28, 1958, LCA President's Correspondence, Franklin Clark Fry, 1962-1968, Box 1 of 18, Lutheran Church in America Archives, Lutheran School of Theology Library, Chicago, Illinois.

2. Answers the question as to what we mean when we talk of the Word of God as constitutive for this fellowship.
3. Answers the question as to the relation of this Word to the Bible. Note that the Scriptures must be a means of grace before they become normative. In this paragraph we have transcended the gap between those who see its immediacy and those who see its normative character, two opposing views of the Word.
4. Affirms our relation to the historic church before the time of the Reformation.
5. Affirms a turning point or watershed in the life of the church. . . . The Augsburg Confession is here because it stands as a watershed in the history of the church. The Catechism is here because it stands as an unsurpassed summary statement of this faith. . . . Surprisingly enough, here we have accepted the ELC tradition, though unlike the ELC and some other Lutheran groups we have not stopped at this point.
6. Affirms the fuller historical development of Lutheranism.
7. Summarizes the elements basic and constitutive for the life of the church. Note Gospel, Scripture, Creeds and Confessions, issuing in the unity and continuity of a fellowship. Through the Holy Spirit the above comes to life and we have a living church.³⁶

What deserves particular attention in Mattson's letter is his emphasis on what he calls "a more dynamic concept of Lutheranism, the Word and the Confessions." In the opinion of this writer, it is this "dynamic concept" that furnishes the key to the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" and its interrelationship of Gospel, Scripture, Creeds and Confessions. Significantly enough, it is this approach that Mattson

³⁶Karl E. Mattson to Franklin Clark Fry, May 24, 1958, ibid.

credits with the transcendence of our "theological differences," and the refinement of the statement to a point where "Lutherans and, of course, a host of other Christian brethren could no longer argue."

Fry was so pleased with Mattson's statement that he paraphrased most of it for his presidential report. As for the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" itself, Fry praised it as a "noble declaration of faith."³⁷

The 1958 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement on the Word of God and the Confessions" was submitted to the participating church bodies as information and had no official status as such. It was meant to be what its name clearly indicated--a preliminary statement. In the years 1958-1960 the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition proceeded to further revise the "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement" until a final draft was approved by the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity in time for inclusion in the "Agreement of Consolidation" that was forwarded to the conventions of the participating church bodies in 1960.³⁸

The 1960 draft of the new doctrinal article was incorporated into the proposed constitution of the Lutheran Church in America as Article II, "Confession of Faith." This constitution was formally adopted at the

³⁷Minutes of the Twenty-First Biennial Convention of the United Lutheran Church in America, Dayton, Ohio, October 8-15, 1958, p. 34.

³⁸"Agreement of Consolidation," The United Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Twenty-Second Biennial Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, October 13-20, 1960 (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Publication House, n.d.), pp. 427-508.

constituting convention of the Lutheran Church in America in 1962.

In the next chapter we shall turn to an examination of the "Confession of Faith" of 1962 and the manner in which the LCA constituting convention defined its nature and function.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSTITUTING CONVENTION OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA, 1962

On June 28, 1962, the first session of the constituting convention of the Lutheran Church in America convened in Cobo Hall in Detroit, Michigan. It was at this convention that five and a half years of planning on the part of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity came to fruition with the actual merger of the United Lutheran Church in America, the American Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was at this convention, too, that the new united church's "Confession of Faith" was formally adopted and established as the Lutheran Church in America's "united witness."¹ So important was this Confession considered by those JCLU commissioners who drafted the Lutheran Church in America constitution that they assigned to the "Confession of Faith" the task of establishing the standard of pure teaching and right administration of the Sacraments for the new united church. Article V of the LCA constitution cites as one of the basic "objectives" of the Lutheran Church in America:

¹Constitution and By-laws of the Lutheran Church in America, Preamble, Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Constituting Convention, Detroit, Michigan, June 28-July 1, 1962, p. 279; R. C. Wolf, Documents of Lutheran Unity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), Document 227, p. 566.

To safeguard the pure teaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Sacraments by all its ministers and in all its congregations in conformity with its Confession of Faith. (Italics mine.)²

Article V further provided that one of the "powers" of the LCA was the authority to:

Decide all questions of doctrine and life on the basis of the Holy Scriptures in accordance with the Confession of Faith of this church. (Italics mine.)³

Moreover, synods,⁴ congregations,⁵ and ministers⁶ are required to subscribe to the "Confession of Faith" if they are to be accepted as members of the Lutheran Church in America.

The text of the "Confession of Faith" adopted at the 1962 convention was based on the 1958 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement on the Word of God and the Confessions" and really constituted little more than a further revision of that document. In Sections 1 through 3 revision took the form of extensive deletions from the 1958 text, with one exception--the addition of the sentence, "This church confesses Jesus

²Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. V, Sec. 1, d, p. 281; Wolf, Document 227, p. 569.

³Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. V, Sec. 2, i, p. 281.

⁴See Approved Constitution for Synods, Art. I, Sec. IV, p. 104; cf. Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. VI, Sec. 4, p. 282; Wolf, Document 227, p. 570.

⁵See Approved Constitution for Congregations, Art. II, pp. 208-209; cf. Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. VI, Sec. 6, p. 282; Wolf, Document 227, p. 570.

⁶Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. VII, Sec. 3, p. 183; Wolf, Document 227, p. 570; also By-laws, Sec. II, Item 1, p. 295.

Christ as Lord of the church" to Section 1. Section 2 was the most extensively revised. It was reduced from eighty to twenty-nine words. Dropped from this Section was the whole discussion of the various senses of the phrase "Word of God." All that remained was a definition of the Gospel as "the revelation of God's sovereign will and saving grace in Jesus Christ" and the designation of Christ as the "Word Incarnate." Ironically, for all the importance that was attached to the "Word of God" issue and all of the space that was dedicated to this problem in the 1958 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement," the phrase "Word of God" does not even appear in the 1962 "Confession of Faith." Section 3 was retained as far as its essential meaning is concerned, but the phrases were completely rearranged. Prominence is now given to the traditional Augustana and ULCA designation of the Holy Scriptures as "norm for the faith and life of the Church."

The full text of Sections 1 through 3 of the 1962 "Confession of Faith" is as follows:

Confession of Faith

Section 1. This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church. The Holy Spirit creates and sustains the Church through the Gospel and thereby unites believers with their Lord and with one another in the fellowship of faith.

Section 2. This church holds that the Gospel is the revelation of God's sovereign will and saving grace in Jesus Christ. In Him, the Word Incarnate, God imparts Himself to men.

Section 3. This church acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as the norm for the faith and life of the Church. The Holy Scriptures as the divinely inspired record of God's redemptive act in Christ, for which the Old Testament

prepared the way and which the New Testament proclaims, In the continuation of this proclamation in the Church, God still speaks through the Holy Scriptures and realizes His redemptive purpose generation after generation.⁷

Sections 4 through 7 of the 1962 "Confession of Faith" are virtually the same as paragraphs 4 through 7 of the 1958 "Preliminary Doctrinal Statement." Other than minor stylistic changes, the only significant change in these Sections is the addition of the "administration of the Sacraments" to those means enumerated in Section 7 that the Holy Spirit uses to "create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship."

The full text of Sections 4 through 7 of the 1962 "Confession of Faith" is as follows:

Section 4. This church accepts the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creeds as true declarations of the faith of the Church.

Section 5. This church accepts the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, and Luther's Small Catechism as true witnesses to the Gospel, and acknowledges as one with it in faith and doctrine all churches that likewise accept the teachings of these symbols.

Section 6. This church accepts the other symbolical books of the evangelical Lutheran church, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, Luther's Large Catechism, and the Formula of Concord as further valid interpretations of the confession of the church.

Section 7. This church affirms that the Gospel transmitted by the Holy Scriptures, to which the creeds and confessions bear witness, is the true treasure of the

⁷Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. II, Secs. 1-3, p. 279; Wolf, Document 227, pp. 566-567.

Church, the substance of its proclamation, and the basis of its unity and continuity. The Holy Spirit uses the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship. As this occurs, the Church fulfills its divine mission and purpose.⁸

Before we attempt an analysis of the 1962 "Confession" we would do well to examine another document that was officially adopted at the constituting convention of the Lutheran Church in America--"The Nature and Function of the Doctrinal Article." This document was drafted by the Committee on Doctrine and Living Tradition of the JCLU "in order that this [doctrinal] article might be better understood and more intelligently discussed at the conventions of the merging churches and the constituting convention of the new church."⁹

The statement opens with a brief summary of the doctrinal negotiations within the JCLU including a full quotation of the 1956 Fry resolution on doctrinal agreement.¹⁰ It emphasized that "no new doctrinal statement was needed for further fellowship and continued merger negotiations," since "in the presentation of their doctrinal subscriptions to the Lutheran Confessions, the participating churches had already given ample assurance that there was sufficient ground of agreement to allow them to move forward."¹¹ In spite of this sufficient

⁸Constitution of the Lutheran Church in America, Art. II, Secs. 4-7, pp. 279-280; Wolf, Document 227, p. 567.

⁹Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, Minutes, February 18-20, 1960, III, Appendix I.

¹⁰Supra, p. 76.

¹¹"Nature and Function of the Doctrinal Article," Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Constituting Convention, Detroit, Michigan, June 28-July 1, 1962, p. 47.

doctrinal agreement and the firm belief that no new doctrinal statement was necessary the commission reported:

We were, however, unanimously of the opinion that the constitution of the new and united church should contain articles of doctrine as well as practical matters of organization.¹²

With the principle established that the "Confession of Faith" was not to be considered an extra-confessional test of doctrinal agreement, the commission turned to a discussion of the significance of the title.

The title of the doctrinal article has tremendous significance. For us the doctrinal article has become a confession of faith. Too often, in American Lutheranism, doctrinal subscription has been understood merely as a legal code or standard of discipline. To be sure, the confession does have legal significance but it is first of all a ringing challenge and a joyful affirmation of the blessings we share in our Christian and Lutheran fellowship. It is our sincere and humble response to God's revealing and saving activity among us.¹³

In addition to being a "confession of faith," the doctrinal article is characterized as "an affirmation pointing to the fountain from which all the life and the activities of the church flow," "the consensus of faith among those uniting to form the new church and those who will enter the fellowship at a later time," and "a standard or flag under which all those of like faith may gather."¹⁴

The most important aspect of this document for our purposes is the distinction which the last two paragraphs make between the

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 47-48.

"evangelical character" of the doctrinal article and its "legal and disciplinary character."

The article seeks to affirm and to preserve the evangelical character of the church. As we affirm the necessity and importance of laws and codes we also recognize that the life of the Christian Church rests primarily on the good news of God's grace and fellowship in Christ Jesus.

Having first made these affirmations we may now state that the doctrinal article has also a legal and disciplinary character. Where consensus and affirmation of this faith are lacking fellowship is inappropriate. The confession of faith is therefore the final test of the propriety of membership.¹⁵

The 1962 Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity to the Constituting Convention of the Lutheran Church in America picks up this same phrase, "evangelical character of the church," and suggests that "it is clearly seen in Article II of the constitution, which presents our confession of faith."¹⁶ The report states that the "evangelical accent" of the "Confession" consists in its primary emphasis on "Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church" (Section 1), the Gospel as "the revelation of God's sovereign will and saving grace in Jesus Christ" (Section 2), the doctrinal article's acknowledgment of "the Holy Scriptures as the norm for the faith and life of the Church" (Section 3), its affirmation that "God still speaks through the Holy Scriptures and realizes His redemptive purpose generation after generation" (Section 3),

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶ "Report of the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity to the Constituting Convention of the Lutheran Church in America," Lutheran Church in America Minutes of the Constituting Convention, Detroit, Michigan, June 28-July 1, 1962, p. 42.

and the definition of the "true treasure of the Church" as "the Gospel . . . [which is] the substance of its proclamation and the basis of its unity and continuity" (Section 1).¹⁷

We are now ready to take a closer look at the inner workings of the "Confession of Faith" itself and attempt to determine, if we can, the nature and function of the Word and the Confessions within the larger "Confession." If we combine the "Confession's" central emphasis on the "evangelical character of the Church" with what Karl E. Mattson called "the dynamic core in the Lutheran view of the Gospel,"¹⁸ we begin to see certain relationships among the various elements of the "Confession." The "evangelical character" or Gospel-centered structure of the "Confession" combines with an understanding of the Gospel that informs and inspires the Scriptures, the Creeds and the Confessions to produce a dynamic whole, in which Scriptures, Creeds and Confessions interact in mutual relationship to their common denominator--the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and ultimately to Christ Himself, the "Word Incarnate" and "Lord of the Church."

The result of these dynamic interrelationships is the creation of a kind of hermeneutical hierarchy within the "Confession of Faith." The highest level is Jesus Christ Himself as the incarnate Word and Lord. The second level is the Gospel--the good news of God's redemptive grace in Christ. On the third level we find the Holy Scriptures as a

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Supra, p. 89.

"record" (Section 3) of that Gospel--a divinely inspired record which is held to be normative for the faith and life of the Church. On the fourth and final level we have the Ecumenical Creeds and the Lutheran Confessions as "witnesses" (Section 7) to the Gospel--they are neither divinely inspired nor are they normative (in the proper sense) for the faith and life of the Church.

With the exception of the highest level,¹⁹ the Gospel is what gives Scripture, Creeds and Confessions their relative significance. To put it another way, Scripture, the Creeds and the Confessions derive their authority from their relationship to and their communication of the Gospel. In this way both fundamentalist Biblicism and legalistic Confessionalism are rejected and avoided. The Scriptures, the Creeds and the Confessions are never an end in themselves. The Holy Scriptures "transmit" (Section 7) the Gospel, and the Creeds and Confessions "bear witness" (Section 7) to the Gospel. It is this Gospel, then, and not any laws or codes of theology, which is the basis of the unity and continuity of the Church.

The Scriptures, the Creeds and Confessions, therefore, always stand in dynamic relation to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this relationship certain dynamic tensions are maintained. The Gospel is not to be equated with the Scriptures. Rather, we know the Gospel because it is recorded in the Scriptures. Nor is the Gospel to be equated with the Creeds and

¹⁹It will be recalled that the sentence, "This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church," was added in a later revision.

Confessions. Rather, they are witnesses to the Gospel that the Scripture records. The interrelationship among the various elements is such that no one of the elements can be wrested from the dynamic whole and used alone. Not even the Gospel can be talked about in isolation from the "record" and "witnesses" of the Gospel. Only the whole "Confession of Faith" is a proper "safeguard [of] the pure teaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the Sacraments . . ." ²⁰ because only the whole "Confession of Faith" keeps the various elements of the Lutheran Church in America's "united witness" ²¹ in their proper relationship to one another and to the centrality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the "Word Incarnate," that transcends them all.

²⁰Supra, p. 94.

²¹Supra, p. 93.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

This study has had two basic purposes: (1) to trace the evolution of the doctrinal positions on the Word and the Confessions of the predecessor bodies of the Lutheran Church in America; and (2) to examine the interaction of these positions within the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity as they further developed and took shape as the Lutheran Church in America "Confession of Faith" of 1962. A historical approach was adopted because of the merger and consensus nature of the LCA. Not only was the organization of the LCA in 1962 a merger of four separate church bodies with four distinct historical backgrounds and doctrinal developments, but in the case of the United Lutheran Church in America, by far the largest party to the merger, it was a merger of merged churches.

The LCA position on the Word and the Confessions as this is established in the "Confession of Faith" of 1962 must be seen in terms of this doctrinal evolution and development if it is to be properly understood and evaluated. Each of the predecessor bodies contributed to the doctrinal consensus that emerged in 1962. The Muhlenberg strain contributed a heavy emphasis on the Scriptures as the rule and norm of faith and life for the Church and on the Lutheran Confessions, especially the Unaltered Augsburg Confession, as a correct exhibition or interpretation of the doctrines of Holy Scripture which were in dispute at the time of the Reformation. The Augustana Synod stood very close to the

doctrinal position of the Muhlenberg strain, in part because of her close association with the General Council in the years 1870-1918. The American (Danish) Evangelical Lutheran Church contributed its traditional Grundtvigian emphasis on the living Lord of the Church active in the actual proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, almost to the exclusion of the more typically Lutheran emphasis on the written Word of God in the Scriptures. The Suomi Synod contributed its traditional Pietistic emphasis on a vibrant faith relationship of believers with Christ, a position compatible in many respects to the Grundtvigian approach.

When these four doctrinal positions and traditional emphases came together in the Joint Commission on Lutheran Unity, a new level of development and evolution was initiated. The most pressing problem was the reconciliation of the Grundtvigian position on the Word of God as living Lord of Gospel and Sacrament with the ULCA and Augustana position of the Word of God as written Bible. Suomi was somewhat in agreement with both positions due to its traditional Pietist emphasis on a personal relationship with the Lord who is revealed in Scripture. On the "Word of God" issue modern biblical and Luther studies as well as certain facets of the Baltimore Declaration came to the rescue and produced an agreement which accented the centrality of the Gospel and its character as "Word of God" and "means of grace." Inasmuch as the Scriptures transmit the Gospel they also may be called the "Word of God," but only in a derivative sense.

With the centrality of the Gospel firmly established as the governing principle of the "Confession of Faith" of 1962, the four church bodies in the JCLU doctrinal negotiations proceeded to move "at a level where Lutherans and, of course, a host of other Christian brethren could no longer argue."¹ To put it another way, they reached a level of doctrinal discussion at which "a solid, dynamic core in the Lutheran view of the Gospel . . . transcends our theological differences."² On this Gospel-centered level the Scriptures, Creeds and Confessions were said to derive their relative authority from their relationship to the Gospel. Thus, the Scriptures were declared to be the norm for faith and life because they were deemed to be an inspired record of the Gospel, and the Creeds and Confessions were considered to be significant statements of the faith of the Church because they were judged to be important historic Lutheran witnesses to the Gospel. In such a scheme both fundamentalist Biblicism and legalistic Confessionalism were rejected.

Whether the "Confession of Faith" will ever be anything more than just another LCA merger document remains to be seen. Nonetheless, it proved to be an effective instrument for establishing a doctrinal consensus among the four very different Lutheran groups which merged to form the LCA in 1962. For that reason alone, both the process which produced it and the document itself deserve careful study and evaluation. This thesis project has attempted a beginning.

¹Karl E. Mattson, Supra, p. 89.

²Ibid.

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