

5-1-1961

Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements

Erwin L. Lueker

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lueker, Erwin L. (1961) "Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 32, Article 28.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol32/iss1/28>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Functions of Symbols and of Doctrinal Statements

(A Discussion Outline)

By ERWIN L. LUEKER

THE following outline was given to the faculty of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Oct. 9, 1959, as a guide for discussions of the functions served by confessional statements. In this presentation the writer did not attempt to give a complete historical survey of confessions, or to treat the most important confessions and statements, but to concentrate on the study of functions. Selections were made to show a variety of functions. Explanatory notes have been added for the orientation of the reader.

I. NEW TESTAMENT

The origin of creeds and confessions is traced to the New Testament.¹ These statements of faith have been classified as

A. *Confessions of Jesus as Lord.* Such simple forms are found in Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Heb. 4:14; 1 John 4:15; 5:5. In Acts 8:37 this simple confession precedes the act of Baptism. The fish was early used as a symbol for this confession because the letters in the Greek word *ichthys* formed

¹ For a detailed discussion see H. A. Blair, *A Creed Before the Creeds* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1955); Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949). A brief discussion is found in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 4th ed., pp. xi—xv.

the first letters of the words in the confession (*Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter*).

This simple confession is amplified in Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; 2 Tim. 2:8; Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Peter 3:18-22.²

B. *Confessions of Father and Son* are found in 1 Cor. 8:6: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." (1 Tim. 6:13; 2 Tim. 4:1)³

C. *Confessions of the Trinity* are found in Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13.⁴

² It is closely associated with Baptism by Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios*, XVIII, 2. Some of the elements of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed are given by the same author (*Epistula ad Trallianos*, IX. Compare *Epistula ad Smyrnaeos*, I).

³ Polycarp (*Epistula ad Philippenses*, II) gives an interpretation of this confession and applies it to the Christian life. For this form of confession in Irenaeus see August Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der alten Kirche*, ed. E. Morgenstern, 3d. ed. (Breslau, 1897), Ch. v.

⁴ 1 *Clementis ad Cor.* (c. A. D. 96) has this Trinitarian form in the words "we have only one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace, poured out on us, and one calling in Christ." The *Epistula Apostolorum* (150?—180?) has (V): "The five loaves are a symbol of our faith concerning great Christendom, namely, in the Father, the Ruler of the whole world, and in Jesus Christ, our Savior, and in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and in the holy church, and in the forgiveness of sins." For forms of this confession in Justin and Irenaeus see Hahn, chs. iii, v.

The following list indicates some of the chief functions of these confessions:

1. To signify the willingness of the individual to acknowledge God as Lord and to place himself entirely under the guidance and rule of Christ.

2. The parallelism in 1 Cor. 8:6 indicates that the individual shows that he worships God in Christ.

3. To repudiate worship of heathen idols (context of 1 Cor. 8:6).

4. Baptismal formula signifying the faith into which the individual is baptized. (Matt. 28:19)

5. Liturgical formula, invoking blessing of the triune God confessed.

6. To outline soteriology.

7. To express the common faith.

8. The fish as symbol was used to identify Christians to one another, especially in times of persecution.

II. EARLY CHURCH

Many confessions arose in the early church. Even after synods had adopted definite forms, strict uniformity was not achieved. Some scholars (e. g., A. Seeberg) hold that there was a primitive formula from which the symbols derived. Others (e. g., H. Lietzmann) hold that primitive symbols developed freely and independently. Some of these symbols are short (e. g., *Epistula Apostolorum*). Others long (e. g., *Profession of Faith of the Bishops at the Council of Antioch*).⁵

⁵ For a discussion of these creedal statements consult such works as F. J. Badcock, *The History of Creeds* (London: SPCK, 1938); A. E. Burn, *An Introduction to the Creeds and to the Te Deum* (London: Methuen and Co., 1899); Hahn, loc. cit. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 2d ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1960)

A. Some of the Chief Functions of Those Creedal Statements

1. Baptismal Confession.⁶

2. Outline for catechetical instruction.⁷

3. Element in liturgical service.⁸

⁶ Cp. Ignatius, *Epistula ad Ephesios*, XVIII, 2 with Matt. 28:19 and Acts 8:37.

⁷ The instruction of catechumens in the articles of the faith was called *traditio symboli* ("delivery of the Creed") in the ancient church. St. Cyril's "Ten Points of Doctrine" in his Catechetical Lectures (IV) are an example of such instruction in the early church. "But before delivering you over to the Creed," he says, "I think it is well to make use at present of a short summary of necessary doctrines; that the multitude of things to be spoken, and the long interval of the days of all this holy Lent, may not cause forgetfulness in the mind of the more simple among you. . . . But let those here present whose habit of mind is mature, and who have their senses already exercised to discern good and evil, endure patiently to listen to things fitted rather for children and to an introductory course, as it were, of milk: that at the same time both those who have need of the instruction may be benefited, and those who have the knowledge may rekindle the remembrance of things which they already know." (Translation from P. Schaff and H. Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1955], Second Series, VII, 20, 21). This is followed by lectures on God; Christ and His virgin birth, cross, burial, resurrection, ascension, and judgment; Holy Ghost; soul, body; meats; apparel; resurrection; Baptism; Holy Scriptures.

⁸ From the sixth century on, the Nicene Creed became increasingly prominent as the church's confession of faith at its celebration of the Eucharist. The *Te Deum* (regarded by Luther as one of the three [or four] catholic creeds) was used in monastic worship at the end of the fifth century. The Athanasian Creed became a part of monastic worship about the same time and ultimately a part of Sunday Prime. The Apostles' Creed was used from the eighth century on as a part of choir offices and after the Reformation became a part of the Sunday service when the Eucharist was not celebrated.

4. Identification of Christians as distinct from heterodox.⁹

5. Norm for preaching and administering sacrament.

6. Confession of belief.

7. Kerygmatic presentation of Gospel.

8. Instrument to distinguish orthodox from heretics. The confession of Nicaea is an example of this. It has been argued that key phrases were inserted in the Jerusalem symbol by the commission (as noted in brackets below) and an anathema added in order to oppose heresy more definitely.

We believe in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of all visible and invisible things.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten, begotten out of the Father [that is, out of the Father's essence (ousias)], God out of God, light out of light [true God out of the true God, begotten, not made, of the same essence (homoousion) as the Father] through Whom all things that are in the heaven and in the earth came into being, Who for us men and for our salvation came down and became incarnate, became man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended into the heavens, and is coming to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Ghost;

[The Catholic Church anathematizes those who say that there was a time when He was not, and before He was begotten He was not, and that He came into exist-

⁹ St. Cyprian (died 258) writes in his Letter 69 to Magnus: "But if anyone objects by saying that Novatian holds the same law which the Catholic Church holds, baptizes with the same Creed with which we baptize, knows the same *God the Father*, the same *Christ the Son*, the same *Holy Spirit* . . . let him know . . . that there is not one law of the Creed, nor the same interrogation common to us and the schismatics.

ence out of things non-existent, or that the Son of God is of other substance (hupostasis) or essence (ousia), or a creature, or alterable, or changeable.]¹⁰

III. LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS¹¹

A. *Some of the Chief Functions of the Augsburg Confession*

1. Response on the part of the princes to the request that they prepare a statement concerning the doctrine of the churches in their territories.

In connection with the matter pertaining to the faith and in conformity with the imperial summons, Your Imperial Majesty also graciously and earnestly requested that each of the electors, princes, and estates should commit to writing and present, in German and Latin, his judgments, opinions, and beliefs with reference to the said errors, dissensions, and abuses. Accordingly, after due deliberation and counsel, it was decided last Wednesday that, in keeping with Your Majesty's wish, we should present our case in German and Latin today (Friday). [Preface, 6, 7]

2. Vindication of the evangelical position as being that of the universal church.

It must not be thought that anything has been said or introduced out of hatred or for the purpose of injuring anybody, but we have related only matters which we

For when they say, "Dost thou believe *in remission of sins and eternal life through the holy Church?*" they lie in the interrogation since they have not the Church." Quoted from Badcock, p. 31.

¹⁰ The Nicene Creed as currently used is the "Nicaeno-Constantinopolitanum" of A. D. 381 (Badcock, pp. 220, 221).

¹¹ The internationally standard edition of the Lutheran Confessions is *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*. The quotations in this article are from Tappert, Fischer, Pelikan, Piepkorn, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

have considered it necessary to adduce and mention in order that it may be made very clear that we have introduced nothing, either in doctrine or in ceremonies, that is contrary to Holy Scripture or the universal Christian church. For it is manifest and evident (to speak without boasting) that we have diligently and with God's help prevented any new and godless teaching from creeping into our churches and gaining the upper hand in them. [Conclusion, 4, 5]

3. Elucidation and correction of causes for chief abuses.

These are the chief articles that are regarded as controversial. Although we could have mentioned many more abuses and wrongs, to avoid prolixity and undue length we have indicated only the principal ones. The others can readily be weighed in the light of these. [Conclusion, 1]

4. Instrument for discussion to bring about unity in the church.

If the other electors, princes, and estates also submit a similar written statement of their judgments and opinions, in Latin and German, we are prepared, in obedience to Your Imperial Majesty, our most gracious lord, to discuss with them and their associates, in so far as this can honorably be done, such practical and equitable ways as may restore unity. Thus the matters at issue between us may be presented in writing on both sides, they may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ. [Preface, 9—11]

5. Kerygmatic presentation of Gospel.¹²

6. Means of identification leading to fraternity among evangelicals.¹²

¹² "In addition we must acknowledge that the doctrine preached and submitted at Augs-

7. Identification among Lutherans.

With reference to the schism in matters of faith which has occurred in our times, we regard, as the unanimous consensus and exposition of our Christian faith, particularly against the false worship, idolatry, and superstition of the papacy and against other sects, and as the symbol of our time, the first and unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg during the great Diet in the year 1530. [FC, Ep, Summary Formulation, 4]

8. Norm of teaching and administering sacraments (AC VII).

burg is the true and pure Word of God and that all who believe and hold it are children of God and will be saved, whether they believe now already or will be enlightened later on; which confession will endure until the end of the world and the Last Day. For it is written: 'He that believes and calls upon God will be saved.' And one must pay loving attention (wahrnehmen) not only to all those who will still join us, but also to the Christian church, which preaches the Word, and our people, who are its members. For it is written Gal. 6:16: 'As many as walk according to this rule,' etc.; which excludes no one. In accordance therewith, all who believe and live according to the teachings of the Confession and its Apology are by such faith and teaching our brothers, and their danger concerns us as much as our own. Also we dare not forsake them as members of the true church, whether they unite with us whenever they will; whether they do this quietly or openly; whether they live among us or at a distance. That we say and hold. If Jesus (John 17) prays for all those who were to believe the teachings of the apostles, why should we, then, forsake and not regard those for whom Jesus prayed? In the fifth place, a person cannot deny that this doctrine, which was preached and presented at so many diets, has at all times converted a number of people to God, and if a person were to repulse and separate from this doctrine, he would be fighting against the Holy Spirit inasmuch as they were illumined by the Holy Spirit, who so openly declared that such deeds and works please Him" (Luther; trans. from Walch ed., XVI, 1857, 1858).

9. Constitutive factor in Lutheran church organization and government.¹³

10. Guide to the understanding and interpretation of Scripture.

No one can blame us if we derive our expositions and decisions in the controverted articles from these writings, for just as we base our position on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors who remained steadfastly in the pure doctrine. [FC SD, Summary Formulation, 12, 13]

11. Source and norm (*normata*) for doctrinal formulation.

Our intention was only to have a single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine to which all our Evangelical churches subscribe and from which and according to which, because it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated. [Ibid., p. 10]

12. Devotional study.

13. Confession.

14. Instrument to enforce conformity.¹⁴

¹³ For the role of the Augsburg Confession in church organization throughout the world see M. Reu, *The Augsburg Confession* Chicago: Wartburg, 1930. The Lutheran World Federation acknowledges it as "a pure exposition of the Word of God." *Proceedings of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly, Lund, Sweden, June 30—July 6, 1947* (Philadelphia: United Luth. Pub. House, 1948). The Lutheran Synods of America subscribe to it.

¹⁴ This, in a sense, might be called on *opus alienum*. The process of disciplinary use is not outlined in the confessions. Already in 1532 Luther, Justus Jonas, and Bugenhagen drew up the regulation that those who wanted to assume the office of teaching and wanted to be ordained "should give the assurance beforehand that they accept . . . the Confession which our churches read before Emperor Charles. . . ." (*Corpus Reformatorum*, XII, 6, 7, quoted in C. F. W.

(Points mentioned under A are not repeated below unless especially significant in the case of a particular confession.)

B. *The Chief Functions of the Apology*

1. Elucidation of Augsburg Confession.

They commanded me and several others to prepare an apology of our Confession, answering the opponents, objections and explaining to His Imperial Majesty why we could not accept the Confutation. [Ap, Preface, 5]

2. Emphasis of relation of doctrine to justification by faith (note especially Art. IV).

C. *Functions of the Tractatus*

The following functions appear from the document as a whole:

1. Presentation of evangelical conception of ministry of Word.

2. Explanation of authority of persons engaged in the ministry.

3. Exposition of the church's function in establishing and preserving ministry.

4. Delineation of abuses in contemporary conceptions.

D. *Some of the Chief Functions of the Smalcald Articles*

1. Presentation of minimum to be held by Lutherans.

John Frederick's instructions to Luther read in part:

. . . how far and in which articles and parts one may or may not yield, give way for the sake of peace and unity . . . and so it is our gracious desire, that you Dr. Martin, take in hand these points and articles and

Walther's "Why Should Our Pastors, Teachers, and Professors Subscribe Unconditionally to the Symbolical Writings of Our Church," trans. A. W. C. Guebert *CTM*, [April, 1947], 250).

give your considered opinion what and how far for the sake of Christian love and the preservation of unity in Christendom one may yield with due responsibility to God and a good conscience. . . .¹⁵

2. Delineation of reasons for holding Lutheran doctrines.¹⁶

3. Delineation of reasons for rejecting abuses.¹⁶

4. Guidelines for doctrinal orientation and discussion. The following articles treat matters which we may discuss with learned men or even among ourselves. (Introductory Statement to Part III)

E. Some of the Functions of the Large and Small Catechisms

1. Guide for lay instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian faith.¹⁷

2. Guide for doctrinal preaching.¹⁸

3. Norm of Biblical doctrine for laymen.

Since these important matters also concern ordinary people and laymen who for their eternal salvation must as Christians know the difference between true and false doctrine, we declare our unanimous adherence to Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, as he prepared them and incorporated them in his published works, since they have been unanimously sanctioned and accepted and are used publicly in the churches, the schools, and the homes of those churches which adhere to the Augsburg Confession and since they formulate Christian doctrine on the basis of God's Word for ordinary laymen in a most correct and simple, yet sufficiently explicit, form. [FC SD, Summary Formulation, 8]

Since these matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls, we subscribe Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms as both of them are contained in his printed works. They are "the layman's Bible" and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation. [FC Ep, Summary Formulation, 5]

4. Guide for meditation and worship.

Even if their knowledge of the Catechism were perfect (though that is impossible in this life), yet it is highly profitable and fruitful daily to read it and make it the subject of meditation and conversation. In such reading, conversation, and meditation the Holy Spirit is present and bestows ever new and greater light and fervor, so that day by day we relish and appreciate the Catechism more greatly. [LC, Preface]

5. Summary of doctrine for review and deeper insight for learned and simple.¹⁹

F. Function of the Formula of Concord

1. To create unity of doctrine among the territorial Lutheran churches of Germany.

2. To preserve *reine Lehre* in the face of controversies which had arisen because of the Interim.²⁰

3. To furnish a guide whereby the problems which had arisen after the Interim might be studied in the light of the Scriptures and the Augsburg Confession.²¹

4. To present the doctrine of the an-

¹⁵ *Bekennnisschriften*, XXIV.

¹⁶ The functions of 2 and 3 appear from the articles as a whole.

¹⁷ See especially SC Introduction.

¹⁸ See especially LC Preface.

¹⁹ LC Preface.

²⁰ For 1 and 2 see *Bekennnisschriften*, pp. 739—762; Ep. Summary; SD, Summary Formulation.

²¹ *Bekennnisschriften*, p. 746(M8), p. 749(M11).

cient creeds²² and Augsburg Confession²³ in the environment of contemporary discussion.

5. To preserve the once recognized and confessed divine truth.²⁴

6. To transmit the pure explanation of the Reformation doctrine to posterity.²⁵

7. To bring technical discussion into harmony with the Scriptures and Augsburg Confession.²⁶

8. To furnish guidelines for correct and incorrect use of terminology and expressions.²⁷

9. To show, in a technical manner, relationship between certain doctrines.²⁸

IV. SOME DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS BY LUTHERANS IN AMERICA

A. *Pennsylvania Ministerium* (1748)

1. Mother Synod had no constitution until 1781. Then it contained the provisions:

Every minister professes that he holds the Word of God and our Symbolical Books in doctrine and life [VI, 2].

When accusations are made against a pastor the accusations must pertain to:

Positive errors opposed to the plain teachings of the Holy Scriptures and our Symbolical Books [V, 22].²⁹

²² Ibid., p. 742.

²³ Ibid., p. 740(M3).

²⁴ Ibid., p. 743(M6).

²⁵ Ibid., p. 748(M10).

²⁶ E. g., Ep, I 24, 25.

²⁷ E. g., FC IV.

²⁸ E. g., FC II, VIII.

²⁹ V. Ferm, *Crisis in American Lutheran Theology* (New York: Century, 1927), p. 16; A. L. Graebner, *Geschichte der Lutherischen Kirche in America* (St. Louis: CPH, 1892), p. 529; H. E. Jacobs, *History of the Evangelical Lu-*

2. The constitution prepared for Philadelphia congregation (Oct. 18, 1762. Muhlenberg, Handshuh, Acrelius) contained provision that pastors and their successors

shall publicly, purely, briefly, plainly, thoroughly and in an edifying way proclaim God's Word on the basis of the Apostles and Prophets and in harmony with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession.³⁰

The functions of these documents included:

1. To serve as a guide for the proclamation of pastors.

2. To foster the development of Lutheranism.

3. To protect pastors in this effort.

B. *General Synod*

1. The original constitution of the General Synod contained no reference to Lutheran Symbols with the exception of the Catechism.

2. The constitution of Gettysburg Seminary was designed

to provide our churches with pastors who sincerely believe and cordially approve of the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures as they

theran Church in the United States (New York: Christian Lit., 1893), pp. 241 ff.; A. Spaeth, H. E. Jacobs, G. F. Spieker, *Documentary History of the Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States. Proceedings of the Annual Conventions from 1748 to 1821*, Bd. of Pub., General Council, Philadelphia, 1898, pp. 165—176.

³⁰ The entire document is found in W. J. Mann-W. Germann, ed., *Nachrichten von den vereinigten Deutschen Ev. Luth. Gemeinden in Nord Amerika* (Philadelphia, 1895), II, 435 to 441. See also Graebner, pp. 484 ff.; Jacobs, pp. 262—264.

are fundamentally taught in the Augsburg Confession.³¹

It required the following pledge of professors

I solemnly declare in the presence of God and the Directors of this Seminary, that I do *ex animo* believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired Word of God, and the only perfect rule of faith and practice. I believe the Augsburg Confession and the Catechisms of Luther to be a summary and just exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of the Word of God.³²

3. Candidates at ordination (1829) were asked whether they subscribed to the Scriptures and

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 Augsburg Confession?³³

The functions of these documents included:

1. To establish a basis upon which Lutherans in America should unite in a Synod.

2. To implement Schmucker's endeavors to bring Lutheran confessionalism into the church.³⁴

³¹ *Constitution of the Theological Seminary of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States: Located at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, together with the Statutes of the General Synod on which it is founded* (Philadelphia: Wm. Brown, 1826), p. 5.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³³ *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifth General Synod of the Ev. Luth. Church, In the United States, Convened at Hagerstown, Maryland, 1826*, p. 5.

³⁴ The confessionalism of S. S. Schmucker at this time was probably similar to the modified form later advocated in the *Definite Platform (Definite Platform, Doctrinal and Disciplinarian,*

C. *Altenburg Theses*³⁵

These were theses successfully defended by C. F. W. Walther in a debate with Adolf Marbach at Altenburg, Mo., April, 1841. These theses saved the Saxon Lutheran community from disintegration. Their functions were:

1. To show the relationship of a local church to the universal church.³⁶

2. To show that heterodox and erring churches are still, in a certain sense, *real* and *true* churches.³⁶

3. To find a basis which would justify the existence and organization of the Saxon immigrants.³⁷

for Ev. Luth. District Synods, Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General Synod [Philadelphia: Miller and Burlock, 1856].

³⁵ J. F. Koesterling, *Auswanderung der sächsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838, ihre Niederlassung in Perry Co., Mo., und damit zusammenhängende interessante Nachrichten* (Saint Louis, 1867), pp. 51—52; W. G. Polack, *The Story of C. F. W. Walther* (St. Louis: CPH, 1947), pp. 49, 50.

³⁶ Thesis 3. The name *church*, and in a certain sense the name *real church*, also belongs to such visible societies as are united in the confessions of a falsified faith and therefore are guilty of a partial falling away from the truth, provided they retain in its purity so much of the Word of God and the holy sacraments as is necessary that children of God may thereby be born. When such societies are called true churches, the intention is not to state that they are faithful but merely that they are real churches as opposed to secular societies.

³⁷ Thesis 5 . . . the outward separation of heterodox societies from the orthodox church is not necessarily a separation from the universal Christian church. . . .

Thesis 6(3). Even heterodox societies (*Gemeinschaften*) have church power; even among them the treasures of the church may be validly dispensed, the ministry established, the sacraments validly administered, and the keys of the Kingdom validly exercised.

D. *Doctrinal Paragraph of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*³⁸

Functions as originally conceived:

1. Statement of the optimum (maximum) necessary for identification with the organization.³⁹

Thesis 7: Even heterodox societies (*irrgläubige Gemeinschaften*) are not to be dissolved but reformed.

³⁸ *Die Verfassung der deutschen ev. luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten* (St. Louis: Weber & Olshausen, 1846).

³⁹ Subscription to all the classical Lutheran confessions was the ideal for Walther, who played the leading role in the formulation of the constitution. "There is no doubt that the person who without reservation subscribes to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession cannot reject one single phrase in the other Confessions, inasmuch as these are nothing else than a further development and apology of that which is contained in the Augustana. . . . We believe one of the most important duties of the conference would be just this, to remove the uncertainties from the minds of those brethren who still harbor scruples against the consequent unfolding (*Durchfuehrung*) of the doctrine confessed at Augsburg and, by the grace of God, to lead them to the blessed, happy conviction that the other symbols of our church are *implicite* contained in the Augustana, which they accept." Walther, *Lehre und Wehre*, II, 84 (trans. *CTM*, XV, 535 f.). The insertion of the *Saxon Visitation Articles* in the constitution of Old Trinity, Saint Louis, was undoubtedly due to the Saxon background of the members. These articles were not inserted in the synodical constitution. Although many statements were drafted and approved in Walther's lifetime these were not placed in the constitution nor required in the ordination pledge. The Augsburg Confession, as further explained in the classical Lutheran Symbols (of which the Formula is the "capstone," *Lehre und Wehre*, II, 84), was for Walther the norm of the Lutheran faith. "The orthodox church is to be judged principally by the common, orthodox, and public confession to which the members acknowledge themselves to have been pledged and which they profess" (Altenburg Thesis 8). He opposed bringing formulated theses to the Free Lutheran conferences (*CTM*, XV, 529 to

2. Undoubtedly not a statement of the minimum requirements for fellowship.⁴⁰

563). The fear was expressed in *Lehre und Wehre* (II, 88) that such statements might lead to a party spirit. He opposed making "private writings" a norm: ". . . whenever a controversy arises concerning the question whether a doctrine is *Lutheran*, we must not ask: 'What does this or that "Father" of the Lutheran Church teach in his private writings?' for he also may have fallen into error. On the contrary we must ask: What does the public CONFESSIO of the Lutheran Church teach concerning the controverted point? For in her confession our Church has recorded for all times what she believes, teaches, and confesses, for the very reason that no controversy may arise concerning the question what our Lutheran Church believes" (C. F. Walther, *The Controversy Concerning Predestination*, trans. A. Crull [St. Louis: CPH, 1881], p. 5). Walther endorsed Charles Porterfield Krauth's stand on the confessions after 1865 (*Lehre und Wehre*, XXIX, 32).

For a full discussion by Walther on the need for confessional subscription see *CTM*, XVIII, 241—253.

⁴⁰ Walther also held that those who adhered only to the Augsburg Confession were to be treated as Lutheran. He said: "There are whole Lutheran state churches, like the Swedish and the Danish, which have never officially acknowledged the Formula of Concord and have not required their candidates to subscribe to it, which, nevertheless, were for that reason never suspected by other Lutheran Churches nor denied church fellowship by those churches which subscribed to the whole Formula of Concord. . . . We therefore deem it right and proper not to look with suspicion on those who for the time being declare their adherence to the U. A. C. without reservation, but to extend the hand of brotherhood to them and confer with them, with the conviction that such are *implicite* subscribers to the teachings contained in the other symbols, although perhaps they do not yet know these and for that reason are held by a certain hesitancy." *Der Lutheraner*, XII, 181. Trans. *CTM*, XV, 540 f.

The above quotation pertains to ecclesiastical fellowship among Lutherans. That Christian fraternity extended beyond organizational boundaries, in the thought of Walther, is shown by such statements as the following: "The Lutheran Church is not limited to those people who from their youth have borne the name 'Lutheran' or

3. Implies use of Scripture and confessions for proclamation, study, norm, and other uses indicated above.

4. Justification for creation of organization to achieve and keep goals implied in statement.

5. Served as guide for subsequent synodical constitutions.⁴¹

E. *Fundamental Principles of Faith and Church Polity*

The *General Council* was organized (1867) on the basis of a statement by C. P. Krauth bearing the above title.⁴²

It pledged its organization to Scripture, the Ecumenical Creeds, the Lutheran Confessions. The functions of these principles were:

1. To witness the generic unity of the Christian church in the General Creeds and

have taken that name later on. To every person who honestly submits to the whole word of God, bears the true faith in our dear Lord Jesus Christ in his heart and confesses it before the world, we extend our hand, regard him also as a fellow believer, as a brother in Christ, as a member of our Church, no matter in what sect he may be concealed and captive" (*Luth. I:5*). "We are not fighting for a specific constituted division which calls itself Lutheran. It is not our goal to bring matters to such a pass that all Christians accept a so-called Lutheran Church polity and Lutheran ceremonies, join a Lutheran Synod, or bind themselves by Lutheran symbols. . . . The object of our struggle is nothing else than the true faith, the pure truth, the unfalsified Gospel, the pure foundation of the Apostles and Prophets." (*Luth. I:100*)

⁴¹ See *Doctrinal Declarations* (St. Louis: CPH, 1957), pp. 3—8.

⁴² *Proceedings of the Convention Held by Representatives from Various Ev. Luth. Synods in the United States and Canada Accepting the Unaltered Augsburg Confession at Reading, Pa., Dec. 12, 13 and 14, A. D. 1866. Also the Opening Sermon by Rev. Prof. M. Loy* (Pittsburgh: 1867.)

the specific unity of pure parts of the Christian church in specific creeds.

2. That Christians, who are in the unity of faith, may know one another as such and may have a visible bond of fellowship.

3. To give distinctive being, political and historical recognition, to the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

4. To make the confessions and creeds a basis for study and proclamation.

5. To give a basis for union to conservative Lutherans.

6. To serve as a basis for negotiation with other Lutherans.

V. SOME SPECIFIC DOCUMENTS

A. *Galesburg Rule*

A name given to a ruling at Galesburg, Ill., 1875, of the General Council in regard to pulpit and altar fellowship.⁴³

The function was to limit Lutheran pulpits and altars to Lutherans.

B. *Schmucker's Fraternal Appeal*

This was an appeal to Protestants and Lutherans to co-operate. It stated the "fundamental doctrinal agreement" for such co-operation.⁴⁴ Its functions:

1. To establish principles which are held in common by Protestants.

2. To indicate separation between Protestants and Romanists.

3. To foster fellowship and co-operation between churches.

⁴³ *Minutes of General Council, Bakewell C. Marthens; Second Convention, 22—25; Ninth Convention, 17, 38.*

⁴⁴ S. S. Schmucker, *Fraternal Appeal to American Churches with a Plan for Catholic Union on Apostolic Principles*, 2d ed., (New York: Taylor G. Dodd, 1839).

C. *Washington Declaration*

A statement adopted by the United Lutheran Church at its second convention.⁴⁵ Its functions are:

1. Application of doctrines already contained in the confessions to present conditions in the church.
2. Elucidation of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.
3. To show how every church expresses the apostolic character of one holy church.
4. Guidelines for relationship to other bodies.

D. *Chicago Theses*

Theses adopted by representatives of the Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin Synods at Chicago, April 15, 1925.⁴⁶ They were accepted by the Buffalo Synod. Their functions were:

1. To express the doctrinal harmony which existed between the synods drafting them, especially on doctrines previously in dispute.
2. To bring about the exercise of fellowship between the bodies concerned.

E. *Brief Statement*

A statement adopted by the Missouri Synod in 1932.⁴⁷ Its functions were:

⁴⁵ This statement is printed out in full in *Doctrinal Declarations*, pp. 15—23.

⁴⁶ *Chicago Thesen ueber die Bekehrung, Praedestination und andere Lehren, angenommen von Vertretern der Synoden von Buffalo, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio und Wisconsin* (Im Verlag des Komitees, 1925); English translation in *Doctrinal Declarations*, pp. 24—42; *Theologische Quartalschrift* (Milwaukee, Oct. 1929). See *Proceedings* of the Missouri Synod, 1929, pp. 133 ff.

⁴⁷ The official German version is in *CTM*, II, 321—336; the official English translation in *CTM*, II, 401—416. It follows the form of

1. To begin with the *status controversiae* as it existed among Missouri, Ohio, Iowa, Buffalo, and "present the doctrine of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions in the shortest, most simple manner. . . ." (*Proceedings*, 1929, p. 113)

2. To be a positive answer to the negative action on the Chicago Theses.

3. To serve as a basis for union with other bodies.⁴⁸

4. To justify the action taken on the Chicago Theses.

F. *Theses of Agreement*

These theses were adopted by the faculties of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and Wisconsin's faculty at Thiensville in 1932.⁴⁹

Their function was to adjust differences between the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods on church and ministry as these affected excommunication.

Pieper's *Ich Glaube, Darum Rede Ich*, 1897. See *Proceedings* of Missouri Synod, 1929, pp. 110—113; 1952, pp. 154, 155.

⁴⁸ In 1938 the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church accepted the *Brief Statement* and *Declaration* as the doctrinal basis for *future Church* fellowship (*Proceedings*, 1938, pp. 231—253). In 1941 this action was modified by requesting that the two be combined: "d. In calling for one document, we do not mean to dispense with any doctrinal statement made in our *Brief Statement*—for we believe that it correctly expresses the doctrinal position of our Synod—but we concede that, for the sake of clarification under the present circumstances, some statements need to be more sharply defined or amplified" (*Proceedings*, 1941, p. 302). Later, Synod instructed the Committee on Doctrinal Unity to prepare a new document which would use the "Brief Statement and such other documents as are already in existence" (*Proceedings*, 1947, p. 510).

⁴⁹ *Lutheran Witness*, LI (1932), 224.

G. Doctrinal Affirmation

An attempt by the committees of the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod to combine the *Brief Statement* and *Declaration*.⁵⁰ Proposed function:

To unite the contents of the *Brief Statement* and the *Declaration*.

H. Common Confession

Statement of doctrine adopted by the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod (1950, 1953).⁵¹

⁵⁰ *Proceedings of Missouri Synod, 1941*, pp. 301—303; 1946, p. 378.

⁵¹ *Doctrinal Declarations, CPH, 1957*, pp. 71 to 91; *Proceedings, 1947*, p. 510; 1950, pp. 586, 587.

Its functions:

1. "To arrive ultimately at one document which is Scriptural, clear, concise, unequivocal."⁵²

2. To be the basis for fellowship between Missouri and the ALC.

3. Later it was resolved that the *Common Confession* is

. . . not to be regarded or employed as a functioning basic document toward the establishment of altar and pulpit fellowship with other church bodies.⁵³

4. To relate doctrine to the life and corporate activity of the Church (Part 2).

St. Louis, Mo.

⁵² *Proceedings, 1941*, p. 510.

⁵³ *Proceedings, 1956*, p. 505.