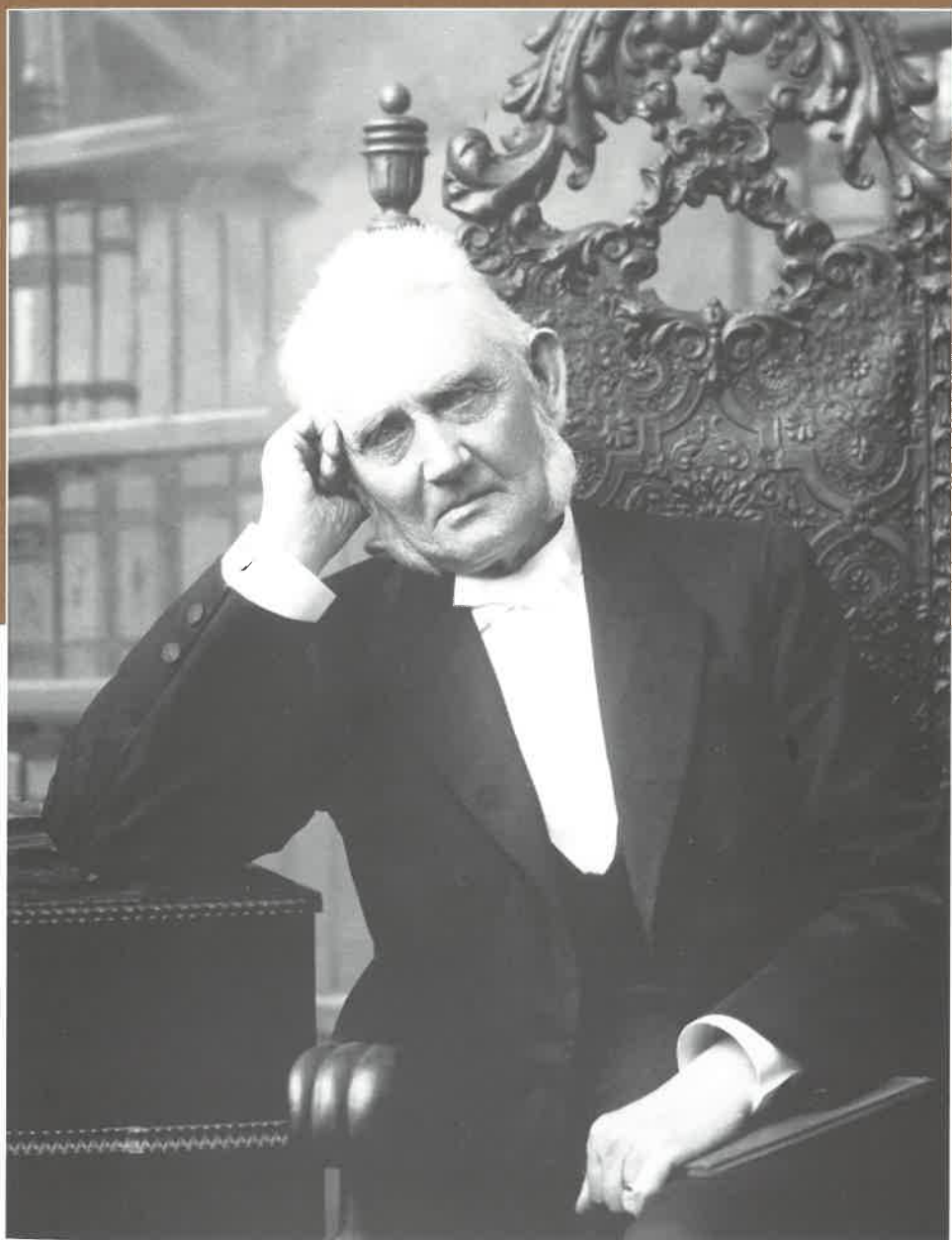


Commemorating the 150th Anniversary
of the Norwegian Synod



Lutheran Synod Quarterly

Volume 43 Nos. 2 & 3 June & September, 2003

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

Theological Journal of the
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Edited by the faculty of
Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary
6 Browns Court
Mankato, MN 56001

Editor Pres. Gaylin Schmeling
Managing Editor Pres. Gaylin Schmeling
Book Review Editor Prof. Michael Smith
Layout Rev. Paul Fries, Terri Fries
Cover Design Chad Bloedel
Printer Ideal Printers Inc., St. Paul, Minnesota

Subscription Price: \$15.00 U.S. per year

*Send all subscriptions and other correspondence
to the following address:*

BETHANY LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
ATTN: LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY
6 BROWNS CT.
MANKATO, MN 56001

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NORWEGIAN SYNOD

Contents

Foreword	119
<i>Gaylin R. Schmeling</i>	
Brief History of the Synod	124
<i>Juul B. Madson</i>	
The Lord is My Shepherd - Psalm 23	127
<i>Sigurd C. Ylvisaker</i>	
<i>En Redegjørelse</i> An Accounting to the Congregations	128
of the Norwegian Synod	
<i>Ulrik V. Koren</i>	
Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?	148
<i>Ulrik V. Koren</i>	
Sermon on Genesis 12:1-4	189
<i>Bjug Harstad</i>	
Unity, Union and Unionism	200
<i>H. M. Tjernagel</i>	
The Three Solas	230
<i>Justin A. Petersen, J. B. Unseth, Christian Anderson</i>	
The Position and the Part of Faith in Justification	264
<i>C. Monrad Gullerud</i>	

The Ministry of Reconciliation 286
Norman A. Madson

City Set on a Hill, final chapter 295
Theodore A. Aaberg

Foreword

In commemoration of the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Norwegian Synod, of which the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is the spiritual heir, this issue of the *Quarterly* is being devoted to a special remembrance of our history and tradition. This is a time to remember all the wonderful blessings that the Lord has poured out upon His church during the past one hundred fifty years. We have received a great heritage from our forefathers and we thank the Lord for all His blessings in the past. While looking forward to the future, we want to use the lessons of the past to help guide us on the pathway on which the Lord is leading us.

This *Quarterly* contains significant essays produced throughout the history of our synod. They were valuable at the time they were produced and they still are of vital importance today. They reveal our spiritual heritage. For each essay there is an introduction explaining its contents written by Pastor Donald Moldstad, the co-editor of this issue of the *Quarterly*. Following are short biographies of each of the writers.

Sigurd C. Ylvisaker (1884-1959) was born in Madison, Wisconsin, to Prof. and Mrs. Johannes Ylvisaker. He attended Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, from 1904 to 1907. The next three years he spent at Leipzig University in Germany and earned his Doctor's Degree in Semitics in 1910. In 1919 he became the representative of the ELS on the teaching staff of Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1923 he accepted a call to Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Madison, Wisconsin, where he served until 1930 when he became president of Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minnesota. He served as president until 1950. Because of his faithful and tireless efforts Bethany Lutheran College survived and prospered during some of the most difficult years of its existence. The poem *The Lord is My Shepherd – Psalm 23* was written by Dr. Ylvisaker.

Ulrik V. Koren (1826-1910) was born in Bergen on the west coast of Norway. In 1853 he and his wife Elisabeth crossed a frozen

Mississippi with a light buggy to northern Iowa, which became the center of his ministry. He served at Washington Prairie, east of Decorah, Iowa. Through his tireless efforts about twenty parishes were formed from this, his original congregation among them, East and West Paint Creek and Jerico and Saude of the present ELS. He was president of the synod from 1894 to 1910. Beyond a doubt he was the leading theologian in the synod. At times he is referred to as the Norwegian Walther. Many of his theological writings were published in a four-volume set of books under the title *Samlede Skrifter* (Collected Writings). He is the writer of both "*En Redegjorelse*" *An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod* (*Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 2, June 1993, pp. 8-27) and *Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?* (U.V. Koren, *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*, pp. 171-199)

Bjug A. Harstad (1848-1933) was born on the Harstad farm in Valle, Saetersdal, Norway. In the early 1860s the Harstad family came to America. He graduated from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, in 1871, and enrolled at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. In 1874 he was called to the Red River Valley area. He was the president of the Minnesota District from 1884 to 1892. Later he was called to the state of Washington where he established the institution that would become Pacific Lutheran University. To support the institution in economic difficulties he went prospecting for gold in the Yukon region of Canada. In 1918 he was elected the first president of the reorganized Norwegian Synod, now the ELS. He was the author of a number of essays and books, including *Pioneer Days* and *Is the Bible Reliable?* The *Sermon on Genesis 12:1-4* included in this issue was presented by Pastor Harstad at the first convention of the ELS in 1918 at Lime Creek Lutheran Church, Lake Mills, Iowa. (1918 *Beretning*, pp. 75-85)

Helge M. Tjernagel (1871-1940) was born at the Follinglo family farm near Story City, Iowa. He served congregations in Washington, California, Minnesota, and Iowa. The Norwegian Synod began mission work in Alaska in 1894. Here the young Tjernagel served as

a missionary among the Eskimos. Pastor Tjernagel joined the ELS in 1923 when he was called to serve the Saude and Jerico congregations in Iowa. In 1929 he established a Lutheran school, thereby showing his love for Christian education. He also served as the fourth president of the ELS. He is the primary author of *Unity, Union, and Unionism*. (1936 Synod Report, pp. 30-51)

Justin A. Petersen (1891-1954) was born in Escanaba, Michigan. After graduating from Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, he entered Luther Seminary at St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1924 he joined the ELS and received a call to the Scarville-Center parish, Scarville, Iowa, where he served 24 years. He was an ardent advocate of Christian education on all levels and established a Christian Day School at Scarville, a school which is still in existence today. After poor health had led him to leave the parish ministry, he accepted the position as manager of the Lutheran Synod Book Company at Bethany. He truly loved the synod and worked hard to promote its work. He was buried at the Scarville cemetery where his tombstone is inscribed with the words A CHRISTIAN LUTHERAN PASTOR—BY THE GRACE OF GOD, an epitaph that aptly describes his life. He is one of the writers of *The Three Solas*. (1943 Synod Report, pp. 18-41)

J. B. Unseth (1875-1966) was born near Westby, Wisconsin. He attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, and Luther Seminary, St. Paul, graduating as a candidate of theology in 1900. He served congregations in North Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota. After serving in the public ministry for 51 years he retired in 1951. In his retirement he continued to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to his brothers and sisters in Christ as chaplain at Kasota Valley Lutheran Home, a retirement home then operated by the ELS in Kasota, near Mankato. He is one of the writers of *The Three Solas*.

Christian Anderson (1874-1959) was born in Grant County, Minnesota. He attended Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, and Luther Seminary, St. Paul, graduating as a candidate of theology in 1899. He served the following congregations: Genesee, Idaho, from 1899 to 1903; Zion Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 1903

to 1916; Fairview Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 1916 to 1928; Belview parish, Minnesota, from 1928 to 1949. He was along in the reorganization of the Norwegian Synod on the old foundations in 1918 after the merger of 1917 had split the ranks of the old synod. In the ELS he served as president and vice-president and on various boards and committees. He is one of the writers of *The Three Solas*.

C. Monrad Gullerud (1908-1995) was born at Tracy, Minnesota, to Pastor and Mrs. O.M. Gullerud. He attended Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. After graduating in 1932 he was called to serve as pastor of Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, South Dakota, and Oslo Lutheran Church, Volga, South Dakota, from 1932 to 1941. He served Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Mankato, Minnesota from 1941 to 1959; and Salem Lutheran Church, Eagle Lake, Minnesota, from 1942 to 1962. He was one of the founding members of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. Here he functioned as editor of the *Journal of Theology*, as professor of Immanuel Lutheran Seminary from 1959 to 1984, and as president of Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire from 1962 to 1978. During his retirement years he authored five family devotion books and translated several religious works from Norwegian to English. He is the writer of the essay *The Position and the Part of Faith in Justification*. (1939 *Synod Report*, pp. 21-39)

Norman A. Madson (1886-1962) was born near Manitowoc, Wisconsin. He attended Luther Seminary at St. Paul, Minnesota, and was ordained in the fall of 1915. He became a traveling missionary on the Iron Range of northern Minnesota. After joining the ELS in 1925 he served as pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, rural Princeton, Minnesota. In 1946 he was called as the dean of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary where he served until 1960. He wrote numerous articles for the *Lutheran Sentinel* and the *Lutheran Quarterly*. His publications include *Preaching to Preachers* (1952); and two volumes of chapel addresses, entitled *Evening Bells at Bethany* (1948) and *Evening Bells at Bethany II* (1952). Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois, awarded him an

honorary doctor of divinity degree in 1951. After his retirement in 1960 he spent his last two years on earth as a member of the CLC. ***The Ministry of Reconciliation*** (*Preaching to Preachers*, pp. 46-55) was written by Dr. Madson.

Theodore A. Aaberg (1925-1980) was born at Wildrose, North Dakota, to Pastor and Mrs. Theodore Aaberg. He attended Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, and the newly organized Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato, Minnesota, graduating in 1950. From 1949 to 1968 he served as pastor at Scarville-Center Lutheran parish at Scarville, Iowa. He then accepted the call to the Norseland-Norwegian Grove parish, St. Peter, where he served until 1976. At that time he accepted the call as president of Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mankato. He was managing editor of the *Lutheran Sentinel* for several years and served on the Doctrine Committee. In 1968 he authored a major history of the synod entitled *A City Set on a Hill*. In "***A City Set on a Hill***," final chapter (*City Set on a Hill*, pp. 264-265) Pastor Aaberg explains the significance of the book.

A Brief History of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod

by Juul B. Madson

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod had its beginnings among Norwegian immigrants to the United States of America in the nineteenth century. As these immigrants began settling primarily in the upper Midwest they had no congregations, no pastors, no schools of their own; but the Lord had not forgotten them. Soon pastors from their homeland began arriving to provide spiritual leadership for them and to organize congregations in which the public ministry of God's Word and His Sacraments could preserve the people in the true faith.

One of these early immigrant pastors held a memorable service outdoors under an oak tree in September of 1844 at a place with the Indian name of Koshkonong, near Madison, Wisconsin. Soon afterward, two congregations bearing that name were organized in the area. In 1853 a church body composed of several congregations was organized at nearby Luther Valley Church under the official name of The Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For a long time this church body was to be commonly known as the "Norwegian Synod."

These Norwegian spiritual pioneers soon came in contact with other Lutheran groups in this country. Unfortunately, not all of the latter were in full agreement on the teaching and practice set forth in God's Holy Word. However, the members of the Norwegian Synod eventually discovered a synod and its leader with whom they were in blessed agreement, a larger group of primarily German Lutherans known as the Missouri Synod, which quickly opened its educational institutions to the Norwegian Synod for the training of its pastors and teachers.

In 1872 the Missouri Synod, the Norwegian Synod, the Wisconsin Synod and several other state synods formed the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America, for many years a strong champion of the true teachings of the Holy Scriptures and of the Lutheran confessional writings gathered in the Book of Concord in 1580.

The Christian church here on earth, however, is called the militant church—and for good reason. The devil is constantly seeking to destroy God’s church by undermining the truth of His holy teachings. In the 1880s a serious disagreement on the biblical doctrine of God’s election of individuals to salvation divided the Norwegian Synod. When in 1917 the larger group resulting from this division rejoined other groups, a remnant of the Norwegian Synod refused to enter into this merger because it was based on the false teaching that man can somehow by nature cooperate with God in bringing about his own conversion.

In order to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word, this minority reorganized in 1918 at Lime Creek Lutheran Church, near Lake Mills, Iowa, as The Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. This name was later officially changed to its present designation, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, with headquarters in Mankato, Minnesota. The Lord of the church blessed this little flock, which soon rejoined its former member churches in the Synodical Conference.

Mid-twentieth-century doctrinal differences arising in the Synodical Conference eventually forced the Norwegian Synod to withdraw from this federation. However, in 1993 it joined with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and several other smaller but doctrinally and confessionally sound Lutheran church bodies throughout the world to form a new international federation, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference.

In 1927 the synod purchased and began operating as its own school of higher learning Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato. For many years a two-year college, it was at the turn of the century upgraded to a full baccalaureate institution. In 1946 Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary was added to the synod’s educational program. The synod fervently promotes Christian education also at the elementary and high school levels and has quite a few Christian day schools and several area Lutheran high schools serving its youth. For a period of forty years it once operated a high school on the campus of Bethany Lutheran College. From its reorganization the synod has also been actively engaged in mission work both in the United States, especially in the South and the West, and in foreign lands, notably in Africa and South America.

The prayer arising from the hearts of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is that the Lord of the Church will preserve

their church body as a true confessor of His inerrant and alone-saving Word, the Holy Scriptures.

[From *An Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism*. Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 2001. pp. 215-216.]

The Lord is My Shepherd

Psalm 23

by Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker

Introduction: In this brief exposition of the familiar Psalm 23 one can see the pastoral heart of this great theologian, Dr. S.C. Ylvisaker. For many who attended Bethany College during his term as president "Doc Y" took on a fatherly, pastoral role with the students, primarily through his frequent chapel homilies. Here, in concise wording, he expresses the comfort of the Good Shepherd Psalm for all generations. For that reason these words were often found framed on the walls of many in the re-organized synod.

*This has become the Christian's Song of Trust in a dark world
 his confession in a confused world
 his challenge to unbelief
 his privilege before God and men
 his exercise of faith against doubt and neglect
 his solemn vow and sacrifice of love
 his daily prayer — the Lord's Prayer of the Old Covenant
 his assurance of God's sacred promises
 his thanksgiving for the mercy of God in Christ
 his cry of victory
 his last whisper in the final hour
 his GREAT AMEN*

*The New Testament answers the Old when Jesus says
 I Am the Good Shepherd
 John 10*

En Redegjørelse

An Accounting to the Congregations of the Norwegian Synod

by *Ulrik V. Koren*

Introduction: The great Election Controversy of the nineteenth century reached a watershed mark in 1884. Pastor U. V. Koren was asked to serve as chief author of a theological statement so that the "man in the pew" could understand all of the issues in question. In his words, "We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess." The following 63 theses soon became known as "An Accounting." Many consider this document to be Koren at his finest, and one of the best presentations of the challenging doctrine of predestination ever written on American soil. In this work we see how the Norwegian Synod theologians did their theology, using clear Scripture passages and then the Lutheran Confessions to set forth their case. "An Accounting" served as the definitive statement which would help to bring about a clear distinction between the doctrine expressed in the Formula of Concord and other non-biblical expressions. Unwilling to subscribe to "An Accounting," Prof. F.A. Schmidt, leader of the opposition to Koren, finally admitted, "I believe....that salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone." Such a statement helped many a layman stay with Koren and the Norwegian Synod, where salvation by grace alone continued to be confessed.

It is well known to you that we now for several years have been attacked and accused of teaching false doctrines regarding election or the election of grace. Our teaching has been called Calvinistic. The teachings with which we have been charged are of two kinds: some, which we have never believed and never taught; these we have publicly repudiated, but we have continued to be accused of them anyway; others, which we actually have taught, because they are expressly taught in God's Word and confessed by the Lutheran Church in its public confessions. Therefore we cling to

these in spite of all attacks. We do not accept as our own a single doctrine which is not clearly based on the Word of God and which cannot be shown to be in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church.

We owe our congregations an accounting for what we teach and confess; and although we dare to believe that our hearers both know our testimony and will judge it by what they hear of us and not by what others say, we have still considered it our duty to present to you now this our common complete accounting, in which we hope no essential question that concerns the disputed doctrines has been unanswered.

We present this accounting to you, then, in the name of the Lord, for testing by the Word of God.

I

Concerning the Universal Grace of God, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession is as follows:

1. God will have all men to be saved. He is not willing that any sinner should perish and is not responsible for the damnation of any sinner. (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11)

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God does not will the salvation of all men.

2. Christ has redeemed all men, and His redemption has the same content and purpose for all. (1 Timothy 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 18:11; John 1:29)

We reject the Calvinistic teaching, that Christ in reality has redeemed only the elect. (2 Peter 2:1)

3. In the Word, God calls all men to repentance, and it is "His will that in those whom He thus calls He will work through the Word that they may be enlightened, converted, and saved." (*FC TD*, XI, 25) Accordingly this call of God is equally earnest and powerful over towards all. (Acts 17:30; Mark 16:15; Matthew 23:37; Isaiah 65:2; Matthew 22:1-14)

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God's call is earnest and powerful only over towards the elect.

4. The means of grace always possess their innate power to work

repentance, faith and perseverance (in the faith) and thus to save the man to whom they come. The means of grace do not have different powers over towards the different men. (John 6:63; Romans 10:6-8,17; 2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that the means of grace are powerful and efficacious only for the elect.

5. The power of the means of grace can be resisted and their saving effect can be prevented by every man and at every point. (Matthew 23:37; Luke 7:30; Acts 13:46; Zechariah 7:11-12; Acts 7:51; Hebrews 3:7-11)

We reject the teaching of the Calvinists that God's grace is irresistible and that the truly regenerated cannot fall away from the state of grace.

II

Concerning Conversion, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession in the disputed points is as follows:

1. The conversion (of the fallen) is "that a man who has fallen away from the grace of God and is dead in sin is again by the power of God raised up to a new spiritual life, reconciled with God by faith and thus entirely converted and changed." (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, Q. 677; *Epitome*, V. 532; 2 Timothy 2:25,26; Jeremiah 3:1,6,7; Ephesians 2:4-6; Acts 26:18)
2. When the Holy Scriptures call the natural man dead in sin, it designates thereby also a spiritual impotence and bondage such that the free use of the faculties of the soul in purely spiritual things is wholly and completely lost and gone; "the reason is darkened, the will is incapable of good and inclined to everything evil, and the peace of the conscience is disturbed." (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, Q. 383 [Q. 382-386]; *Epitome*, Q. 270; Revelation 3:1; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 1:21; Matthew 13:11ff; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Romans 3:11,12; 6:20; Genesis 6:5; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:13; 4:17-18; Titus 3:3; 2 Peter 2:19; Isaiah 49:9)
3. Being dead in sin, the natural man cannot himself change this condition of his heart nor cooperate, either little or much, in effecting

this change; for “the man who is not regenerated resists God altogether and is wholly and entirely a slave of sin,” and “he is and remains an enemy of God, until he by the power of the Holy Spirit is converted, made a believer, regenerated and renewed, through the Word that is preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own.” (*FC, TD*, II, 44; II, 2; John 3:6; Romans 8:7-9; Ephesians 2:4-6; Philippians 2:13; Jeremiah 31:18; Hosea 13:9; Matthew 11:27; Deuteronomy 29:4; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Colossians 2:12,13; Matthew 7:17-18)

4. The natural man has freedom and power outwardly to hear and consider the Word of God or not to do this, but man cannot cooperate at all in bringing about any inner change in his heart for good. (Colossians 2:13; Philippians 2:13; John 15:5; Luke 11:23; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Jeremiah 13:23; Romans 8:8)
5. Not to want to hear the Word of God is an effective and deciding cause for a person's not being converted. (Romans 10:14,17)
6. The fact that the unregenerate man outwardly hears and with his still darkened reason considers the Word of God is not a cooperating, much less deciding, cause for this that he is converted, although such hearing is necessary as a means which God uses for conversion. (Matthew 13:14; Romans 8:7; 9:16; 10:17; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Matthew 19:22; Acts 28:26; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Romans 10:21; Hebrews 4:2; Acts 16:14; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15)

We reject the assertion that the natural, unregenerated man, because he can outwardly use the Word of God, can by this conduct of his cooperate in his conversion.

7. God's command — Repent ye, Awake, etc. — does not prove that it is possible for the unregenerated man by his own strength to obey, any more than the command; “Thou shalt love God above all things,” shows that man is capable of doing this. Such and similar words are **means** which God uses, both to bring a man to recognize his own impotence and also by the power of the divine Word to produce the effect intended. (Matthew 7:18; Jeremiah 31:18; 2 Timothy 2:25; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Ephesians 2:1; John 11:43; Mark 5:41-42)

We reject the semi-pelagian, papistic misuse of the Scripture passages named, when by them men seek to prove that the

unregenerated man is of himself capable of obeying; likewise that, if this were not the case, then these admonitions and commands would be meaningless.

8. There is no power left in the will of the unregenerated man, by which he can assist the work of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 8:7-8; Genesis 6:5; John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 6:63; Ephesians 2:8-10) We reject the opposite semi-pelagian and synergistic error.
9. The will of an unconverted man is not a cooperating instrument but is itself the object on which the Holy Ghost works in order to convert and change him. For, since the unregenerated man is dead in his sins, "no *modus agendi*, or no way whatever of working something good in spiritual things can be ascribed to man before his conversion" (*FC, TD, II, 31*).

We reject the synergistic teaching that the unregenerated man, by the help of some divinely bestowed powers, can himself cooperate in his conversion. This would presuppose that the unregenerated man who is dead in sin already had a will, freed from the bondage of sin, to make use of such powers; but this is contrary to Scripture. (Jeremiah 31:18,33; Acts 15:9; 2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Philippians 2:13; Ezekiel 36: 26-27)

10. "This doctrine concerning the inability and wickedness of our natural free will and concerning our conversion and regeneration, namely, that it is a work of God alone and not of our powers, is abused in an unchristian manner both by enthusiasts and by Epicureans" (*FC, TD, II, 21*); namely, so that they show contempt for the means of grace, are indifferent regarding their conversion, yes, even mock and blaspheme; but this does not give us the right to pass by, change or limit the express and oft-repeated teaching of the Word of God concerning it. (1 Corinthians 4:12-15; Jeremiah 6:10,19; Acts 20:18,21,26-27; 1 Timothy 1:13; Romans 3:8)
11. The preparation of the heart of man for conversion by preparatory grace is a work of the Holy Ghost, like conversion itself, and is described in Holy Writ by many names, such as calling, awakening, inviting, drawing, knocking, etc. (Matthew 20:16; Titus 1:9; Ephesians 5:14; Luke 14:16; John 6:44; Jeremiah 31:3; John 12:32; Revelation 3:20)

12. There may be several steps and degrees in this preparation for conversion, through which men are led, sometimes in a shorter, sometimes in a longer, time; for God deals, in his wisdom and love, very differently with the different men. (Isaiah 48:4; Acts 24:25; 1 Timothy 1:13; Acts 26:28-29; Hebrews 4:12; Luke 13:17; Mark 12:34; Luke 24:25; Acts 16:14; 13:48; Matthew 21:28-29; Luke 11:27-28)
13. Just as the unregenerated man is without ability to cooperate, but is passive, *i.e.*, is acted upon, when the Spirit of God first begins to work on him by the Word, so he is also not active in producing the succeeding emotions or changes either, but is also then passive, *i.e.*, is only acted upon, until conversion has taken place and the will thus has been set free and made capable of good. (Cf Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 478, 485, 498, 586)

We reject the newer synergistic doctrine that every man to whom God's call comes receives before regeneration a liberated will by the operation of the Word, so that the as yet unregenerated man is assumed to be able to will the good or to determine that he will turn to God and thus decide his conversion and salvation himself, and that a man's conversion thus depends on his own choice. It is the teaching of Scripture that the man who does not become converted, has himself to thank for it; but it does not teach that about those who are converted. (John 3:6; Romans 8:7; Ephesians 2:4-5; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Philippians 2:13; Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:18,22,23; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23; John 1:5; Romans 14:23; 9:16; Hosea 13:9; Luke 11:23; John 1: 12-13)

14. When we teach that a man during preparatory grace and in conversion itself remains passive, it is "not our meaning that in conversion no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Ghost and no spiritual operation begun," (*FC, TD, II, 46*); for each of the preparatory operations of the Holy Ghost may produce even violent emotions and agitation in the as yet unregenerated man (e.g., terror, distress, and efforts to make oneself righteous according to the law). But since the unregenerated man does not as yet know God as his Savior and is at enmity with God in the depths of his heart, he cannot truly turn to God with his heart or contribute anything to the changing of his heart and thus cooperate in his

- conversion. (Acts 2:37; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Acts 24:25; 16:27-30; Romans 7:8-11; cf. the passages under Thesis 3)
15. God's work is not done on man by force, but by changing the will. Therefore, as certain as it is that God alone works conversion, so certain is it also that man repents and that the man who repents wants to repent. For the man who repents does not do it by compulsion, but willingly, although it is God alone who effects this that a man both wants to do this and does it. For it is not God, but man who repents of his sin; it is man who ceases his resistance; it is man who believes and makes good resolutions and thus decides for God, although all these things are the operations of grace, which God alone, without any cooperation of man, has produced in him by the power of the Word by which He in His grace bends and determines the will. (See Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 585, 586 [Q. 692, 487, 488]; Jeremiah 24:7; John 1:12; Jeremiah 20:7; Ezekiel 18:31-32; 36:26; Psalm 51:14; Isaiah 55:6-7; Philippians 2:13)
16. Since the unregenerated man is at enmity with God and resists God altogether, it belongs to the gracious work of the Holy Ghost to "remove the resistance of the will." This removal does not take place by compulsion, but by the drawing of God; for "the Lord God draws the man whom he wishes to convert, and draws him in such a way that his darkened understanding is turned into an enlightened one and his perverse will into an obedient one. And this is what the Scriptures call "creating a new heart." (Psalm 51:12; *FC, TD*, II, 30; cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 485; *Epitome*, Q. 369; Romans 8:7; Acts 7:51; Isaiah 63:17; 2 Timothy 2:25; Acts 9:1ff, Ezekiel 36:26; John 6:44; Matthew 11:27)
17. It is God's gracious will to remove all resistance in every man to whom His call in the Word comes. Where a man in spite of this persists in his resistance, this has its cause not in any lack or insufficiency in the operation of the Holy Ghost, but in man's own wickedness. But we do not have the right, according to Scripture, to deduce from this that those men whose resistance is removed have themselves cooperated in any way toward this result which must be ascribed to the grace of God alone.

We reject the doctrine that the outward hearing of the Word

of God by the unregenerated man constitutes a cessation of the rebellious opposition of the human heart and thus a change in his real conduct toward God. We likewise reject the doctrine that this inner, rebellious opposition, where it is removed, is removed not by God but by man himself, either by his own natural powers or by powers which the unregenerated man is supposed to have received from God. (1 Timothy 2:4; Ezekiel 11:19; Acts 7:51; Jeremiah 7:25-27; Luke 7:30; Matthew 23:37; Hosea 13:9; cf. Thesis 3)

18. When a man does not repent, he cannot rightly excuse himself with this that he was incapable of doing so. For it is God's gracious will to remove this hindrance, as well as everything which hinders a man's conversion. The cause is only this that the man himself would not. (Matthew 21:32; 22:4; Psalm 95:8; Isaiah 55:6-7; Acts 7:5 1; Isaiah 65:2)
19. Since it is God's gracious purpose to remove every hindrance to conversion by the means of grace, and it still is possible for a man at every point to continue in his opposition to God, a man is never without responsibility over towards the grace of God, although he may mock and say that, since God is the one who does everything for our salvation, then a man has no responsibility himself, as we see in Romans 9:19. (cf Theses 17 and 18)
20. There is only a difference in degree between those who by preparatory grace are awakened from their sleep in sin, are restless in conscience and therefore seek to escape God's wrath, and those with whom this is not the case, up to the time when faith enters in. Until this happens, a man is still carnal and an enemy of God; for there is no such thing as an intermediate state between converted and unconverted, regenerated and unregenerated, believing and unbelieving. (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 498 [Q. 484, 323, 327]; *Epitome*, Q. 217; John 3:6; Matthew 6:24; Luke 11:23; Matthew 7:13-14; Acts 26:18; Hebrews 11:6; Ephesians 2:5; 5:8)
21. Where the first spark of the true faith is ignited in a man's heart, there the man is in truth converted. (Matthew 12:20; Mark 9:24; Luke 17:5; Hebrews 5:13; Isaiah 42:3; 35:3-4)
22. Although conversion in the strict sense, as a transition from death to life, must necessarily take place in an instant, it is still as a rule

not possible in experience to tell when faith is created in the heart, and thus to notice the transition from the preparatory to the really converting operations of grace; “for the Holy Ghost does not work on the human will of man as by violent jerks, and one cannot put one’s finger, as on a mathematical point, on the time when the liberated will begins to function.” (Martin Chemnitz; Matthew 6:24; Luke 11:23; Ephesians 5:14)

III

Concerning Election - Introductory Remarks

1. The words: election of grace, election, predestination, foreordination to salvation, appointment to eternal life, are expressions which in Scripture and our confessional writings all denote the same thing. (Romans 11:5; 8:29-30, 33; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; Matthew 20:16; Acts 13:48)

We reject the assertion that in some of the Scripture passages which treat of and explain election for us, the words “chosen” (elected) and “choose” (elect) have another meaning than that which our confessional writings have found in them, namely, election to eternal salvation, as our Savior Himself uses the word in Matthew 22:14; 24:22, 31; Mark 13:22, etc.

2. The doctrine of election is not a chief article in the teaching of God’s Word; for a man can be a believing Christian and be saved, although he has not attained to a knowledge of this doctrine and appropriated it, but since Holy Writ treats of it, “We should not neglect or reject the doctrine of the divine Word on account of abuse or misunderstanding.” (*FC, TD, XI, 1*; 1 Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Acts 20:27)
3. A man comes to repentance and faith not by brooding over God’s predestination, but by appropriating the Gospel of God’s universal grace in Christ. No one who has not already become a true believer by the Gospel can appropriate the doctrine of election for his comfort. (Luke 13:23-24; Romans 1:16-17; Matthew 11:28)
We reject the Calvinistic error which makes the doctrine of election the starting point for the Christian faith.

4. The doctrine of election stands in close connection with the fundamental chief articles of the Christian faith, such as: That fallen man is completely corrupted and dead in sin; that God desires the salvation of all men; that salvation is by the grace of God alone; and that it therefore is gained through faith alone without the works of the law. (Ephesians 1:3ff; Romans 8:29ff; Matthew 22:1ff; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

Therefore the doctrine of election can be kept pure only then when these chief articles of faith are kept in their purity.

5. While that which is taught us in the Word of God concerning election is clear and definite, "God has still kept secret and concealed much concerning this mystery, and reserved it for His wisdom and knowledge alone, which we should not investigate, nor should we indulge our thoughts in this matter, nor draw conclusions, nor inquire curiously, but should adhere to the revealed Word. This admonition is most urgently needed. For our curiosity has always much more pleasure in concerning itself with these matters than with what God has revealed to us concerning this in His Word, because we cannot harmonize it, which, moreover, we have not been commanded to do." (*FC, TD, XI, 41-42; Romans 11:33-36; Job 38:1ff 40:2; 42:3; Isaiah 55:8-9*)
6. Where we in the Word of God meet with two clearly taught truths which we cannot reconcile with each other by our reason, there we shall let them stand side by side, "bring into captivity every thought," and believe both things. Just as we must do this in the doctrine of the Trinity, in the doctrine of Christ's person, of the sacrament and of conversion, so we must do it also in the doctrine of election. (Cf. Pontoppidan *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 80 [Q. 15,16]; 1 Corinthians 13:9-12; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Hebrews 11:17-19; John 10:35; Ecclesiastes 8:17; Proverbs 3:5; 1 Samuel 1:23)

We reject the opposite procedure as dangerous and presumptuous.

7. There is no real contradiction between the Scripture's doctrine of universal grace and that of election, although these doctrines cannot be harmonized by reason. He who seeks to harmonize them before the judgment of our reason will not succeed in doing so, except by limiting or changing one or the other of them, and must, on the one hand, depart from the Scripture doctrine concerning

election, and, on the other hand, from the Scripture doctrine concerning the universality of God's grace (Calvinism) or from the Scripture doctrine concerning man's complete corruption (Synergism). Scripture gives us no other explanation than that in Hosea 13:9: "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help." (2 Corinthians 1:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 1 Timothy 2:4; Acts 13:48; Matthew 23:37; Romans 9:16)

8. Every article of faith must be sought in those Scripture passages in which the respective doctrine is specially and thoroughly treated by the holy writers. Other passages in which the same doctrine is only incidentally mentioned must be explained in accordance with these passages. (Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:11)

It is therefore an improper way to treat Scripture when people in the doctrine of election partly set aside more or less those passages where this teaching is specially and thoroughly treated, partly want to explain these in accordance with such passages as either treat this doctrine only in passing or even do not treat it at all.

9. The passages in Scripture which specially and thoroughly treat of the doctrine of election are chiefly: Ephesians 1:3ff; Romans 8:29ff; Matthew 22:1ff; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

On these passages, therefore, we base our faith and teaching concerning this matter, which is contained in the following theses:

The Doctrine of Election

10. "In this His counsel, purpose and ordination God has not only prepared salvation in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and ordained that in the way just mentioned (by the means of grace and in the order of salvation) he will, by his grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen and preserve them." (*FC, TD, XI, 19; Acts 13:48; Romans 11:5; John 15:16; Matthew 16:18; John 10:28; Isaiah 43:1; cf Thesis 9*)

11. All those, and only those, who die in the faith in Christ are the elect. (*FC*, XI, 3; Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 547, *Epitome*, Q. 426 and 454; Matthew 24:24,31)

We reject the Huberian error of an election of all men. (Matthew 22:14)

12. The fact that election does not apply to all men is not due to any unwillingness on the part of God to save all men. For God has not by any eternal decree either predestined any man to damnation or passed him by with His grace. That the many are not chosen has its ground alone in their resistance or in their renewed and continued fall from grace; “they have prepared themselves to be vessels of wrath.” (*FC*, TD XI, 52-53, Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 545, 546; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Matthew 25:41; 23:37; Isaiah 65:2; Jeremiah 7:24; Matthew 22:1-14; 2 Peter 2:1ff; Luke 11:24-26; Isaiah 3:9; 5:1-6; Hosea 13:9; Romans 9:22-23)

We reject the Calvinistic doctrine that God has predestined some men to damnation.

13. Election is not a mere foreordination to salvation or “a muster, thus: ‘This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned; — as though nothing more belonged to it and nothing more were to be considered in it.’” (*FC*, TD XI, 7) Rather it stands in the very closest connection with God’s universal will of grace, in that it includes the whole order of salvation, through which God in election has determined to lead the elect, and fain would lead all men, on to salvation. (Ephesians 1:3ff; Romans 8:29ff; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13)

That presentation which limits election to the bare decree concerning salvation and which excludes from it God’s decree concerning the way and means of salvation, we do not acknowledge as the presentation of Scripture and the *Formula of Concord*. (*FC*, XI, 6 and 19) However, so long as the doctrine of sin and of grace is kept pure, we do not regard anyone who has used, or uses, that incomplete concept of election as a false teacher. Therefore we acknowledge, not indeed as a complete definition of the concept of election, but still as a correct presentation of the last part of it, the answer given to Q. 548 of Pontoppidan’s *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed*, which reads, “That God has appointed all those to

eternal life whom he from eternity has seen would accept the grace proffered them, believe in Jesus and persevere in this faith unto the end.” (Romans 8:28-30; 2 Timothy 1:13) This is to be understood in the manner in which it is developed by Johann Gerhard in the following quotation:

The merit of Christ is the cause of our election. But since the merit of Christ does not benefit anyone without faith, therefore we say that the regard to faith is a component part of the decree of election. We confess with loud voice that we teach that God has not found anything good in the man who was to be chosen to the life eternal; that he has not taken into consideration either good works, or the use of the free will, or, what is more, not even faith itself in such a way that he was influenced by it, or that he has elected some on account of it; but we say that it is solely and alone the merit of Christ whose worthiness God has taken into consideration, and that he has resolved upon the decree of election out of pure grace. However, since the merit of Christ is found in a man only through faith, therefore we teach that election has taken place in view of Christ’s merit which is to be appropriated by faith. We say, therefore, that all those, and only those, are by God in eternity elected unto salvation, of whom he has foreseen that they by the operation of the Holy Ghost through the ministry of the Gospel would come to a true faith in the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and would persevere in the faith until the end. (Gerhard, *Loc. de electione*, par. 161)

Therefore, we declare also that we stand in fellowship of faith with those who like Pontoppidan and Johann Gerhard teach correctly regarding sin and grace and who, like them, reject the doctrine that God has been influenced in electing men by their conduct.

14. The election of grace or predestination is not an act of judgment, but alone an act of grace. (Romans 11:5-6)
15. The cause of the election of grace is alone the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ, and there is in us no cause for the sake of which God has elected us unto eternal life. (*FC, Ep, XI, 20; Ephesians 1:4-5; Titus 3:4-7*)

We reject the synergistic doctrine that God in electing a man has been “determined by” or has “taken into consideration” or has

“been guided by” man’s conduct. For a man’s (good) conduct denotes something which man “does or omits doing,” or a work of the law; and when one refers to election unto salvation and the attainment of salvation, we confess that “our best works are of no value whatever to that end.” (Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 325 [323, 327]; *Epitome*, Q. 215, 217) On the other hand, when one refers to damnation, then we confess that a man’s (evil) conduct is the cause of it. (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9; Matthew 22:5-8; 1 Corinthians 4:7; John 3:27; 1:17)

16. Although a man’s good conduct (i.e., the works of the law) cannot contribute anything whatever to his salvation, it is still on the other hand certain that a man’s evil conduct unfortunately can only too easily bring him to perdition. Furthermore, since the only way to salvation along which God leads the elect is via repentance, faith, and sanctification, and he accordingly who would be saved must be found on that way, it is blasphemous to say that, since our conduct does not help us to gain salvation, we can then conduct ourselves as we wish, which is the ancient offense of the Gospel. (Hosea 13:9; John 14:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 3:8; 6:1-2; cf. Theses 12 and 13)

17. Since everything good in man is God’s free and undeserved gift of grace, there is nothing in man which could induce God to elect him. Man’s faith could not induce God to do this either, for faith is itself a free gift of grace from God, which He has not been induced to give to man by anything good in him, but alone by His mercy for Christ’s sake; “because God in his counsel, before the time of the world, decided and ordained that he himself, by the power of his Holy Ghost, would produce and work in us, through the Word, everything that pertains to our conversion.” (*FC, TD XI*, 36; Phl 1-29; James 1:17; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 2:8-9) Since we are saved by grace and therefore by faith alone without the works of the law, faith does not come into consideration here as a work of the law, i.e., as a piece of good “conduct” on our part.

We therefore reject the synergistic doctrine which gives faith this significance. (Romans 4:16)

18. Faith must not be excluded from the election of grace, for there is no election of grace except in Christ, and man is united with Christ

only by faith. Therefore also faith is included in election as a part of the order which has been fixed in the decree of election itself. (2 Thessalonians 2:13; cf. Theses 9 and 13)

We reject the Calvinistic teaching that God first has ordained some people to salvation by an absolute election and then thereafter has decided to send His Son and bestow faith as a means of salvation on those men who were in an absolute manner elected to salvation.

19. Since everything is eternally present for God, the faith of the elect is also foreseen, and the elect themselves are foreseen by God as believing, without its being the case, however, that this foreseen faith in any way dare be counted among the efficient causes of election. For “the eternal election of God not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto.” (*FC, TD XI*, 6; cf. Thesis 10)

20. The faith of the elect is not produced by any other means than by the means of grace which are the same for all; nor by any special power which is supposedly added to them by election; for God wanted to lead all men exactly in the same way and by the same means through the ordinary order of salvation to eternal bliss. (Isaiah 5:4; Romans 1:16; 2:11; Matthew 22:1ff)

We reject the opposite, Calvinistic doctrine:

21. According to Scripture it belongs to the essence of grace to be free; for if grace is not free, i.e., undeserved by any kind of merit whatsoever in the one who is favored with it, then “grace is no more grace,” and a man cannot then trust in the grace of God alone. (Romans 11:6; 3:23-24; 27-28; Ephesians 2:8-10)

We reject the synergistic doctrine that the election in Christ has not taken place in accordance with a free purpose of grace by God, and that “salvation in a certain sense does not depend on God alone.” (Ephesians 1:11)

22. On the other hand the election of grace is not absolute:

- Because it is conditioned by the merit of Christ, which is the foundation on which it is built. (Ephesians 1:3ff)
- Because it is determined by the order of salvation fixed by

God, which points us to Christ. “In Him we are to seek the eternal election of the Father, who has determined in His eternal, divine counsel that He would save no one except those who know His Son, Christ, and truly believe on Him.” (*FC, Ep, XI, 12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13*)

- Because there is no corresponding election of wrath, since no man is predestined by God unto perdition. (*Matthew 25:41ff, 7:22-23; cf Theses 9, 12, and 13*)

23. Every correct teaching and presentation of the eternal and saving election of God’s elect children must “give to God His own glory entirely and fully, that in Christ He saves us out of pure mercy, without any merits or good works of ours, according to the purpose of His will, as it is written at Ephesians 1:5: ‘Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.’” (*FC, TD XI, 68*)

Every doctrine according to which our election and our salvation in any part and in any manner are ascribed to any other source or origin than solely and alone and exclusively God Himself, robs God of His honor and depreciates the merit of our Savior.

Therefore, we reject every doctrine which either directly or indirectly mentions any work of any kind whatsoever in us men, along side of God’s mercy and Christ’s merit, as a cause or as a concurrent cause or as an explanatory cause of our election and salvation. For such a doctrine conflicts with the First Commandment, robs God of His honor and robs us of our hope. (*Galatians 2:21; 5:4; Romans 8:32; Isaiah 42:8; 48:11; Daniel 9:7ff*)

IV

Concerning the Certainty, by Faith, of Preservation (in the Faith) and of Salvation, our Faith, Teaching, and Confession is as follows:

1. When a man has been converted to God, he has thereby received a new spiritual life with desire and power to do that which is good.

- (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 7:22; Ephesians 2:4-5; Philippians 4:13; Mark 9:23)
2. The preservation of this new life is, like its creation, to be ascribed solely and alone to the power and grace of God. (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:2; Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:21)
 3. Since faith is a new life, the believer is also willing to do, and be active in, the good by the powers given him by God, works out his own salvation with fear and trembling through daily renewal, and strives thus to keep the faith. (Matthew 3:8; Titus 2:14; 2 Corinthians 3:5; Philippians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 10:12)
 4. Where this exercise of the faith ceases, where the means of grace are neglected, where the mind becomes worldly and vain, and where a man becomes addicted to sins of security or malice, there faith is lost, and since man has the power to do this, he also has the power to hinder his preservation in the faith. (1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Timothy 4:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Luke 8:7,14; 1 Timothy 6:10)
 5. The cooperation of the regenerated man does not, however, have this importance for his preservation (in the faith), that it is a source and cause of it, nor does it merit it; for “the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him, and as soon as God would withdraw His gracious hand from him, he could not for a moment persevere in obedience to God.” (*FC, TD, II, 33*; Philippians 1:6; 2:13; Hebrews 13:21; Luke 22:32; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:5; John 15:5; Psalm 51:10)
- We reject the papistic doctrine “that our good works preserve salvation, or that the righteousness of faith which has been received, or even faith itself, is either entirely or in part kept and preserved by our works”; for from this would follow that the believer must depend at least in part on himself. (*FC, TD, IV, 23*; Jeremiah 17:5; Proverbs 28:26)
6. Since it is God’s will to save by faith in Christ the one whom He calls, He has also promised the believer to keep him in all temptations by the true faith unto the end. (Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 509; *Epitome*, Q. 390; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; John 10:27-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Isaiah 41:10-13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Luke 12:32; Psalm 55:23)

7. Since the good works which the believer must and will busy himself with cannot, whether wholly or in part, keep him in the faith, he must also with reference to his preservation (in the faith) trust in God alone. (cf. Thesis 6).

We reject the error by which the believer is misled to trust more or less on the gift and work of God in him instead of on God Himself alone. (Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 56 and 98; Luke 18:11)

8. Since God has promised His children that He will keep them in the faith unto the end, the believer trusts in this promise of God, which is unbreakable and sufficient; therefore, he has the certainty by faith that he will be kept in the faith until the end, that God then “will grant him and all believers in Christ eternal life,” and that he thus actually will attain and share the (life of) glory with God. (*Small Catechism*, Art. III; John 14:1-3; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:19,49; Romans 8:31-39; Colossians 3:4)

We reject the papistic and synergistic doctrine of doubt that a believer neither can nor should have a certainty by faith regarding his preservation and his final salvation. (1 John 5:10; Hebrews 10:23; James 1:6-7; Matthew 21:22)

9. This certainty by faith is not a more or less well-grounded assumption or a careless hope, but it is a faith, i.e., “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” a firm trust in the heart, because it is based on God’s unbreakable promise. However it is often “hidden under weakness and temptation.” (Pontoppidan, *Kort Begreb*, par. 35; Hebrews 11:1; Romans 8:38-39; 2 Corinthians 5:1-2; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 8:25-26; Mark 9:24)

The expression “a conditioned certainty of salvation” is ambiguous. If thereby is meant that the certainty by faith of preservation and salvation is bound up with the order of salvation, so that only those who are in that order can have it, then the teaching is correct. (Hebrews 3:6,14; Romans 11:22) But that expression is often used by those who teach the false doctrine that a man’s preservation and salvation has its cause more or less in his own works by

which, accordingly, the certainty of salvation is conditioned. A “certainty” “conditioned” in this way becomes in reality an uncertainty or a groundless hope. For one can have no certainty by faith that a condition which a man must fulfill will really be fulfilled. (Romans 9:16)

10. No man who will not trust in God alone for salvation, but who thinks that he must himself be able to contribute something to it, can have any certainty by faith that he will be saved. (Romans 4:16; 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-9; 2 Chronicles 13:18; Psalm 84:13)
11. The certainty by faith that salvation will actually be attained is not an absolute certainty, as if it were impossible for a man to hinder it; for preservation does not take place by compulsion, and the possibility of apostasy is, therefore, not removed. Nor are the promises of God to the believer a prophecy that he will be saved. (Romans 8:24-25; 1 Corinthians 9:27; Revelation 2:10; Mark 4:17)
12. Recognition of the possibility of apostasy, and the earnestness which results from it in working out one’s own salvation with fear and trembling (filial fear), does not take away the believer’s certainty of salvation, nor does it limit it, but strengthens it; for that is one of the means whereby God preserves the believer. For it compels him continually to seek refuge in God’s promise of help, which strengthens and preserves him in the firm faith and hope that the possibility of apostasy shall by the grace of God not become a reality. That recognition, therefore, will always accompany the true certainty by faith of salvation. Where it is forgotten and a man falls into sinful security, there the grace of God and faith are lost. (Cf. Pontoppidan, *Sandh. til Gudfr.*, Q. 86, 670, 514; Titus 2:11-13; Philippians 2:12-13; Mark 13:33-37; 1 Timothy 1:19; 6:10; Psalm 2:11; 1 Peter 1:4,8,17)
13. A man cannot arrive at a certainty by faith concerning his salvation and election by brooding over election or by wanting to get that clear first, but alone by building on the universal grace and the call of God’s love in Christ. But he who in this way has become a believer will have, especially in temptation, this comfort in the teaching of God’s Word concerning election, that God who in the Gospel has promised him salvation, has (“since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost from

our hands”) “wished to secure my salvation so well and certainly that He ordained it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and placed it for preservation in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, from which no one can pluck us.” (John 10:28; *FC, TD, XI, 37*; Luke 16:29; Romans 11:34; John 1:12-13; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 2:6; Psalm 9:11; John 3:16) †

† Note: In the above quotations from the *Formula of Concord*, we have used the English version of the *Concordia Triglotta*, (St. Louis, 1917).

Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?

by *Ulrik V. Koren*

Introduction: *“Can I be sure I am going to heaven?” This basic question has lurked in the heart of every believer. In the midst of the great election controversy in the Norwegian Synod, Rev. U.V. Koren penned the following essay, “Can and Ought a Christian Be Certain of His Salvation?” This paper was delivered in 1881, the same year in which Dr. C.F.W. Walther published his work on the controversy concerning predestination. We see how Koren vividly understands the purpose of all theology: the comfort of sinners with the grace of God in Christ. He heavily leans upon Luther and Article XI of the Formula of Concord, in addition to quoting many comforting verses from the great treasury of Lutheran hymn writers. It is clear that for Koren the Lutheran Symbols were not merely historical writings of what Lutherans once believed, but the very breath of the living church today.*

It might seem strange to ask this question and it might seem unnecessary to use many words in answering it. It might seem enough to refer to our Confession of Faith where, in the Third Article, we say that we believe in “the life everlasting”; and to the explanation of this Article in our *Small Catechism*, where we say: “I believe . . . that the Holy Ghost shall give to me and all believers everlasting life”; or to one of the many passages in Holy Writ, where God promises to save those who believe in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, when I undertake to treat the question more fully, I have several reasons for it, both general and more specific. Partly, there are many who think they are certain of their salvation, but who deceive themselves, and therefore need to be admonished; partly, there are many who would very much like to be certain of their salvation, but dare not be, and therefore need to be encouraged; finally, the question has recently become the object of controversy among us—a controversy very closely allied to, or rather a part of, the controversy concerning the doctrine of election.

If one wishes to avoid misunderstanding in treating this matter and be kept from error both on the right hand and on the left, then there are certain truths which must be noted in advance, be strictly adhered to, and never lost sight of.

1. First of all, we must maintain that when this question of our final salvation is being considered, there can be no talk of any so-called absolute certainty, provided the word "absolute" is used in its proper sense. But here, alas! In common usage the word "absolute" is wrongly construed to mean "altogether and wholly," "completely," and so forth. We do not use the word in this sense here; for, as we shall see, a believer can and ought to be altogether and wholly certain of his salvation. In itself, certainty is a superlative concept, denoting the highest degree. If the certainty is not a perfect certainty, it is not certainty, but only a more or less well-formed supposition. "Absolute" here means independent, free, not determined by anything else. Thus a person can be absolutely certain that he exists, of what he perceives with his senses, sees with his eyes, and so forth; or, of what he can demonstrate, such as the mathematical truth that one and one are two, and so forth.

Thus an absolute certainty is a certainty which we have in itself, and which is not dependent upon or attached to anything else. The expression "I know" generally designates this. A believer cannot have such an unbounded or disengaged certainty, or absolute certainty, regarding his salvation in this sense. Only God can have it. The certainty of which we speak is, first of all, a certainty of faith, which can only be where faith is. We arrive at such a certainty through another means, another power, than the one through which we arrive at certainty concerning those things which we are accustomed to say that we know. Further, the certainty of faith is not absolute, because it is bound to the Word of God and to the order and way which God has ordained unto salvation. But, as we have already said, it does not follow from all this that the certainty of faith is weaker than absolute certainty. Faith is certainty, and the Holy Scriptures often use the expression. We know about that which we believe or hope, for example, 1 John 3:3; 5:13; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 5:1, etc.

2. Furthermore, we must maintain that as certainty of salvation is a certainty of faith, only he who is truly a believer can have it. No

unconverted person, no hypocrite, no nominal Christian, no one who has merely an “historic” faith, can possess it. True, many imagine that they are certain of salvation (Matthew 7:21-22); it often seems as though they believe that to be saved nothing else is needed than to belong to a congregation, live somewhat decently, and then die. But like their faith, their certainty is only imagination, for their faith does not have the marks which the New Testament places upon faith. Those who do not seek salvation have no promise of finding it; nor do those who seek it in other ways than the one God has shown us; for where there is no promise, neither can there be any true faith, and where faith is dead, certainty of faith can only be sinful security. For the same reason, neither can those who have another foundation for their faith than Christ and the promises of God because of Him have any certainty of faith regarding salvation. As their faith has no foundation, neither can their certainty have any, except in their own imagination.

3. Thirdly, we must maintain that a certainty is not here spoken of which all believers necessarily must have in the same degree, or which all believers necessarily must feel within themselves, with the result that if they do not do so, they must conclude that they do not have the right faith. When it is asked whether we can and ought to have certainty of faith regarding a matter, we do not really ask about the degree or strength of faith. The strength of faith, we know, can be different, without the essence of faith being changed thereby. Accordingly, the question is really whether we can and ought to have faith in this particular. If we acknowledge this, it follows of itself that we can and ought to have certainty, for faith, in its nature and essence, is a firm conviction. It can be this even if it is so weak that it is not felt as certainty—if it be true and sincere. If faith is not a firm conviction, it is not faith, but only a vague notion. Thus the expression “to believe” is often used in everyday conversation about things concerning which one has only an opinion or a presumption. Thus we, in fact, occasionally hear someone say, “I believe so, but it may be that I am mistaken.” This is not faith in the Biblical sense of the word. “I would wish,” Luther says, “that the word *faith* either were not so common, or that it were allowed to retain its right meaning and use, so that it were called faith when one is altogether certain and without doubt in the matter. . . .Therefore, the Scriptures, also

designate faith with the Hebrew word *emuna*, and St. Paul calls it *pleroforia*, that is, that the heart is altogether certain and has no doubt as to the word. But for this the Holy Spirit is essential, who prepares the hearts, as the Psalmist confesses (Psalm 51:10): ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.’ Oh! he says, I would gladly have a spirit which does not doubt or waver, but freely says: I know nothing of which I am certain except Thy Word alone. Here he plainly confesses that faith is not a notion or a something that grows of itself within our hearts, for he says: ‘Create in me,’ etc My beloved, it is not a matter such as one masters after a single attempt. I am now an old doctor, have preached, written and learned much thereabout, but nevertheless do not as yet know it. I can get nowhere with it. If I have today mastered a considerable part of it, it will only be, no doubt, that I have forgotten it again tomorrow. Our flesh and blood bring this about—which cannot enter so deeply into the Word, and hide itself, that it will perish because of it, as should indeed be the case, however, and verily must be.” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XII, 1614) Hence, if certainty belongs to the essence of faith, it is so far from being audacity to possess or to seek it, that it is much more a sin not to possess it; for it is a sin to be infirm and weak in faith.

4. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that faith and hope, in the Biblical meaning, are not different in such a way that faith is stronger and hope weaker. The word “hope” is often used in such a way as intentionally to express thereby that something is inferior to, or weaker than faith. Many a person thus, for instance, when he is asked, “Do you believe that you will be saved?” will not readily venture to say, “Yes, I believe it,” but will perhaps not hesitate to say, “I hope so.” as if something less were said thereby. This usage of language has no foundation in the Holy Scriptures. Christian faith and Christian hope are altogether coordinate there. The difference is, partly, that hope especially has future blessings as its objective, while the objective of faith is things past as well as things present and to come. There is also this difference that while faith is the assent of the heart to the Word, and appropriation of the promise it contains, hope is the firm expectation of the blessings which are promised in the Word. Faith and hope are therefore inseparable. While faith believes

the Word, hope expects the good which the Word promises. They go hand in hand; and how intimately they are conjoined is seen among other things from the explanation given of faith in Hebrews 11:1, that it “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” just as the Christians “are called in one hope of their calling” (Ephesians 4:4), and as we confess that we are “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Titus 1:2) He, therefore, who through Christ has access by faith into grace, also rejoices in hope of the glory of God; and hope maketh not ashamed. (See Romans 5:1-5)

5. Further, we must maintain that there is no difference between being certain of one’s salvation and being certain of one’s election. It may well be that a believer has not heard anything about election, or has not understood any of this doctrine; but this does not alter the case, however, for these two concepts, to be saved and to have been elected, nevertheless amount to the same thing in effect. Every single soul of the elect will be saved, and none except the elect. (Matthew 24:24; Romans 8:30-33) To be one of the elect and to be saved are, accordingly, the same, and if one believes that he will be saved, it is the same as to believe that he is one of the elect.

6. Finally, we must be convinced that certainty of salvation cannot be attained by brooding over or wanting to “investigate the secret, concealed abyss of divine predestination.” Whoever makes this his beginning will fall into either arrogance or despair and will not attain to any certainty of salvation. Whoever, on the other hand, in conformity with the advice of Luther and the guidance of *The Book of Concord*, follows Paul in his explanation of God’s eternal counsel, as this is presented to us in the Epistle to the Romans, will, by the grace of God through the Gospel, learn to form the same conclusion as Paul does, when in Romans 8:31 he exclaims: “What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” And in the immediate presence of the inscrutable mystery of God’s counsel, he will also repeat the words of the apostle: “O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?”

or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Romans 11:33-35)

For "we must carefully distinguish between what God has expressly revealed in His Word and what He has not revealed." (*The Book of Concord*, Tappert edition, page 625, 52) God has in Christ revealed to us all that we need in order to be certain of our salvation, but much of His secret counsel He has kept hidden. We are not to brood over this—and this admonition is needful in the highest degree. "In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize—in fact, we have no command to do so—than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in His Word." (*ibid*, page 625, 53)

I.

With these introductory remarks, we will now account for whether a believing Christian can and ought to be certain of his salvation. As stated before, we find the first clear confession regarding it in our Third Article of Faith, where we say: "I believe . . . the life everlasting."

In each of these parts in all the Articles of Faith it is true that our faith is a true Christian faith only when we truly add the words "for me," and thus in a living way, make our own that in which we confess our belief. This is true also of this part; yes, concerning this part which states the final objective of our faith, we must say that it is obviously much more important that we make whatever lies therein our own, inasmuch as all the other parts are of no use if this one is not added; for all the others indeed aim at and are given precisely on account of this part. "Therefore, those who believe in Christ are to be certain of eternal glory and together with all creatures sigh and pray that God will hasten to come with a blessed day when our hope shall be fulfilled; and for this very reason God has commanded us to pray in our Lord's Prayer: 'Thy Kingdom come'; for we are not baptized for the present life, nor do we hear the Gospel just for it, but everything has eternal life in view." (Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XII, 735)

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Corinthians 15:19) But how can a Christian have certainty regarding his salvation, or, in other words, that he shall be kept in the true and living faith unto the end? He is to believe it. “The entire life which a truly believing Christian leads after Baptism is nothing else than an expectation of the revelation of the bliss which he already has. He certainly has it entire, but nevertheless hid in faith.” (Luther, *ibid*, 137)

He is to believe, that is, humbly and in a child-like manner rely upon the promises which God has given him precisely concerning this. These promises are more firm than heaven and earth and are given just for this purpose, that we are to believe them, have a firm conviction that He will fulfill them in spite of the devil, the world and our flesh.

Of ourselves we are powerless, impotent. We can neither believe God nor do anything else well-pleasing in His sight. “It is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13), and “makes us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.” (Hebrews 13:21)

What then has our heavenly Father promised to do for us and work in us? He has promised us who “wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that He will “confirm us unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and to assure us further He reminds us that He “is faithful, by whom we were called unto the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:7-9)

He has assured us that He, because He “is faithful, will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) He has said that because He “is faithful, he will establish us and keep us from evil.” (2 Thessalonians 3:3) He wants us to “be confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6) “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Romans 11:29), and He has “called us unto his eternal

glory by Christ Jesus, after that we have suffered a while.” (1 Peter 5:10)

Our Lord Jesus does not desire that our hearts be troubled, but that we believe in God and believe also in Him. He has therefore said: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:1-3) He has promised us another Comforter, the Holy Spirit “that he may abide with us forever” (John 14:16), and has said: “because I live, ye shall live also.” (verse 19) In His High-Priestly Prayer, He prays that God will “keep us from the evil,” and says: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.” (John 17:24) He has promised to be with us always, even unto the end of the world, and has at the same time reminded us that “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” (Matthew 28:18-20) He can therefore also promise us, and has promised us, that His sheep, that is, those who hear His voice, “shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand.” (John 10:28)

It is therefore God’s will that we “hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised.” (Hebrews 10:23) If we are troubled with the thought of how easily we can fall, and with what difficulty “our whole spirit and soul and body are preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” we are to pray and with Paul believe and say: “Faithful is he that called us, who also will do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24) He must do it; otherwise, it will not be done: “for we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:5) But we are also to rely firmly upon this power of God, for He has promised and said: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5), and therefore He wants us to “cast all our care upon him.” (1 Peter 5:7) We do this when we think and believe as follows: “What is to become of my soul? Well, He must see and give heed to that, who has so truly cared for my soul as to give His own life to redeem it. Let Him be praised eternally, the only right and true Shepherd and bishop of all souls that believe on Him! And, surely—He will not first because of me begin to teach me how He preserves

and defends the saved, who hear and keep His Word, against the power of the devil and the evil and the tyranny of the world. He says: 'They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' (John 10:28) I will let the matter rest here. I therefore no longer wish to care for my soul myself, or have power and authority over it; for then it would truly be ill cared for because the devil could soon, yea, any moment snatch it away from me and devour it. There, in Jesus' hand, it shall continue to be safe and well preserved, according to His Word." (Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume IX, 1830)

For what do we need in order to be kept in the faith to the end? Is there anything of all that we need which God should not be willing to give us? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) Therefore, St. Paul, with much frankness, can promise believers: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." (Colossians 3:4) Therefore he can teach us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:12-13; cf. Philippians 3:20-21) Therefore he himself can comfort us, saying: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1), and we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2), a "hope that maketh not ashamed" (verse 5), because we have not given it to ourselves nor invented it, but it is "the hope set before us," which we should therefore "lay hold upon" and "have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." (Hebrews 6:17-19) Therefore St. John can testify so directly and surely: "We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him." (1 John 3:2) Yes, and Paul in his glorious song of victory in Romans 8 can challenge all principalities and powers, all enemies and dangers, both those present and those to come, and be certain that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Yes, indeed, God would have us believe that it is unalterably certain that we shall sometime be saved. For He has given us all these glorious words and promises that we should believe them. Surely, He has not given them to us that we should doubt them. “For the Son of God . . . was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.” (2 Corinthians 1:19-20) He, therefore, who believes these promises believes that it is unfailingly certain that he shall once be saved. “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar.” (1 John 5:10)

Now, we are not to forget, and, if we are believers, neither will we forget, that left to ourselves we could easily fall from faith, and certainly would fall at once. But as a help against this, the Lord Jesus has taught us to pray to our heavenly Father: “Lead us not into temptation.” And when we then in this prayer pray “that God would guard and keep us, that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive us, nor lead us into misbelief, despair and other shameful sin and vice; and, though we be thus tempted, that we may still in the end overcome, and retain the victory,” are we not to believe and regard it as altogether certain that God will do this? And when we pray in the Third Petition “that God would break and hinder every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow God’s name nor let His Kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world and our own flesh”; and when we further pray “that God, in place of our will, lets His good and gracious will be done, and strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto the end”—are we then not to believe and regard as altogether certain that He will do it? Or when we pray in the Seventh Petition that God “would deliver us from all manner of evil. . . and at last, when the hour of death shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven,” are we then to regard it as uncertain whether we shall receive what we pray for? Are we not, as Luther says, to make the “Amen” which our Lord has taught us, right strong, and thus believe that it is unswervingly certain that we shall receive it? “Amen, Amen, that is, yes, yes, it shall be so.”

Thus, because God has promised it, we are to believe it, and consider it to be unfailingly true that we shall be saved. Because

“from such words and promises of God, which of pure grace and mercy, without our deserving, are spoken to us, springs the hope that I certainly expect that which is promised to me, . . . and do not allow anything to frighten me away from them, be it sin, death, the devil, or hell, the world or our own flesh. Just as now faith looks only to the promises of God, so does hope look only to the pure and undeserved mercy of God, that is, to that which is spoken in His Word and profuse of grace, as the psalmist says: ‘For thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.’ (Psalm 26:3)

“The work and fruit of faith is a good conscience, a tranquil heart, and a cheerful trust in God. Hope is tranquil and expects what God has promised, let fall what may: and it is especially established in tribulation. St. Paul sums this up so beautifully in Romans 5:1-5, where he says: ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.’” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XI, 1940)

We were baptized to share in the death and resurrection of Christ, and have promise upon promise from the mouth of God, and should we not want to believe it! Do we not have enough with which to struggle and contend, the miserable and shameful unbelief because of our old Adam without in addition thinking that we did right and that it was piety on our part to doubt what God has promised?

II.

Is there a doctrine in the Word of God to which men have not objected? I know of none. This doctrine has also been objected to, that a believer can and ought to be certain of his salvation. And, alas! These objections are now in our own midst, and from trusted teachers among us. I cannot but cherish the hope, however, that by the Word of God they can be set aright, so there can once more be the unity

among us, which by the grace of God there has been for so many years.

The objections which are raised appear in a double form. Partly it is alleged that we cannot have such a certainty, partly that we are not to have it. It is really but one objection, however. For it is true, that if we could not have this certainty, neither should we have it; and again, if it is God's will that we are to have it, we are also able to, by the grace of God.

In the Scripture passages previously cited I have shown from the Word of God both that we can and should be certain of our salvation, and I will now look more closely at the objections made to it.

In the first place, the objectors say: from the Scripture passages which have been cited, it is clear that God is able to do all that is necessary for our salvation; but I cannot know whether I shall receive His grace in the future, whether I shall permit Him to keep me in faith. I do not know whether I, like so many others, shall fail to keep from falling away. And how can I be certain that I shall once be saved? Where is it written that perchance I shall not fall and be lost?

First, let me reply to this: If this objection were valid, a Christian would have to spend his days on earth in uncertainty as to his eternal salvation. It would then be Christian and correct to say: "Now I am a Christian; but whether I remain one is more than I can know. I can have no firm belief regarding it. I am to watch and pray and use the means of grace; and I am to work out my salvation with fear and trembling—I know this, but what the end will be, I do not know: whether I come to Jesus or to the devil, to heaven or to hell—I can have no certain or dependable belief concerning this."

Is this Christian faith? Is this the faith the apostles had? Paul—who testified: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day" (2 Timothy 4:8)—and John, who says, that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him?" (1 John 3:2) Is this the faith which called forth in the apostles' disciples the joy of which Peter speaks (1 Peter 1:8). . . . "ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"? The reason for this joy, indeed, lay in the words of Peter, in which he "blessed God for his manifold spiritual graces," for instance, "Blessed

be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, wherein ye greatly rejoice,” etc. (1 Peter 1:3-6) Do you suppose that in the midst of their unspeakable joy, and as they joined the apostle in blessing the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that nevertheless they did and should have thought within themselves: “But whether we shall ever enter heaven and receive any inheritance, is more than we can tell; we dare have no firm assurance about it”?

Is this the burden of the faith we confessed in Holy Baptism regarding life everlasting? Does this agree with what we say in our *Catechism*: I believe that the Holy Spirit shall grant me, together with all those who believe, eternal life?

If the objection were true, it would be presumptuous to believe God’s promises. It would be audacious to sing at the grave of a dear one:

*Then shall I see Thy count'nance clear,
Lord, Throne of my salvation,
When Thou in glory dost appear,
With trump and angel-vision;*

or when we sing with Brorson:¹

*O, I am a sinful man,
That is all my titled glory;
Better it can never be,
If God's Law scroll I but scan.
But—Thou becamest Jesus,
And my mis'ry 'pon Thee took;
Therefore is my name most precious,
And Thou wrot'st it in Thy Book.*

*At Judgment I shall rise
 To enter heaven with joy,
 To reign there with my Lord,
 And wear the beauteous crown.
 Branches of palm, and raiment white,
 Angelic drink, abundant life—
 These I enjoy,
 For Jesus' sake, and by His blood.*

or when we confess with the same hymn writer:

*My walk is heavenward all the way,
 Await my soul, the morrow,
 When thou shalt find release for aye
 From all thy sin and sorrow;*

*All worldly pomp, begone.
 To heaven I now press on;
 For all the world I would not stay,
 My walk is heavenward all the way.*

We would not then dare to sing with Kingo:²

*From first day of my life,
 Whatever I have met
 Of grievous pain and strife,
 I shall indeed forget,
 When in triumphant Church
 Mid all the heavenly host,
 With angel tongue and voice,
 God's honor I will boast.*

*Then shall I in my hand
 The palm of triumph wave,
 For great the victory
 By which Christ came to save,
 Who by His blood and death*

*Has won the victory—
Thus it shall be my joy
To bear the emblem high.*

Neither ought we sing with Paul Gerhard night after night:

*Behold, the day is vanished.
And hosts of stars have risen
In heaven's deepest blue:
Thus I shall be attired,
When life and cares are ended,
And I depart to be with You.*

We have then no right to pray with Palladius and Landstad:³

*Grant us a steadfast faith,
So we may never doubt
That peace and rest in heaven
We shall by Thee obtain!*

or to confess:

*His Spirit is to me a pledge,
My faith shall finally obtain
A sweet and blessed end.*

But no, God be praised! Let the papal church keep its old lie that a Christian is to be uncertain of his salvation. We will continue in our churches and in our homes humbly and joyfully to pray, praise and give thanks, saying:

*Until we join the hosts that cry,
'Holy are Thou, O Lord most high!'
And 'mid the light of that blessed place
Shall gaze upon Thee face to face.*

Now let us examine more closely what lies in that objection that “God can and will do His part, but I do not know, surely, whether I shall let Him do so, and thus I cannot be certain of my salvation.” In it lies the assertion that the promises of God cannot be sufficient for a troubled heart. For, it is said, even though our Savior has promised: “I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3), I surely cannot know whether I will always let Him receive me unto Himself, whether it won’t happen that I leave Him, and so I cannot depend on it with full certainty that I shall once arrive there where He is. Thus the promises of God are not sufficient for one to build an unfailing certainty of salvation on them.

Well now, if God’s promises are not enough, what more then do we want? Something more from God? No, God indeed has already promised us everything. It must therefore be something of our own. Good deeds? No, for we surely know that they do not avail; for we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the Law. (Galatians 2:16) Is it faith then which is meant? “Yes,” they answer, “if I knew that I would continue in faith unto the end, I could be certain of my final salvation.” If we meet this objection by reminding them that we indeed have the unfailing promise of God that He will keep us in faith unto the end, and that according to the Scriptures we ‘are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time,’ and that according to Scripture it is by God’s power that we are preserved in faith to eternal salvation, they again answer with the same objection: ‘Yes, but I don’t know whether I will be willing to receive this help from God unto the end. I can, of course, fall.’

Thus the Word and promise of God are considered insufficient. God has promised to do everything; but that, however, is not enough. In addition, one must have something of his own, otherwise he cannot be certain of his salvation. Men want to build on their own acceptance of the Word in addition to God’s Word. They want to make their own faith, or willingness to believe, or their own non-resistance, a basis for their confidence; and if they cannot do this, they do not want to have any confidence. But surely, thereby, faith has been mortally wounded. For whoever wants to build on something of his own in

addition to the promise of God, does not have the true Christian faith which the Holy Ghost works. Because “it is the essence and nature of faith to tolerate nothing alongside it in which man might trust except the Word of God alone, or the divine promise. To him who uses faith as a weapon in the strife, the things which are contrary to God’s Word will suggest themselves immediately. But faith lets go of all creatures and visible things in the world, also itself, and holds fast to the Word of God. Faith does not seek a footing somewhere, or reach for something, to obtain certainty, and thus be preserved. This is what Christ means when He also says (John 8:51): ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.’ If you cling to the Word of God and close your eyes, you will be preserved. From whence does it come? Indeed, from here: the Word of God is a living Word; death cannot devour it. If the Word remains, you also remain.” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XI, 2191)

At this point the opposition will no doubt seek another expedient, saying: We subscribe to all this with all our heart, that a man is not to believe in his faith, and that faith has only the Word of God to rely upon; you could just as well have spared yourself the trouble of telling us, because we already knew it. When we say we want nothing to do with this faith that is unfailingly certain that we will once be saved, it is precisely because we neither can nor ought to have such a faith: “It is not commanded by God to know beforehand with divine certainty of faith that we shall indeed be constant, but rather with daily fear and trembling see that we become so by a true and diligent use of the means of grace.”

I reply to this: Fear and trembling form no contrast to faith and do not hinder it, but further it. I shall make this plain later. But the subterfuge that we are not to have certainty of faith regarding our salvation, and that God has not commanded it, is really nothing else than a new way of stating the previous objection, or, that God will do His part, but I cannot be sure that I shall do mine; and thus, neither can I be certain of my salvation. Indeed, men may say that they subscribe to those words about not believing in one’s faith, or in one’s acceptance of grace, but only in the Word and promise of God; however, they cannot dismiss this matter with such utterances. There

is the best opportunity right here to show whether they really mean this and acknowledge the significance of it. I have cited a long list of promises of God to the effect that He will make us finally blessed. Why will the opposition not believe them, that is, be assured of their fulfillment? Christ says to us: "I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:3) If a person really accepts this truth, that the Word of God is sufficient for faith and that faith does not want anything else to rely upon, he must admit that we are to believe this promise of God, that is, be unswervingly certain that it will be fulfilled. Or is it not given to be believed? Is it not the will of God (that is to say, commanded us), that with divine certainty of faith we are to know beforehand that what God has promised will take place?

The answer is, yes, God wills it, to be sure, but we cannot know if we shall will it. This is but a repetition of the previous objection and shows where the damaging thing lodges.

The mistake is that they do not fully and completely surrender every thought of contributing anything whatsoever in any particular or in any manner to their salvation. If we do not do this, neither do we believe God's promise before we are assured that we ourselves will do our part, be it little or much.

The objection is raised: Indeed, you forget that we can resist the grace of God. Manifestly, this is our power, and who can vouch for it that we do not resist?

I reply: God must vouch for it; and—praised be His unfathomable grace! —He will vouch for it. And this is, indeed, the very thing we are to believe, and if we do not believe it we do not give God all the glory for our salvation. For who can overcome our resistance? Can we do it ourselves? No, no power in the world can overcome the opposition of our evil and vain hearts—save God alone. And hasn't God promised to do this? Hasn't He promised that He will not leave us? Hasn't He promised us eternal bliss? Did He, then, perhaps not take into consideration that this also required that He deliver us from our most dangerous enemies, our own flesh and blood? Has He forgotten this? Is He not, according to Scripture, "the finisher of our faith," just as He is its "author"?—No, the case is this: one

does not want to give himself up wholly and entirely and cling to the Word alone.⁴

“A person must despair of himself, let go with both hands and feet, confess before God that he is incompetent, and implore His divine grace, in which he may firmly trust. Anyone who teaches or seeks another way to begin than this errs and deceives both himself and others as, then, those do who say: ‘Look here, you have a free will: do what is in your power; God will do His part,’ and who are of the opinion that a person should not teach people to despair. It is true enough one is not to teach people to despair; but we must first explain this despair rightly. No one is to despair of the grace of God, but, despite the entire world and all sin, firmly rely on God’s help; of himself, however, one is altogether to despair and in no way rely on his free will to perform even the smallest little deed. . . .It is not possible that God can deny a person His grace who thus with his whole heart acknowledges his inability and plainly despairs of himself. . . .This despair and searching after grace is not to last for an hour or for a time and then cease, but all our deeds, words, thoughts, as long as we live, are to have as their aim that we always despair of ourselves and continue in the grace of God with an eager desire and longing for him.” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XI, 2310)

Despite all these glorious promises, men still make the pitiable assertion that God does not want us to have certainty of faith concerning our constancy unto the end. On what do they base this assertion? Among other things, on a rational deduction which unbelief makes along these lines: As it is possible for me to fall away, and since I, according to God’s will, am always to acknowledge and bear in mind that it is possible for me to fall away—it follows that I neither can nor ought to be certain that I will not fall away.

But this rational deduction does not hold good, because there is no contradiction in one’s recognizing as possibilities two opposite things: salvation and damnation—while at the same time, according to a divine promise, one has the certainty of faith that the first of these possibilities (salvation) will become reality. If anyone cannot understand this,⁵ he can, however, learn it from St. Paul, who says that by faith he is immovably sure that he shall be saved, but that the

possibility that he may be condemned is not thereby annulled. By faith he is certain that this possibility, by the grace of God, shall not become a reality, and still he admits the possibility, as shall be pointed out later. (Romans 8:38; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Corinthians 9:27)

Or, it is said: I cannot be certain of my salvation because I know that I may fall away, and nowhere in the Bible does it say that I will remain constant. The meaning is: If it were stated in the Scriptures, with the mention of my name, that I am to endure unto the end; or, if I could look into the Book of Life and find my name there, then I could be certain of my salvation. In other words, this is precisely what Christ so often and severely chastises: that people will not believe, but want to see. “Blessed are they,” He says, “that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

“But as long as we are on earth, we must live in hope. For although we are sure that we have all the blessings of God through faith—for faith is surely accompanied for you by the new birth, the filial relationship, and the inheritance—we do not yet see this. It is still something to be hoped for and still somewhat remote. We cannot see it with our eyes. St. Peter calls this the hope of life. . . . We speak of a living hope, that is, a hope in which we may hope with certainty and be sure of eternal life. But this is still concealed. It is still covered with a cloth. One does not see it. At present it can be grasped only with the heart and through faith, as St. John says in 1 John 3:2.” (*Luther’s Works*, American Edition, volume 30, page 11)

Another objection by which men would save themselves from difficulty is that they say all of God’s promises of salvation are conditioned (as many of our church fathers have expressed it); for God has not promised us salvation unconditionally, but, as St. Paul says (Romans 11:22), “if thou continue in his goodness”; nor has Christ unconditionally promised that we shall be where He is, for we must infer a condition from other passages, as “if ye abide in me” (John 15:7); “if a man keep my saying.” (John 8:51)

I reply to this: Yes, if it were true that God’s promises are conditioned on something in us, which we must therefore first bring about in order to obtain the promises, our opponents would then, indeed, be correct, and we could never be sure of our salvation; but—God be praised!—it is not so. This objection is, then, nothing else

than the old confusion and lack of understanding which we know from the Absolution Controversy, and of which every pastor with a little experience has had enough instances in his own care of souls. It comes from a confusion of the nature of the divine promises with the effect of the divine promises. The promises of God in themselves are not conditioned upon anything except the mercy of God and the ground on which they are given, Jesus Christ. They are and must be unconditional, otherwise they would not be promises of grace, and this is then the essence of the promises. It is a different matter with the effect. This is conditioned upon our faith; for if we do not believe, the promises profit us nothing. And it is for this reason, indeed, that I write these lines—to exhort us that we do by all means believe these glorious promises. The effect of the promises is, accordingly, conditioned on our belief in them. But we are to note, in connection with this, that God Himself has promised to fulfill this condition, for we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Christ. And the means by which God effects this condition is precisely the free and unconditioned promise itself.

Wherever in the Gospel it seems as though God demands something of us, so that our salvation is made to depend upon it, Scripture shows that God Himself will fulfill the condition for us; for otherwise it would not be fulfilled, our salvation would not be of God, and the Gospel would not be Gospel. Here the Augustinian saying applies: “*Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis*”—that is, “Give me what Thou commandest me, and command what Thou wilt.” According to their nature, the promises of God are unconditional, and precisely for that reason they create within us the condition which is demanded for their blessed use—namely, faith. All that we can do by our own strength is to despise the promises of God or doubt them. Alas, it is quite easy for us to do this!

Another objection of long standing is that such a frank assurance of salvation does not agree with the many admonitions of God to us to “watch and pray”; that “he that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall”; that we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” and the like.

This has always been the claim of the Roman Catholic Church and later of a part of the Reformed Church.

This objection is also closely related to the lack of trust in God's Word and promises already mentioned—as though these were not sufficient unto salvation—and is founded on a misconception of the nature of faith. So far from it being the case that the fear and trembling to which God exhorts us militate against the certainty of faith, much rather do these further that certainty. In fact, if we do not work out our salvation with fear and trembling; if we do not bear in mind that we may fall; if we do not watch and pray, and if we do not “strive to enter in at the strait gate” (Luke 13:24); in short, if our life is not a daily conversion, we cannot be kept in faith. Therefore St. Paul says, Romans 11:20: “Thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear!” An interchange of effect is to be noted here: the only way to be kept in faith is to fight the good fight of faith, and that which is to give us strength to fight the good fight is again, faith, the certain hope of eternal life.

God has not promised to save His elect, as it were, without any further ado, without their knowing it. He does not force us, but He reproveth, rebukes, exhorts, guides and comforts us. He bears us up; He draws us, and likewise gives the strength to follow His guiding hand. He has shown us the way by which He will save us—not the sinful way of security, but the narrow way. Jesus is the way for us and there is none other. The promise is joined to this way. If we would go any other, we have no promise; and if we have no promise, we can have no divine certainty of faith, but merely a vain illusion. Therefore the certainty of faith can and is always to be controlled and proved. Even though it is, as to its essence, a frank, unshaken, divine and unfailing certainty, it is indeed at the same time no absolute certainty, but a certainty of faith; and precisely because it is a certainty of faith, it is bound to the Word of God on which it rests. Therefore, many of our old teachers called it a *certitudo ordinata*, that is, one joined to and determined by a certain order (the order of salvation), so that if the order of salvation is abandoned, the certainty of faith ceases.

As God has promised that He will save us, we are to believe this with all our heart; but if we are God's children, we not only believe this one utterance, that it is certain that we shall be saved, but we also believe all the utterances in which God shows us how He

saves us. Every word from the mouth of God is precious to us, and each day we have use for the admonitions and warnings of God, as well as for His comfortings. For we are not merely spirit; our faith is, for the greater part, very weak and frail, while flesh and blood in us are strong; but if we “live after the flesh, we shall surely die.” If we relapse into sensual security, we lose our faith, and where is our certainty then? We, therefore, also need the Word of God which reminds us that there is the possibility that we may fall away and be condemned, in order that this truth may drive us to faith in God’s promises, in which our salvation lies. Faith in God’s promises cannot be preserved unless we shun all sin and live in daily repentance, so we must also precisely hold to faith and preserve a good conscience; for he who puts away from himself a good conscience will suffer shipwreck to his faith. (1 Timothy 1:19) “Because faith in God, and prayer, are delicate matters, and there may easily be a slight wound in the conscience which drives faith and prayer away, as every Christian often experiences. Therefore, St. Paul places these words together, as in 1 Timothy 1:5, 9; 3:9.” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume X, 1706-1707)

Paul shows this in his own case. He had unflinching certainty of faith regarding his election and salvation, but he also knew that God would save him through combat with the flesh, and that he could be preserved in faith only through such combat and thus obtain the incorruptible crown; therefore he says: “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:27) He had the proper weapon for this combat in faith, which he calls the shield, with which we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (Ephesians 6:16) Therefore, Peter admonishes that we show diligence in good works, that by their testimony that we are on the right road of faith, we may be established in our calling and election, and that through this firm faith we again may receive strength, so that we do not become inactive or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, but that the virtues which issue from faith may be found to abound in us. (2 Peter 1:8-10) Therefore John says in the same breath, as he has said that he is certain that he shall be saved:

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

If we consider what we are and what we have deserved, that we have never been and never could be worthy of even the least of the gifts of God; if we consider what we are in the sight of God, who thoroughly knows our miserable hearts; and if we then have become convinced from the Word of God that He loves us and would have us be among His own, that the Father loves us as that father in the Gospel loved the prodigal son, that the dear Lord Jesus has had mercy on us as on Peter, that the Holy Ghost has not become weary of us and will still be our Instructor and Guide—is it then possible that we can do otherwise than love Him in return, and that with filial fear we will live in daily conversion and take heed lest we do anything against God? Will it not be our daily shame and sorrow that we do not do better? Should we want to add this sin also to all other sins, that we will not believe what God promises us? No, we will believe it, and we will be certain of it, not in sinful security, but in filial fear. We will “serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” (Psalm 2:11) We will acknowledge our weakness of faith with shame; we will not imagine that we have “already attained, either were already perfect”; we will pray God that He will not leave us nor forsake us, but that He will strengthen our faith and help us to humility and to watchfulness against our most cherished sins we will strive to give up all hope of helping ourselves, and will seek our hope and our strength and our encouragement for all this in the glorious promises of God. We will believe them, even though we must cry out and say with tears: “Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief!” Thus shall faith keep us in filial fear and filial fear drive us to faith.

Alas, we have also another fear in us—namely, the slavish fear of the old Adam. It is the fear belonging to doubt, servitude and an evil conscience. This fear does not give God the glory. It is damnable, and we are to strive against it; for it is not of God, but of the evil, natural, unbelieving heart, which will not believe God, nor can it (Romans 8:7), but wants to believe in itself, or else will not believe, but wants to see. It is this fear, which belongs to doubt and unbelief, of which St. John speaks when he says that “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear.” But St. Paul speaks of

filial fear when he admonishes us to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.”⁶

We need to be reminded of this in order to be kept from sinful security. Hence we sing:

*I walk in danger all the way,
The thought shall never leave me,
That Satan, who has marked his prey,
Is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares
May seize me unawares,
If e'er I fail to watch and pray,
I walk in danger all the way.*

And we sing, “I pass through trials all the way,” and, “Death doth pursue me all the way.” But why remind ourselves of this? Is it, perhaps, so that we will become terrified and begin to doubt and say: “I know I walk in danger, and what the end will be, and where I shall go, that I do not know?” No! So that the remembrance of danger may drive us to God, so that we may strengthen ourselves with His promise and by faith be given the power to be on our guard and overcome our foes, so that we may therefore continue, let us say instead:

*I walk with angels all the way,
They shield me and defend me;*

and:

*I walk with Jesus all the way,
His guidance never fails me.
Within His wounds I find a stay,
When Satan's power assails me;*

and therefore:

*My walk is heavenward all the way,
Await, my soul, the morrow,*

*When thou shalt find release for aye,
From all thy sins and sorrow.*

“For,” as Luther says, “having been bought with the precious blood of Christ, been born again in Holy Baptism because of His glorious resurrection from the dead, called by the Gospel unto a lively hope, ‘to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us,’ as St. Peter says—we are also, with rejoicing and in full trust, to be looking for ‘that blessed hope,’ our soul’s final salvation.”

“This truly Christian attitude, with its heavenly lines of demarcation, the Apostle Paul designates to us in Titus 2:13, and admonishes us to note well the difference between this present perishable life and the future imperishable life, and to turn our backs to this present life as the life that perishes and which we finally must leave, and constantly have the future life in view and firmly and assuredly hope for it as the life that continues forever and in which we belong. We should do good deeds, in chastity, righteousness and godly fear look for that blessed hope, he says, that is, we should prepare for a better life than this life on earth. On that we should build more firmly, and with greater certainty hope for it, though we do not yet see it and feel it, than we build on and hope in this present life which we see and feel. This is a right doctrine, but it is not soon learned; a right sermon, but it is not soon believed; a beautiful exhortation, but it is not easily followed; it is well said, but not well done. For there are exceedingly few persons on earth who look for the blessed hope, the future imperishable inheritance and kingdom, and await it so assuredly, as it really ought to be, so that they do not possess the present life more assuredly. . . .Nor are we baptized to remain here on earth and make a paradise and a heavenly home here, . . .but that heaven may be opened for us, and that we may be saved unto eternal life For this eternal life we are baptized; for it Christ has redeemed us with His death and blood, and for it we have received the Gospel. . . .Here one must believe, hope, await, but in the beyond it shall be revealed. He who does not await the blessed hope will not come to the revelation; but he who firmly and without doubt awaits it, need not worry about the revelation. Such distinction (between hope and revelation) St. Paul also makes in Colossians 3:3: ‘Your

life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.' St. John also makes this distinction (1 John 3:2): 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him. . . .'

"A Christian speaks as follows: God through His Son has granted me eternal life; unto this life I am baptized, and unto it I am called by the Gospel. I will therefore also confidently await it. Besides, however, He has created me and placed me in office, so that I am to be lord, mistress, servant, teacher, pastor, etc., and serve Him in my calling; I will therefore also be zealous in good works, be a pious servant, a diligent teacher, a faithful minister of the Word, and do what is pleasing to God.

"To him who knows this and conforms to it, life will not seem burdensome or hard, and he will not murmur against God though he at times fare ill. For being certain of eternal life, and waiting this blessed hope, and the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, he readily does and suffers what he needs must do and suffer But to him who does not know this and does not conform to it, life necessarily must be hard and cumbersome. For, not being certain of eternal life, and not awaiting the blessed hope, he can neither be contented nor have patience." (Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume IX, 932ff.)

The Gospel according to St. Matthew (14:24-31) contains a narrative which, with a few touches, exemplifies and confirms the proofs I have adduced in the foregoing of how groundless are the objections that are raised against this doctrine.

One night the disciples were on the Sea of Gennesaret. It was nearing daybreak. The weather was rough, the wind contrary, and they were hard pressed by the waves. They saw someone walking on the sea. It was Jesus; but they did not recognize Him. It was, in fact, not yet light; they were tossed up and down by the waves, and—how would a person be able to walk on the sea? "They were troubled, saying. It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I, be not afraid. And Peter answered Him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come

down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

We have here a person who has set a goal for himself which he cannot attain by his own strength. Peter cannot by his natural strength take a single step forward on the water, much less, fully come to Jesus. Just as little can a sinful being by his own strength and effort take a single step toward God and salvation, to say nothing of keeping himself in the way of salvation to the end.

But the Savior said to Peter, "Come." Therein lies the promise. This word shows that Jesus both can and will help Peter come to Him; for He well knew that Peter could not come of himself, and that if he were to come, it must be by the power and will of Jesus. If Jesus had not been able as well as willing to help him go forward, He would not have said, "Come." Therefore, Peter should have held to this Word. By faith in this Word he should have been certain that he could and would come to Jesus. He should not have consulted his reason and considered that as the human body is heavier than water, there was the likelihood that he would sink, for surely this was not unknown to Jesus. Nor should he have allowed himself to be troubled by the rough weather and the high waves. Jesus, who had said that he should come, surely also knew what kind of weather it was. Nor should he have consulted his own fleshly thoughts, which would seduce him to rely on his faith instead of on the Word of Jesus. In other words, he should not have thought: Do I now have such a strong faith, that, on the strength of it, I can walk on the sea? For then he either would have doubted immediately or placed his trust in himself, as he once did later, and in either instance he would have sunk. It was indeed only that word of Jesus, "Come," that gave him the right to hope that he would reach his destination on the waves. Faith relies on the power of the Word of Jesus, to hold fast, and not on its own strength. If faith relies on itself, it has already forsaken the solid rock, which is the promise of God.

Nor should he have thought thus: "It is true. Jesus has said, "Come," but I cannot know whether I will ever be able to get there,

because it is possible that I may sink; this possibility is not annulled. I know, surely, that a human being is heavier than water. I know, too, that only by faith can I stay on the water's surface: but I cannot know whether I shall retain my faith, and whether I may not be frightened for a moment by this boisterous weather."

This again would have been secret mistrust in the promise, as though it were not enough that Jesus had said, "Come," With this word in his ear and in his heart, Peter should have said, as he did on another occasion, "At Thy Word, Lord—yea, at Thy Word I will come, in spite of myself and all the billows and storms in the world!"

But did Peter not have to observe anything in order to have this certainty of faith about coming fully to Jesus? Is there in this incident no correlative to what we have said previously about the "fear and trembling" that are to accompany faith? Yes, there is that too. For when Jesus says "Come!" both the way and the goal are designated. Had Peter wanted to walk about and go elsewhere, he would have had no promise. His prayer had been: "Bid me come unto thee on the water," and Jesus had said. "Come!" He had not said: "Go wherever thou wilt," just as God has not promised us salvation without at the same time designating the way we are to go, namely, "the narrow way, which leads to life."

But Peter let go of the promise; he conferred with reason; he made calculations according to the weather, which was rough, and therefore, he began to sink. Jesus said to him. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" There we have the testimony of Jesus Himself as to what Peter should have done and what we are to do when we have a promise from the mouth of the Lord.

But what would be our estimate of Peter, if, after this reproof, he had, in addition, by means of all sorts of objections and seemingly sensible and rational arguments—perhaps even thinking this to be right, humble and spiritual procedure—wanted to adorn his unbelief and doubt of his being able to cross the angry waves and come to Jesus?

III.

I have previously shown that it is in conformity with our covenant of Baptism to have certainty of faith regarding our final salvation, and that our *Catechism* points out that the prayer our Savior taught us strengthens us in this certainty. I have also called attention to this fact that our Church confesses it in its hymns. I will now show the relationship of this doctrine to the true Lutheran doctrine of the gracious election of God unto salvation.

As already shown, we cannot arrive at certainty regarding our salvation by pondering or wanting to search out the secret, hidden depths of divine predestination. Those who would begin here will not arrive at any certainty of faith as to their salvation, but will either become arrogant or else despair. We cannot believe in something that is hidden and of which we have not heard. (Romans 10:14) To believe, it is essential to have something which has been revealed. If the gracious election to salvation were altogether and solely a hidden counsel of God, it is clear that our faith and hope concerning salvation could have nothing to do with it. This, however, is not the case.

Therefore the Lutheran Church confesses that: "We are not to view this eternal election or divine ordering to eternal life only in the secret and inscrutable counsel of God, as though it comprised no more and that nothing more is involved in it, or that nothing more is to be considered in connection with it, than that God has foreseen who and how many are to be saved, who and how many are to be damned, or that he merely held a sort of military muster: This one shall be saved, that one shall be damned." (The *Book of Concord*, Tappert edition, page 617, 9)

"For from this many derive and adopt strange, dangerous and pernicious thoughts and speak thus: If I am foreordained to salvation, nothing can injure me with respect to it, regardless of what I do; and if I am not foreordained, then no matter what I do will not help, because I can neither hinder nor change the election of God." (*ibid.* page 618, 10)

"We must oppose such false imagining and thoughts," our Confessions say, "with the following clear, certain, and unailing foundation: All Scripture, inspired by God, should minister not to

security and impenitence but to ‘reproof, correction and improvement.’ (2 Timothy 3:16) Furthermore, everything in the Word of God is written down for us, not for the purpose of thereby driving us to despair but in order that ‘by steadfastness, by encouragement of the Scripture we might have hope.’ (Romans 15:4) From this it is beyond all doubt that the true understanding or the right use of the teaching of God’s eternal foreknowledge will in no way cause or support either impenitence or despair. So, too, Scripture presents this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word (Ephesians 1:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 1:21, 30-31), to admonish us to repent (2 Timothy 3:16), to urge us to godliness (Ephesians 1:15ff.; John 15:16, 17:3,4, 10, 12), to strengthen our faith and to assure us of our salvation (Ephesians 1:9, 13, 14; John 10:27-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15).” (*ibid*, page 618, 12)

Therefore, as the Formula of Concord says, there is not one thing regarding the election of grace which God has revealed, and another thing which He has hidden from us, warning us not to ponder over the latter, but instead to remain with that which He reveals, and adding the words quoted earlier, that “this admonition is eminently necessary. In our presumption we take much greater delight in concerning ourselves with matters which we cannot harmonize—in fact we have no command to do so—than with those aspects of the question which God has revealed to us in His Word.” (*ibid*, page 625, 52-53)

What has been revealed to us concerning the gracious election of God to salvation is first of all: what prompted God to it, namely, His mercy and the most holy merit of Christ; and, secondly, in what way it has been revealed and by what means God will bring the elect to salvation, namely, through conversion and faith, which He will work in them by the means of grace.

These revealed truths, this grace of God in Christ, and this way of salvation are they in “which He has made known to us the mystery of His will and has brought it to light in Christ Jesus.” It is these revealed truths alone which can give us the certainty of faith concerning our salvation, or in other words, concerning our election, and that, for this reason, these things concern not only some few, but they concern all men: for election must be learned from the holy

Gospel concerning Christ, “which clearly testifies that ‘God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all’ (Romans 11:32), and that He does not want anyone to perish (Ezekiel 33:11; 18:23), but that everyone should repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 2:2).” (*ibid*, page 495, 10) Furthermore, the Scriptures teach us that Christ has borne the sin of all the world (John 1:29), that His blood is the atonement for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2) Christ says: “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28), and it is the Father’s will that whoever believes in Christ shall have eternal life. (John 6:40)

This truth that the promises of the Gospel concern all men, “we must therefore always hold to rigidly and firmly.” Furthermore, we must strongly hold fast the truth that God’s call is no delusion, as if He called only some with an effective call, while others are only apparently called. No, according to Scripture, God’s call is an earnest and holy call, and “in those whom He thus calls He will be efficaciously active through the Word so that they may be illuminated, converted, and saved. For the Word through which we are called is a ministry of the Spirit—‘which gives the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:8) and a ‘power of God’ to save. (Romans 1:16) And because the Holy Spirit wills to be efficacious through the Word, to strengthen us, and to give us power and ability, it is God’s will that we should accept the Word, believe and obey it.” (*ibid*, page 621. 29)

If the promises were not universal; if we did not have the Word of God for it that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4): if we did not know that the call of God is an earnest, effective and true call—then we would have no foundation whatever on which to stand, and we could not speak of any certainty of faith concerning our salvation. The thought that there is an election of grace, and that many are called, but few chosen, would then be a terrible doctrine which must lead either to arrogance or despair; for what assurance would I then have that all those promises concerned me? None at all. Now, however, since we find it taught so plainly and incontestably in the Word of God that God does not desire the death of any sinner, but that He invites all to come unto Him, that Christ will gather all under

His wings; yea, that God is angry when we do not come (Luke 14:21), while there is joy in heaven over every sinner who repents, we have a foundation which cannot be moved.

We could, of all men, least tolerate it that anyone deny the universality of grace—we, who have acknowledged that we ourselves can do nothing at all for our salvation, so that we can hope to be saved only because our salvation is from the very first to the very last an altogether free and unmerited gift of God's pure grace. Anyone who thinks he can himself assist in the matter, even though ever so little, by his acceptance of grace, or by his non-resistance and so forth—by being in one way or another not quite as great a sinner as others, may still suppose that he has some ground for hope, since he still has a little something of his own to hope in; but one who has acknowledged with Paul (not just said) that he is the chief of sinners, must despair if the radiant glory of the Gospel is not for everyone, does not drive away the darkness and draw and call him onward on the way to God.

There is, therefore, no greater injustice than to maintain that we violate the universality of grace. That would be to close the door on ourselves; for there is no other reason than the universality of grace for our daring to count ourselves among the children of God. But God be praised, we now have a foundation which cannot be moved. What proof do we have that it cannot be moved? That we are completely helpless and that therefore we can only look to God for salvation, and that we have His unfailing Word and promise as to our salvation. This foundation cannot be moved; it is called Christ, for us and in us and with us and over us, our alpha and omega, the beginning and the end.

Again: if we ourselves could help a little, choose the good, accommodate ourselves to God, and so forth, and, accordingly, to that extent would have to see that we did our part, and therefore hope that we did what was ours to do (while God did His), our hope would indeed be according to the foundation on which it was built, unstable, uncertain, wavering. No wonder, therefore, that anyone who has not fully surrendered himself vacillates between hope and fear as to his salvation, yea—and consequently maintains that it is right to waver like that.

On the other hand, anyone who sees that he has no prospect of helping himself (alas, a slow and difficult lesson for us to learn)—anyone who finds all avenues closed, with no way open for him, asks: What will God do with me? And then God gives him the answer in the Gospel.

But when the creative and regenerative power of the Gospel has overcome the resistance of our natural heart, and when the scales have fallen from our eyes, so that by the light of the Gospel we acknowledge God's glory in the countenance of Christ Jesus; when we then sigh amid the tribulations of this world and are worried about ourselves; when we think with anxiety about how many of the called have either despised the call or believed only for a time and then fallen away: and when we acknowledge our own inability to keep ourselves in the faith unto the end, and think of the danger to which we are therefore exposed—then it is that the comforting significance of a gracious election comes to our rescue and is acknowledged by us.

As Luther says: "Be first of all concerned about Christ and His Gospel, in order that you may acknowledge your sin and His grace and thereafter strive against sin, as Paul teaches from the first to the eighth chapter in the Epistle to the Romans; thereafter, when in the 8th chapter you become vexed under the cross and suffering, the 9th, 10th and 11th chapters will teach you how comforting God's predestination is." The Election of Grace does, indeed, teach us that when someone is saved, it is not because he himself was so pious that he wanted to come to God, but because God, of His grace, for Christ's sake, has determined to lead him through all the dangers unto eternal joy. All that God does in time, He has determined to do from eternity; for there is no change with God, nor shadow of turning, and there is no past or present for God, but everything is eternally present.

Therefore, our Church confesses: "God's eternal election, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but by God's gracious will and pleasure in Christ Jesus it is also a cause which creates, effects, helps, and furthers our salvation and whatever pertains to it. Our salvation is based on it in such a way that

‘the gates of Hades’ are not able to do anything against it.” (Matthew 16:18) (The *Book of Concord*, Tappert edition, page 617, 8).

For when we—instead of wanting to brood over those things in the election of grace which are hidden—are willing, as shown above, to adhere to that which is revealed, namely, to the ground for election and grace, on which He carries it out here in time, then “it is indeed a useful, salutary, and comforting doctrine, for it mightily substantiates the article that we are justified and saved without our works and merit, purely by grace and solely for Christ’s sake. Before the creation of time, ‘before the foundation of the world was laid’ (Ephesians 1:4), before we even existed, before we were able to have done any good, God elected us to salvation ‘according to his purpose’ by grace in Christ. (Romans 9:11; 2 Timothy 1:9) This also completely refutes all false opinions and erroneous doctrines about the powers of our natural will, for in His counsel God has determined and decreed before the world began that by the power of His Holy Spirit through the Word He would create and effect in us everything that belongs to our conversion.” (*ibid*, page 623, 43, 44)

“This doctrine also affords the beautiful and glorious comfort that God was so deeply concerned about every individual Christian’s conversion, righteousness, and salvation and so faithfully minded about it that ‘even before the foundation of the world was laid’ He held counsel and ordained ‘according to His purpose’ how He would bring me thereto and keep me therein. Furthermore, God wanted to insure my salvation so firmly and certainly—for due to the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily slip from our fingers, and through the deceit and power of the devil and the world it could easily be snatched and taken from our hands—that He ordained my salvation in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and put it for safekeeping into the almighty hand of our Savior, Jesus Christ, out of which no one can pluck us. (John 10:28) For this reason, too, Paul asks, Since we are called according to the purpose of God, ‘who will separate us from the love of God in Christ?’” (Romans 8:35) (*ibid*, page 624, 45-47)

Here the objection will be raised: I can understand that this doctrine would be comforting if just one thing were added: whether

I am really one of those who are chosen. But where is that written? How may I know whether I am one of the elect?

Answer: You are not to know or want to know in the ordinary sense of the word. You are to believe it, and do so on the basis of the promises God has given you. (It would be profitable to look more closely at these promises, of which I have gathered a considerable number in the first part of this article.) If a man will not believe these promises, nothing can help him. Isn't it enough that God promises a man everything that he needs? Whoever wants to have more must find it himself.

According to the Word of God, as our confessional writings also testify, the whole matter comes down to this: We ourselves can do nothing toward our salvation. God says that He will do everything for the elect. The Word of God also says that He wants to do everything for everyone. It follows that all should believe that they are chosen.⁷ But the greater number will not. For that reason they are rejected. God has not formed them vessels of wrath. They have done so themselves, because they put the Word of God away from themselves. If we are not willing to believe that God will do everything for us, we cannot be helped. But if we give God all the glory and believe that He will do everything for us, we also believe that He has determined this from eternity and has thus chosen us unto eternal life.⁸

In a very clear way, indeed, does the *Formula of Concord* conclude from the call the certainty of election. From that, or from the fact that we are called, it would have us conclude in faith that we are chosen.

God has called us with an holy calling to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus. He is truthful and does not lie. He knows what is required for us to follow this call, and He knows that we cannot follow it ourselves. Since He would have us follow it, however, it is clear that He will also give us the ability to follow it, and to remain in it unto the end; for He "hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (2 Timothy 1:9)

Furthermore, in Holy Baptism, God has sealed His call to us and consecrated us unto participation in Christ and thereby to be

“heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” If it seems to us that it is a long time since we were baptized, to God it is as though it had occurred today, and we are to comfort ourselves each day with this inviolable testimony of God’s will toward us.

And again: our Lord Jesus Christ has Himself come to us personally and has imparted Himself to us in the most Holy Supper. Is it possible that we could receive any greater and more glorious assurance that He would have us believe that we are His, members of His body, and are chosen unto eternal life?

And lastly, the promise of prayer;—is not heaven opened for us by it, as Paul says, citing the words of the prophet Joel: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved?” (Romans 10:13; Joel 3:5) Commenting on this passage in Joel, Luther says, (after he has shown how we obtain salvation through the free mercy of God, who loved us while we were yet enemies): “As we learn, we have our riches only in God’s Word. We do not have more from God until we die; then we shall see Him face to face. We are to note especially the unconditioned words: ‘Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord’; because He excludes no one from salvation, which He readily and freely promises those who call upon Him.

“It is well to know this, because of the dangerous thoughts concerning election, which the heart imagines without the Word of God, yes, contrary to the very Word; for, in the first place, the Word and mercy of God are offered to everyone in general, in this and similar passages. In the next place, the servants of the Word of God have received the command to remit the sins of the individual. We should be content with this divine ordinance and believe that since God sends us His Word we are those who are elected. Lastly, we should also, wholly in keeping with this promise, call upon the Lord and be certain of our salvation, which He so plainly promises.” (Luther’s *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume VI, 1436)

Because it is God who calls us; because we are called in one hope of our calling, namely, in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, has promised from eternity, but now revealed in His Word (Ephesians 4:4; Titus 1:2); therefore, we can and ought to have the certainty of faith of our salvation and election. But it is also true, as

Dr. Rudelbach says, only those who have acknowledged that they are called with an eternal, holy calling, only they can believe the Word of revelation, that they are chosen from eternity, before the foundation of the world was laid. (Ephesians 1:4) (*Church Postil*, 1,150)

God has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us—Christ has promised that no one shall pluck us from His hand, and we should not want to believe! Christ wishes that we shall comfort ourselves with this, that all the hairs of our head are numbered; how much more does He desire that we shall comfort ourselves in the certainty of faith, that He has determined to preserve our soul. Praised be His Holy Name!

Endnotes

¹ Hans Adolf Brorson (1694-1764). Danish hymnwriter.

² Thomas Kingo (1634-1703), Danish hymnwriter.

³ Peder Palladius (1503-1560), Danish hymnwriter; Magnus Bostrup Landstad (1802-1879), Norwegian hymnwriter.

⁴ Dr. Koren's note: This objection (like the others raised against this doctrine), plainly militates against the First Commandment, which demands that we should trust in God alone.

⁵ Dr. Koren's note: It is, as stated above, my conviction that the deduction is not even correct according to reason: first of all, because certainty of faith is not absolute; furthermore, because the Christian is seen in two different aspects, as the new man and as the old Adam; and, finally, because the realization of what faith anticipates takes place in the future and does not therefore annul present possibilities. However, it is of less importance whether or not one understands this. What is important is that we do not make our reason governess of the Word of God, and do not reject a doctrine which is plainly taught in the Word of God because we cannot make rhyme nor reason out of it. We know that the Word of God does not contradict itself, even if we cannot see the agreement. It may be well here to call Luther's words to mind:

“Why does Christ refer us in various ways to the Scriptures? In order that we may keep our Christian faith. For all our articles of faith are very difficult and lofty, so that no man can understand them without the grace and gift of the Holy Spirit. I testify and speak thereabout as one who has experienced not a little thereof; and if you also want to experience a little of it, take an article of faith, whichever you want—Christ's incarnation, resurrection, and so forth, and you will not retain one of them if you try to comprehend them with your reason. I have fared thus: when I have let the Word of God go, I have lost Christ, God and everything. . . . Thus the heathen have made this bold deduction: What do you mean? God, who is immortal by nature, became man and died? There is no sense to it!—Of course there is no sense to it. Therefore men also lose it when they think of it without the Word, for it is too lofty. It will not permit being contained in my head, and still less in yours.” (Luther's

Sämmtliche Schriften, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XII, 1604-5)

⁶ Dr. Koren's note: It is important to call attention to the fact that the opposite doctrine necessarily must work a lesser or a greater degree of slavish fear. But slavish fear is a revelation of sin in us. It belongs to the old Adam and is wrought in it by the Law. The fear which the Law demands is filial fear, which goes hand in hand with love and trust and is produced by the Gospel. This shows that the opposite doctrine confuses Law and Gospel.

⁷ Dr. Koren's note: For those who may find these statements too brief, or who need a more detailed presentation, I will add the following: God has opened a way for us to eternal life and salvation through Christ Jesus. Those who make use of this way, or who follow the call of God and repent and believe in Christ, and thus become the children of God, know, both from the testimony of the Word of God and of their conscience, that they are not better than others, and have not merited the least good thing in preference to other sinners in the world. They know that all the prerogatives they have are due solely and alone to the incomprehensible and unmerited grace of God. Therefore, they ascribe to God alone the glory for their entire salvation and for every part of it. They ascribe to God the glory for the beginning and for the end of their conversion and faith, yes, for every good thought that is in their heart. When they now see that God, because He was gracious to them, thus began the good work in them, and likewise understand that He promises them, in His inviolable Word, that He will perfect the good work until the day of Jesus Christ, they believe this Word of God in all humility and therefore believe that they shall be saved. And when they then ask, Whence comes this, and where is the source of this glory? They find no reason whatsoever in themselves or in their own conduct of any kind, and must also here, as the Word of God shows, conclude and say: It comes from the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ alone; it comes from the good and perfect will of God, from Him who does everything according to the counsel of His will. He is so gracious, that He predestinated me "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." (Ephesians 1:5) Thus a Christian, therefore, believes that he is one of the elect,

and that God has done and will still do everything for him. But now, God does indeed offer to all men this very same grace which has been described here, and that, not feignedly, but earnestly and truthfully. For God, in that He would have Christ preached unto all men, thereby also promises them everything that they need; as it is written: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) Therefore, God wants to do everything for everybody. As those who are described above, everyone should therefore believe that they are chosen. Now it is true, that God knew from eternity that many will, alas, not accept His gifts, or will accept them for a time and at last cast them away. These are not chosen; but it is their own fault, for God called them with an earnest and powerful call, showed them that He really wanted to do everything for them, so that they would have full opportunity to become the children of God and continue to be so, and hence, to believe themselves saved and among the elect; but they would not, and thus "many are called, but few are chosen." (Matthew 22:14)

⁸ Dr. Koren's note: Luther says, "From the Word of God, a Christian knows and acknowledges his own unworthiness and has a true fear of God, but he also comforts himself with the grace of God and believes that in Christ, the Son of God, he has the forgiveness of sins and redemption, and that he is pleasing to God and chosen unto eternal life; that in every need, where he finds weakness and temptations, he can find refuge in God, call upon Him, expect His help and he certain that he will be heard." (Luther's *Sämmtliche Schriften*, St. Louis-Walch edition, volume XI, 1860)

Sermon on Genesis 12:1-4

by Bjug A. Harstad

Introduction: Having suffered the dismantling of their precious Norwegian Synod in June of 1917, a handful of men gathered twelve months later to reorganize around God's truth. Rev. B.A. Harstad, an elder statesman from the old Synod, delivered the following sermon to the small convention in Lime Creek, Iowa. His words approach the future with great optimism in the Lord's work, while directing the hearers to continue in the ancient ways of God's truth. For this reason this sermon has been affectionately known as "Old Paths," and marks the spiritual beginnings of the reorganized Synod. "The confessor serves future generations." Church history so clearly testifies to the truth of this saying. The spiritual descendants of these confessors continue to be blessed as they follow the "old path," while observing the sad erosion of truth among many who share the name "Lutheran."

Text: Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him; and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. (Genesis 12:1-4)

Dearly beloved fellow Christians!

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen.

Under exceedingly strange circumstances we greet one another here today. Having always before gathered under a well defined and well understood Apostolically free church organization, we today meet

as scattered sheep, without any formal system of government.

This must call forth strange thoughts and questions. Why do we meet alone? Why not together with the many near and dear ones who wish to believe and be saved, as well as we do? Why stand aloof against a current and rush for that great union which all the world is praising? These and similar questions we must earnestly consider, until we, by the power and light of God's word, arrive at such a firm conviction, that we can, from the Scriptures, answer them properly every time the old Adam puts them into our mind.

Nevertheless, I do not intend to ask your attention to these matters now, but will rather invite you to look away from things which are behind and reach forth unto those things that are before us, that the Word of God may shed light upon the narrow and dark path on which we must run a race, in order to receive the prize.

We know that the old Norwegian Synod was founded on the idea that each congregation which individually gathered around the word and the sacraments has no other master, according to God's call and will, than our Savior Jesus Christ, who has revealed unto us his counsel for our salvation, and given us a plain, perfect and infallible rule and standard of faith, doctrine and life. As independent churches, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, they united into an external association, called The Synod for the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, to which they, in Christian liberty, without any divine Command, wished to belong, as long as they should find that desirable for true edification. To such mutual order belonged also this, that the churches sent to the annual meetings their pastors and representatives for mutual consultation, as to the best way of serving and building up the churches.

As equals and brethren, representatives, pastors, professors and teachers they met, with no other duty, right or authority over others than what each congregation had given them, either in their constitutions or in separate resolutions, with this express understanding that the congregation or church is the bride and the body of Christ and that each local church, with each believing member in it, is a member of Christ's body.

This body has but one Lord and head, Jesus Christ, and owes allegiance and obedience only to Him. It is bound to its own institutions only so long as it finds them serving the welfare of the body.

Woe unto him who in any manner tries to take the place of the groom, or demands obedience of the bride to anyone else than the bridegroom himself. This the Lord has told us in plain words by warning us against being lords over God's heritage. (1 Peter 5:3)

The example of the Apostles also shows how carefully they observed this, not encroaching upon the liberty and right of the bride. When in Jerusalem only the question of electing overseers of the poor arose in the church, the Apostles did not take the authority to appoint them, but they instructed the multitude saying: "Look ye out among you men of honest report." They chose them and set them before the Apostles. (Acts 6:3-6) Even when an Apostle was to be chosen in place of Judas Iscariot the Lord caused all the disciples to take part in that important election. For it is expressly stated in Acts 1:15-25, that there was gathered a number of about 120 persons, they appointed two candidates, they prayed and cast lots. This casting of lots was done, in order that this Apostle also, like the others, should have an immediate call direct from the Lord, according to this Word of God: "*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*" (Proverbs 16:33)

It is true, there are diversities of gifts, differences of administrations, and diversities of operations; but the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. All are to be faithful as stewards of the mysteries of God. Not all are Apostles nor are all teachers. God gave his New Testament church, first of all, the twelve Apostles. But after them he calls none to serve as Apostles. By the death of the 12 Apostles, that office ceased to exist. And yet the Lord takes good care of His bride as to bestowing upon it His blessing here on earth. (1 Corinthians 12:28)

There are also differences of conditions and rank on earth. Some are full-grown and of age, others are children and under guardianship. The husband has his position and the woman hers as well. But in all these diversities, we are by one Spirit baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. (1 Corinthians

12:13) Seeing thus that the position of every member is allotted to it by the Lord, we find that Peter in his position as Apostle performs his vocation among the 120 persons, instructing them as to the qualifications the Apostle to be chosen must have, according to the will of God. And as to the superintendents of the poor in Jerusalem, the Apostles explain to the disciples the order and demands of the Lord concerning such officers in the church. (Acts 6:3) By the grace of God we have been taught this from the word of Scripture; we are so trained.

These truths, as well as all other words of holy writ, are indispensable; and even though this should be my last word to you, I must ask you all, and especially you young friends, in the name of the triune God, that you will keep these truths in your mind and heart, hold them fast and defend them, otherwise we too may soon lose the prize that we are running a race to gain.

And you, beloved brethren in the ministry, who in the presence of our heavenly high priest, have solemnly vowed rather to shed your blood than to tolerate false and pernicious doctrine, permit me to beseech you, by the mercy and meekness of our Lord, that you in that vow will include also these truths, for they are, as well as all scriptures of God, of such importance that they teach us the maintenance and defense of our Christian liberty against the whims of man in these matters. *“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.”* (Hebrews 13:7)

The faith which the founders of our old organization these many years fearlessly professed, in speech and writing, and manifested in their church order, is given us of God. It was all prepared according to the Apostolical teaching of the Guide, the Holy Ghost, and all through bears the stamp of evangelical liberty, the truth and grace of God. We have a Christian right to retain it and cannot yield to false brethren, in order that the gospel may continue with us. (Galatians 2:5) Most of the sages, by whose hands God gave it to us, have finished their course with honor, leaving their shields untarnished. We may well be proud of them.

We have, dear friends, gathered here by the liberty which we enjoy in Christ Jesus. We are, as it were, clustering around the old

building site which is storm swept and waste. A destructive hurricane has swept away the dear old mansion, even taking with it most of them that dwelt there. Discouraged, looking around, we discover only the bare ground with wreckage and dangerous crossroads. Yet let us not be too much alarmed nor discouraged. Worse things have repeatedly happened to the church before this, without its being destroyed. Let us remember and follow these words of Jeremiah, the prophet "*Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.*" (Jeremiah 6:16)

Our common calling and labor in the church is here called asking for the old path, and walking in the good way. How this is done, our Lord shows us in our text, describing the call of Abram.

Let us then consider: *Our Christian Calling: A Walking In The Good Way.*

- 1.) How we are to walk in it, and
- 2.) How we are to be strengthened to walk in the good way.

The Lord, calling Abram says: "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.*" He must do these two things: go out from his country, and his father's house, and go to a strange land that he would show him.

If we ask why he should leave his country and his father's house Joshua answers by telling us that Terah, the father of Abraham, served strange gods. The Lord who had promised to mankind a savior from all evil, reveals Himself to Abraham, and works in him a living faith and hope in the promised Messiah, or the seed of the woman which is Jesus Christ. The first thing then was, that the heart of Abraham was regenerated by the Lord, created anew, and cleansed to be the temple of God. Then he was no longer ruled by unbelief and strange gods.

In order that our journey and labors may be pleasing to God, the first and most important step is that we by the Lord are called out of our original condition, our natural flesh, in sin conceived and shapen, taken from the prodigal son's country far away, and turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. This

the Lord did graciously do to us all in our childhood by baptism which is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. (Titus 3:5) He then blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, just as He had chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. By baptism we were grafted into the vine, and our names were written in the book of life which is Jesus Christ. In Him we shall find and be fully assured of our election and salvation. We must not rack our brain by asking whether or not we will remain steadfast to the end. By doing this, we will only be led astray. As believers we know and treat our flesh as one of the most dangerous foes of our salvation. Therefore, we know that if it depended on our own will, and we so believed, then we depended just as much on ourselves as upon God, and by this faith we would be lost. Our happiness and salvation we will build solely upon the call of God, when He by visible and undeceiving means chose and rescued us from the power of Satan and our flesh, and adopted us as His disciples and children.

This our calling and election we will make sure and prove by following in the footsteps of Abraham. God called him to a strange country. This must have been distasteful to his flesh. He was now seventy-five years old, and hardly had any desire to leave his relatives in the prosperous orient. God led him westward to sojourn among Canaanites in a strange land. (Acts 7:4-6) No good thing of this world was promised him. On the contrary, tribulations of many kinds were in store for both himself and his posterity. It is reasonable to believe that he would much rather have remained at home. Only shortly before his birth the patriarch Noah died. His own forefather, Shem, Noah's son, lived until 75 years after Abraham's emigration. Nineveh, Babylon and many other cities were in a flourishing state in the powerful Assyrian empire, founded by that mighty conqueror, Nimrod the son of Ham. Undoubtedly there were many good positions for a man like Abraham. Yet there is nothing to indicate that he longed for his home country. "*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he later should receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*" (Hebrews 11:8) This was his daily renewal.

Similar to this our labor and journey must be. Let us spend the days of our pilgrimage in faith and reliance on every word of our

Lord, implicitly obeying it whether we understand where it leads to or not. What we are called to believe and do is by no means so contrary to reason and the order of nature as that which was told Abraham, and by which he was tempted. To be sure, we are few and poor, compared with many others. But let us beware of this question: What can a remnant like us do? Is it really by our own might and ability we intend to succeed on our journey? Is it the power and importance of man that we are to depend on, and by which we expect to work? Then we had better quit now. Abraham would then have returned to the kingdom of Nimrod, to Nineveh and Babylon. No. These with all their pompous glory he must leave, in order to escape the snares and temptations of sinful flesh. By faith Abraham understood that not human wisdom and power, but only the work and grace of God could make him and the generations of the earth happy. What business have we to worry about how God will come through the world with this apparently small undertaking and poor remnant? That is His business, none of ours. We are not called to build a kingdom of this world. That Abraham left to Nimrod and his followers.

When we are asked, and when our own flesh whispers to us: What do you, a handful of people, expect to accomplish? we will answer: First, according to the new man we will and can by the power of God believe His word and confess it and live according to it. We are willing to suffer with Christ, even to be made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We can also die with Christ. This Christians will do both separately and in company. Secondly, according to the flesh we, in company with many others, also would like to “boom” the things of this world but according to the Spirit we cannot, and will not do it. With Abraham we will depart from them. For the Lord says: Beware of false prophets, be ye separate, come out from them. This is God’s will. To do this He has called us. Each of us has, individually and in company, the honor and happy duty to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. But that does not consist in meat or drink, money or goods, or in the favor or admiration of the world, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Lord. This is our Mission, our combat for the crown of life, our running a race for the prize, our journey with Abraham to the promised land.

2). How are we to be strengthened to walk in the good way?

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.” This is certainly encouraging to Abraham, one solitary family.

If we would not follow God’s word until we have the masses along with us, what could we then believe or do? The Lord’s yoke is easy and His burden is light. His word is the plainest and His will the best thing we know of in this world. That word is full of promises to us. The only trouble is, that we in our flesh have a big part of the world which is inclined to all evil. Our sinful nature has a keen sense and great cunning to make even disobedience and rejection of scripture to appear reasonable, nay, even as love, obedience and sacrifice for His cause, while it in reality is only self-love and a vain self-chosen worship of a strange God. Therefore we must meditate on the law of God day and night, in prayer and fear of God help each other to hear and keep His word. Otherwise we will surely go astray. For His ways are not our ways. God’s promises are manifold for our encouragement. These few words to Abraham in reality bring him all kinds of blessing for body and soul.

The Lord Himself will show him the land that he shall go to. But He does not at once show it to him, not so much as giving the name of it. The divine word and dispensation is to our mind striking, often shocking, and but seldom suits our taste. The devil seems to do business in a better way. He takes man to a high place, in a moment shows him all the glories of the world and in fine words gives tempting promises for the seemingly small thing to fall down and worship him, while the Spirit of truth does not tempt our mind, but convinces and trains it to obedience of heart. We cannot at once grasp the whole truth, nor fully understand all that here on earth comes with the great things of the kingdom of heaven. Earthly glory is thus always more or less false and disappointing, but God’s promises are always truthful, and never disappointing. He will show to Abraham the land in actual experience, and be with him day by day. To us also the Lord has said: *“Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”* (Matthew 28:20) He is present with us according to His human nature as our fellow man, in word and sacrament, by which He calls, gathers,

enlightens, instructs, leads and comforts all, according to the needs and requirements of each person. Abraham moved his tents from the north to the southern part of Canaan. He saw what it was, and the Lord proved His presence with him all along.

Our life and journey is similar to this, a moving and advancing, a development and training under the benign dispensation of the Lord. Thus in an assembly like this different stages of spiritual life will exist. Some are like children, without much experience, others have gained a more mature manhood in Christ. Some are weak, others are strong. Then the one shall help the other, and all bear with each other. *“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”* (Philippians 3:16) Then we will adjust our faith and progress only to the word and will of God. Then we will, like Abraham learn by actual experience what the kingdom of God on earth is. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. (Hebrews 13:13-14) Another promise is this: *“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.”*

Abraham here receives both an earthly and a spiritual gift. When God blesses, it is done, not only in word, but in deeds by letting actual things come to him. He enjoys strength and perseverance in faith, hope and love; He gains victory over the flesh, and even defies the gates of hell, that did not prevail against him. To become a great nation was a temporal blessing, but even therein he found reason for spiritual joy. As a true believer he would bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He knew the power of God’s grace and rejoiced, because many should receive it. He was convinced that the promise would in due time be fulfilled even though he received no part of the land, no, not so much as to set his foot on. Wherever he pitched his tents, there he built to the Lord an altar from the earth and stones that he found in the place. So will we also do. We have just as complete promises. *“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”* (1 John 3:2)

“And thou shalt be a blessing” is another part of these promises to Abraham. He shall not only himself enjoy the blessings of the Lord, but he will also have the honor of being a co-laborer with God to make many others partakers of the beautiful fruits of the Lord’s blessing upon him. Although he, a solitary family, and a sojourner in a strange and hostile country, was wandering about, without any connection with his many and powerful relatives in the orient, yet he became a great blessing, not only to his own household but also to many others. By his obedience and worship of the one true God he served many people as a shining star in the dense darkness that covered the nations. He rescued Lot and the King of Sodom and Gomorrah. To him it was an enjoyment by his obedience and teaching to give his fellow men a true reflection of the grace of God that he himself enjoyed and valued so highly. He especially gloried in the fact that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. He professed the Christ that was to come.

We are called to bring the same blessing to all mankind, with this difference only, that we confess the Christ as He appeared on earth, and fulfilled the promises to all the families of the earth, reconciling the world unto Himself and proving to friend and foe that He, in spite of the gates of hell, gathers people into His fold and feeds his flock by the spiritual nourishment, served through the ministry of reconciliation, and given us by the same Lord that revealed Himself unto Abraham.

We no more than Abraham should look for support from the world. The powers of this world can never espouse the cause of Christ Jesus.

But to the other blessings the Lord adds one more, which I mention last, because it, as it were, covers, confirms and guards the rest of them. It is this: *“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.”* We see how closely the Lord will stand at his side and take care of him, protecting him against his foes, and promoting him and his friends’ wellbeing. His life and journeys will not be in vain, but always bring some good fruit.

Such are the blessings, flowing from strict obedience and adherence to every one of God’s words, even though it should call down upon us the curse and persecution of the world, and to us seem

to bring only defeat and destruction, besides the ridicule and contempt of the world. Yet we will not swerve from the truth for the Lord is at our side. He says *“And ye shall be hated by all men for my name’s sake. But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls.”* (Luke 21:17-19)

Even in apparent defeat the sincere disciples of the Lord are conquerors. *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.”* (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

Let us abide strictly in the word until our dying day.

‘Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins gird about with truth, and having the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.’ (Ephesians 6:10-18)

May the Lord grant us these blessings for our Savior’s sake.
Amen.

Unity, Union, and Unionism

by H. M. Tjernagel

Foreword

Introduction: In 1935 the United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) invited other Lutheran church bodies to work toward closer relations. The "Little Norwegian Synod" (ELS), in only her seventeenth year of existence, declined the invitation, but was concerned when its big brother, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, accepted the offer. The following year this synodical essay, "Unity, Union and Unionism," written primarily by Rev. H.M. Tjernagel, would sound the warning: "Vestigia terrent" (the footsteps terrify). Commonly known as the "Triple U" this work was published in 1938 and sent to every pastor in the Missouri Synod as a testimony against the errors of these other Lutheran church bodies. These six theses and commentary demonstrate how the ELS members had taken to heart the great lessons of church history. "Triple U" also shows that they were well aware of the doctrinal issues swirling about in their day, and expresses a sincere spirit toward true, Scriptural unity in the church.

Two years ago the following words were addressed to our annual convention:

The Melanchtonian spirit of synergism, compromise, and unionism all but succeeded in preventing the giving of the Augsburg Confession to the world. After Luther's death the same spirit raised its head again and made protracted and insidious attacks on Scripture truth as confessed at Augsburg. This time it brought forth an Altered Augsburg Confession. It has been active ever since, though its voice has at times been somewhat muffled and its operations varying in degree of boldness.

The forces thus set in motion within the early Lutheran Church, and which have their deep-set roots in natural man's reason

and inclination, are today bringing forth a bountiful harvest of indifference to, and misuse of, God's Word, of compromise and of related sins. Throughout the length and breadth of our land a strong, influential voice is now reverberating, bearing the message: "God's Moment is Now" for "recognition and fellowship" among American Lutherans. Voices are also lifted in the interest of the "whole problem of American Church Unity" which express the hope that "the tide toward a true, free national church in America" may set in.

The wave of indifference and unionism that threatened to swamp us, and that did wash overboard many of our friends and brethren two decades ago, was relatively small and timid as compared to the great and bold wave now advancing on orthodox Lutheranism in America and the world. The prevailing winds are against us, the tides and currents are contrary; the sea is rough. Brethren, the need of the hour is faithful, I repeat, faithful, fearless, consecrated captains with firm hands to the helm, eyes fixed on the compass and chart — the open Bible — and a vigorous "get thee hence, Satan," to every suggestion of reason, convenience and self-aggrandizement.

Since then the wave has continued to advance and has increased in boldness. Realizing the imminent danger, and awake to their responsibilities as watchmen, our pastors are sounding the warning.

The Theses

In view of the fact that continued efforts are being made to unite all Lutherans in one fellowship, we adopt the following theses as expressing the principles which must guide us in seeking to effect such fellowship:

Thesis I

The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, "endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith. (Ephesians 4:3)

Thesis 2

We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the Word of God and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

Thesis 3

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

Thesis 4

We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only

- when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact;
- or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” (Acts 18:26)

Thesis 5

Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly,” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view of church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifference and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity rests at all times upon all Christians. (1 Peter 3:15)

Thesis 6

Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists. (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 6:3-5) Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full fledged unionism, as history also attests.

Unity, Union, and Unionism

Before considering the several theses, we pause here to ask Why not subscribe to the U. L. C. Statement of 1934: “Inasmuch as our now separated Lutheran Church bodies all subscribe to these same confessions, it is our sincere belief that we already possess a firm basis on which to unite in one Lutheran Church in America,” and thus be done with statements of principles governing fellowship? (Conv. Report, 416)

Answer: We would gladly do this if observation and experience had not disillusioned us and taught us that “the real standpoint of a church is not the one written and subscribed to on paper, but manifests itself in her actual teaching, life, and practice.” (Bente 10)

We need no further experiments to learn “that there is no guarantee of peace in words when men do not agree in things.” (Krauth in Bente, 183)

It is truly regrettable that the many expressions of admiration for our uncompromising stand from other Lutheran quarters and their declarations of full agreement with us in doctrine must be met with hand cupped to the ear and saying, “What you are speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what you say.” (Emerson in Bente, 166—All quotations from Bente’s *American Lutheranism*, Vol. II, pages 10, 183, 166, respectively.)

Alas many honor Lutheranism and its confessions with the lips, but their teaching and practice are far from it.

Thesis 1

The spiritual unity of the Holy Christian Church, which is the body of Christ, is not dependent upon any such externals as a

common organization or language, but alone upon the possession of the saving faith in Jesus Christ. True Christians will, however, “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” and will therefore also seek to establish and maintain church fellowship with all who are one with them in confessing the true faith. (Ephesians 4:3)

This thesis is fundamental to the matter in hand. We speak of the Holy Christian Church, and in order that there shall be no misunderstanding and confusion, it is necessary briefly to explain what we mean by that name, or what it is we call “The Holy Christian Church.” We refer to the same thing as we confess in the third article of the Apostolic Creed with these words: “I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints.” We say that the Christian Church is the body of Christ because the apostle Paul, being moved and guided by the Spirit of God, compares the church to the body and its members, and shows that as the members of the physical body of man each have their peculiar work and use and by the creative act of God are fitly joined together to form one body, so are also the individual members of the Church given each their particular place and work in the Church and constitute one communion. And he ends his arguments by saying to Christian members of the Church at Corinth: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 12:27, Romans 12:3ff) From this we learn that the Church consists of individual believers, each one given his particular place and work, so as to form a spiritual body.

The “Holy Christian Church” consists only of those persons who have a true and living faith in Jesus Christ, having been called by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel of Christ which “is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1: 16); “being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24); “who have been regenerated,” “born of water and of the Spirit,” and made “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ” (John 3:5; Romans 8:17); and of whom it is said, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” (Titus 3:5) Only those are the members of the

“Holy Christian Church,” then, whom the Holy Ghost has called by the Gospel, redeeming them by the blood of Christ “which cleanseth us from all sin,” and “purifying their hearts by faith.” (1 John 1:7; Acts 15:9)

From this it is evident that the Church of Christ or the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, as the Lord Jesus declares to the Jews: “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, ‘Lo, here!’ or ‘Lo, there!’ for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20-21) For that reason we confess that we “believe the Holy Christian Church.” It is only by the revelation of the Word of God and by faith in that Word that we know of that One Holy Church, for we cannot look into the hearts of men and observe the kingdom of God; we confess that the Holy Christian Church is “the communion of saints.” This indicates spiritual union. In this sense, the Church is the aggregate of all who truly believe in Christ as their only Savior. It is all believers collectively. By “the Church” we denote not a mere abstract concept or idea of Christianity as a whole or in general, disregarding the individual persons who constitute the Church. For the Church of Christ consists of individual persons who truly believe the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake, being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

The faith and hope of the individual persons who constitute the Church are centered upon the same thing and sustained by the same means, and thus they constitute one body, as the apostle declares, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6) The Christian Church is, therefore, one Church, not many churches. It consists of many persons who are the saints of God and dwell together in one communion and fellowship with one another in one faith and one hope. There is a perfect unity in the Church of Christ, which is not established or created by external organization or one language, but which the Holy Ghost has created by converting the hearts of sinners through the power of the Gospel of Christ.

That this unity of the Church is not a product of outward organization or external fellowship of church bodies is evident from

the description of the Church and its members by the apostle Peter when he writes “to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the blood of Jesus Christ,” and tells them: “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: which in time past were not a people, but now are the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 Peter 2:9-10) The unity of the Church is, therefore, a spiritual union which binds together many individual persons, scattered among different peoples, nations, and tongues, but nevertheless have fellowship with one another in the same mind and the same Spirit.

The unity of the Church is a creation of the Holy Ghost, established and maintained by Him through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. To regard it as a result of external organization or any contrivance of man is contrary to the doctrine of the Word of God. (Luke 17:21) It is, indeed, true that members of the Church of Christ are visible persons present in this world, and their fellowship and unity is manifested by their assembling of themselves together to hear the preaching of the Gospel and to use the Sacraments in accordance with the institution of Christ. The Lord Jesus prayed for His Church and its members, saying, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that shouldest keep them from evil.” (John 17:15) And they are earnestly admonished not to neglect coming together for mutual edification of the day of the Lord’s appearing: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

From these and other passages it is clear that the Church of Christ and its members are actively present in the world in assemblies and congregations where the Word and Sacraments are used. Jesus has promised to be present in the assemblies of His disciples, whether they be large or small: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) “Again I say unto you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father

which is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:19) But it is evident that His promises are based on the fact that they are gathered together “in His name” and “agree to ask in His name.” It is the duty of, and indeed a great blessing for the disciples of Christ to practice outward fellowship with each other; but only those are the disciples of Christ who keep His Word: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32) And again: “Verily, Verily I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.” (John 8:51)

As disciples of Christ, we love the brethren and would fellowship with them, but since we cannot know the hearts of men, we know not who are the disciples of Christ except by the confession of the Word of Christ; that is, we can fellowship only with those assemblies or congregations which teach the pure doctrine of the Word of God and “observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.” (Matthew 28:20) We are admonished to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses by teaching other doctrines than we have been taught by the Word of God, as it is written, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which yet have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17)

Fellow believers, be assured the Church of Christ is a unit; it does stand a solid phalanx against sin and the devil. Christ’s promise: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18), is an impregnable fortress surrounding it. Why then, “O ye of little faith,” this feverish concern for mergers and unions of visible groups, as if they could save the Church from being swamped by the surging tides of godlessness and unbelief? It is the Word of God alone that can build, support, and defend the Church. Therefore, we are interested in the visible church only in so far as it fulfills its divinely appointed function, namely of being the agency for administering the means of grace through which the Holy Ghost grafts branches on the vine, Jesus Christ. (John 15:5)

Thesis 2

We acknowledge one, and only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice, namely the

Word of God, and only one God-pleasing procedure in striving for unity: That “the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God lead holy lives according to it.”

By the closing remark on *Thesis 1*, grafting was brought to mind. Grafting of trees and shrubs has been practiced a long time. St. Paul makes figurative use of it in Romans 11:17 and following. That the principle of grafting was fully understood by him, is clear from verse 17. “... grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree.” In surgery a graft is defined as a “juncture between a piece of animal tissue cut from a living person or animal and the tissue of another subject.” The success or failure of grafting depends upon whether or not the life-fluid of the grafted body can be induced to flow through the engrafted part. It is, indeed, axiomatic in plant-as well as animal-tissue grafting that the life-fluid is the only power that can unify the scion and the host, that is, cause the parts grafted together to unite into one living organism; therefore, no procedure is even attempted which is not based on this fact. In plants the life-fluid is called sap, in the human body it is called blood. It is the blood that carries life to every part and tissue of the body, and it is the blood that must nourish a part engrafted upon the body and thus unite it to the body. “The life of the flesh is in the blood.” (Leviticus 17:11)

The Word of God is the lifeblood of the Church. Sinners can not, as branches, be engrafted on the vine, Jesus Christ and, therewith, become a part of the Church, unless that lifeblood, the Word of God, is made to course through the “stony hearts” and spiritually dead souls with its quickening power. (John 15:5; Ezekiel 36:26) It is the Holy Ghost alone (meaning none other, and He, unassisted) who performs this miracle of grace.

The much-vaunted character of the lodge-member, the works of the self-righteous Pharisee, the conduct, attitude, *forhold*, of the synergist have never aided this process of grafting a particle, nor have “science,” modern learning, or “civilization” helped. That the Eskimo, e.g., learned to desire the white man’s food and ways of living; that he has been introduced to the use of soap; that rules of sanitation have been adopted and have decreased infant mortality,

that he has learned to read and write English and can run a motor boat instead of paddling a kayak — all this has not engrafted a single Eskimo on the vine, Jesus Christ. The “Social Gospel” is impotent to produce life, for it is a bloodless Gospel.

Thesis 3

Through such teaching of the Word, unity and (when deemed desirable) union have been attained in the past. Examples: the early New Testament Church, the Lutheran Reformation, and the Synodical Conference.

“When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity,” a God-pleasing method for attaining unity has been instituted. Compromise with error, hedging on disputed points, cowardly failure to teach all things whatsoever the Savior has commanded, is not, and cannot be, the basis for the establishing of a true union, nor of true unity. Union without unity, without unanimity in doctrine and practice, is unscriptural and therefore impossible to us. Loyalty to the truth of God’s Holy Word, orthodoxy in doctrine and practice, opposition to all error and heresy, fidelity to the symbols of Christendom and to the confessions of our Lutheran Church, will promote true unity.

Such unity may lead to union if union be thought desirable, advantageous or necessary. It need not lead to outward organic union as an integral or component part of its essence. Circumstances may be present which (conceivably) would make such union unprofitable or impracticable. Ordinarily, we will grant, some kind of external union will be deemed desirable so that the work of the Kingdom of God may be carried out as effectively and efficiently as possible, since “in union there is strength.”

In support of this proposition we appeal to the past. The records of the early New Testament Church, of the Lutheran Reformation, and of the Synodical Conference prove that that which we hold to be “the only one, truly unifying influence and power in matters both of doctrine and of practice” has indeed brought about, established, promoted, fostered and maintained unity, and that from such unity, church unions of various types have resulted.

The divinely inspired sources of the History of the Early Christian Church, the Church of the Apostolic era (c. 30AD - 75AD) tell us of the church in Jerusalem: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and prayers." (Acts 2:42) "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." (Acts 4:32) The persecutions, although disrupting the visible union of the church to a large extent, did not violate the existing unity, for "they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." (Acts 8:4) There can be no doubt from the language of the text, even if the express words are lacking, that it was the same Word that was being preached by all those who were scattered abroad. Whether it was in the cities of Judea, or in Samaria, in Phoenicia, in Cyprus, in Antioch or in Damascus the same message designated as the Word was preached. Philip expounding Isaiah to an Ethiopian eunuch, Ananias strengthening Saul of Tarsus, this same Saul witnessing for the truth, Peter preaching in Cornelius' house, all preach the same Gospel of repentance, baptism, and forgiveness of sins. Paul's questions: "Walked we not in the same spirit? Walked we not in the same steps?" are to be answered in the affirmative. (2 Corinthians 12:18) They show that there was unity among Paul and his coworkers and that this unity was brought about by the preaching of the pure Word of God. James, Cephas, and John give Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship," "as if they would have said, 'We, O Paul, in preaching the gospel, do agree with thee in all things; therefore, in doctrine we are companions, and have fellowship together therein;' that is to say, we have all one doctrine, for we preach one gospel, one baptism, one Christ, one faith." (Galatians 2:9; Luther) As there was purity among the teachers, there was unity among the churches, so that they exchanged letters, greetings, and gifts. Who will deny that this unity was founded on the teaching of the pure Word of God?

That dissension and disputation, false doctrine and divisions are to be found in the early New Testament Church is true. But these were due not to the pure preaching of the Word of God, but to the perverseness of the human heart and the wiles of the devil. The preservation of the truth demands, however, not only that unity of

doctrine be maintained, but also that error be combated, as the leaders of the Apostolic church did.

The Church of the Reformation shows us, again, that unity must be based on the pure preaching of the Word of God. The work of Luther and his co-laborers in Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, based on fidelity to God's Word, resulted in a God-pleasing unity. For example, when the Wittenberg Concord of 1536 was signed, Luther said to the representatives of the South German cities: "Because you stand thus, we are one, and we acknowledge and receive you as dear brethren in the Lord." The strife and divisions within the Lutheran church after the death of Luther were due not to insistence on sola *Scriptura* (the Bible alone) but to a willingness to compromise. It was only the consistent and persistent testimony of men like Andreae and Chemnitz, who remained faithful to the pure Word of God, the continued preaching of the Word of God in all its truth and purity, and their opposition to all error and to indifference, that eventually restored unity to the strife-torn Church, as evidenced by the adoption of the *Formula of Concord*.

The authors of the *Formula* solemnly declare, "We entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance with our utmost power that unity (and peace) by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ." (1095, 96) Such was the godly peace and true Christian unity restored by the *Formula of Concord* to the Lutheran Church. And what it did for her it is able to do for the Church at large. Being in complete agreement with the Scripture, it is well qualified to become the regeneration center of the entire present-day corrupted, disrupted, and demoralized Christendom.

Accordingly Lutherans, the natural advocates of a truly wholesome and God-pleasing union based on unity in divine truth will not only strive to impart its blessings also to others, all the while praying incessantly, fervently, and trustingly with the pious framers of the *Formula*: "May Almighty God and the Father of our Lord Jesus grant the grace of His Holy Ghost that

we all may be one with Him, and constantly abide in Christian unity, which is well-pleasing to Him! Amen.” (837, 23 [*Triglotta*, I, 256])

The unity which existed among the signers of the *Formula of Concord* existed, and still exists, among their spiritual heirs, the members of the Synodical Conference. The Synodical Conference was formed in 1872 as “an expression of the unity of the spirit existing among the respective synods.” Concerning a preliminary meeting which was held at Fort Wayne (November 14-16, 1871) Dr. C. F. W. Walther wrote in the *Lutheraner*:

We speak the truth, when we assure you, that this Convention in Fort Wayne reminded one of that picture of the Church which the saintly Luke sketches in the words: “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul.” (Acts 4:32) It was not a matter of first establishing unity, much less of producing the appearance of unity from without by all sorts of forced joint resolutions and formulas, but of giving expression to the already existing unity. With joy those present recognized, that not the counsels of men and church politics, but true unity of faith and confession had brought them together, so that the inner unity appeared also outwardly through the bond of peace. It did, indeed, see that there was justification for it when the enemies of (confessional) fidelity declared disdainfully that such fidelity calls forth only division; but God, who requires nothing from His stewards but that they be found faithful, has helped hitherto that now everyone must recognize that fidelity to His Holy Word does not separate but truly unites.

That divisions arose within this body (e.g. the Predestinarian Controversy) was due again to the false teachings of those who did not adhere to all the words of Jesus. Heresy and error is always the disuniting force; purity of preaching is the unifying force. The records of the Synodical Conference bear out this contention.

The lesson of history, then, is clear: the only truly unifying force (leading at times also to outward union) is the preaching of the Word of God in its truth and purity. Error causes divisions and such division have been found throughout the history of the Church. Let

us ask God to preserve to us His pure Word that we might thereby help to bring about unity, praying, too:

*Thou Fountain whence all wisdom flows,
Which God on pious hearts bestows,
Grant us Thy consolation,
That in our pure faith's unity
We faithful witnesses may be
Of grace that brings salvation.
Hear us, cheer us by Thy teachings;
Let our preaching and our labor
Praise Thee, Lord, and bless our neighbor.*

Thesis 4

We hold that inter-synodical committees are useful in promoting Christian fellowship only

- **when the various groups or synods have, through their public ministry of the Word, given each other evidence of an existing unity in spirit, and it remains merely to establish the fact of such unity and to arrange for some public recognition and confession of that fact;**
- **or where it is clear that those in error sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly.” (Act 18:26)**

In the early history of the Lutheran Church in this country so-called Free-conferences were frequently held (Columbus, Ohio, 1856; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1858; Chicago and Fort Wayne, 1860; Rushford, Minnesota, 1870; Decorah, Iowa, 1872; Minneapolis, 1877; St. Ansgar, Iowa, 1881; Roland, Iowa, 1882; Menomonie, Wisconsin, 1883; and many, many others) to discuss the (difference in doctrine and practice separating the various synods. These Free-conferences were open to all Lutherans who wished to take part, laymen as well as clergy. One hundred sixty-five pastors from four different synods were reported present at Roland and a large number of laymen were active participants. The attendance at some sessions of the meetings was estimated at one thousand. The Free-conferences were, as a rule, held in response to an invitation extended by some congregation, not

by resolution of synods, nor was it customary that anyone was officially authorized to speak for the synod to which he belonged. Synodical committees were sometimes appointed to make minor preliminary arrangements for a proposed conference meeting. (*Kirketidende*, 1872, 142) The purpose of these public discussions was to get a clearer view of the doctrinal position held by members of each synod, and, if possible, to come to a God-pleasing agreement. It should also be noted that quite full and detailed reports of the Free-conferences were given general publicity through the synodical organs concerned. Outstanding speeches were quoted and the speakers named. Thus the general membership and pastorate of the several synods were kept well informed.

During the last three or four decades, it has become more and more common for groups and synods to negotiate through specially appointed smaller committees. Though such inter-synodical committees are not, as a rule, vested with authority to make final decisions on behalf of their respective synods, they do, nevertheless, through their official standing possess a prestige which is certain to go a long way in shaping popular opinion in regard to the results of their negotiations.

Within the proper sphere such committees can no doubt fill a real need and useful purpose. When it is quite evident that unity of spirit exists between various groups or synods, they may be very helpful in formulating a definite declaration of principles in doctrine and practice; they may be able to suggest what real and alleged errors, if any, must be specifically and clearly renounced; to work out a basis for organic union, if desirable, or suggest rules for cooperation in their work, if they choose to continue under their existing organizations.

The question may pertinently be asked, "How can a synod discover whether or not real unity of spirit exists between it and other synods?" We answer, "Through their official organs and the published reports of conventions and other meetings, through addresses made by representative members on important occasions, through their constitutions and by-laws, and through the discipline practice, on their congregational and synodical level, a fairly accurate judgment may be formed." More intimate and dependable knowledge of a synod

may be gained in this way than can be obtained through questions and answers and guarded discussions in relatively small committee meetings.

In the earlier periods of the Lutheran Church in this country, while new settlements were constantly being established, new synods were organized in various states. That error of doctrine should creep into some of them is not strange. At that time there were instances where great blessing resulted from negotiations with brethren who, by the grace of God, had reached a higher degree of Christian knowledge and experience. If it should appear today that any group or synod which may err in some points sincerely seeks to know the truth and is willing to listen to the doctrine, reproof and correction of the Word of God and stands ever ready to renounce what the Word denounces, God forbid that we should ever lay a straw in the way of negotiations with them. In such cases, committees may accomplish much good.

Thesis 5

Where such evidence of unity is lacking, or where it is clear that those in error do not sincerely desire to know “the way of God more perfectly,” but such committees nevertheless are elected to confer with them with the view of church fellowship, there is grave danger that the work of these committees will result in indifference and in compromise of Scriptural doctrine and practice. (For examples of this, consider the mergers and unions of recent years among Lutherans.) The duty of testifying to the truth of God’s Word and thus promoting unity rests at all times upon all Christians. (1 Peter 3:15)

Today conditions have become quite well settled, so that there can be little excuse for not knowing the spirit which prevails in the various Lutheran synods. Every group has its own official organ, through which it gives expression to its position in doctrine and practice. Extensive articles, written by prominent members, are published from time to time dealing with different doctrines and various phases of their church work. Although the authors have not always been designated as spokesmen for the whole group, yet, so

long as no protest is made and the same doctrine and principles are repeatedly held forth and defended, it must be regarded as the acknowledged stand of the whole synod. If the contention is made that the synod gives room for various views on important Scriptural doctrines, the synod thereby brands itself as being so indifferent and unionistic that an orthodox church cannot have fellowship with it.

At the present time there is also little excuse for any Lutheran synod to continue in error through ignorance. Hitherto, except during periods of negotiations between inter-synodical committees, erroneous doctrines and unscriptural practices have always been publicly pointed out and corrected. All possible encouragement has hereby been given to those in error to examine carefully their doctrine and practice in the light of God's Word. If they still persist in their errors, they are without excuse.

If we are asked to negotiate through committees with groups and synods which by their public testimony plainly show that they continue to hold erroneous views on Scriptural doctrines in spite of warning and admonition, and in their practice fail to follow the guidance of Scripture, what then? Scripture has made adequate provision for such contingency. To pastors it says, "Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season." (2 Timothy 4:2) It is made the clear duty of all Christians at all times to bear testimony for the truth in word and deed, not only to those that call themselves Lutherans, but to all men. (1 Peter 3:15)

The great danger of negotiating with confirmed errorists through synodical committees (a danger from which Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, etc., graciously safeguard us) is indicated in the passages which describe the nature of those who teach false doctrine. In Ephesians 4:14 we read, "That we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." And in Romans 16:18, after having admonished us to avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the true doctrine, the apostle says of these false teachers, "And by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple."

False teachers are shrewd, cunning, crafty, and are bent on deceiving. This description is not to be applied only to open enemies

of the truth who consciously try to wreck the foundations of our Christian faith. It is equally true of all false teachers. Scripture does not distinguish between great and small error. All error is condemned, none condoned. Every error is a lie, and back of it stands the father of lies. Those who promote error, whether, humanly speaking, great or small, go the errands of the devil, whether they realize it and intend to do so or not.

When we elect a committee to be closeted in confidential negotiations with like committees from errorist bodies who will strive to gain acceptance of their false views, we have every reason to fear that we must reckon with the wily tactics of the archenemy of truth. If 1 Peter 3:15 is cited to justify such procedure, the passage is misapplied, and, though unintentionally, made to nullify Romans 16:17, Titus 3:10, etc. Let it be noted, too, that the prospects of convincing by our testimony to the truth a committee which represents a body confirmed in error, and through it the body itself, are very, very poor indeed. Be it remembered also that the champions of false doctrine are usually satisfied if they gain for their error equal standing with the truth; hence every manner of compromise is resorted to. The danger is multiplied when, as is common, the errorists shower praises upon their opponents in order to gain their personal good will. When the champions of truth are brought to admire the errorists for their gentlemanly behavior and their fair-mindedness, and begin to think of the many able and good men and women whom they represent, then "the lust of the flesh" is near to victory.

Brethren, have we the right to expose ourselves or a committee to the machinations of the tempter? Are we so certain that we, or more especially our committee, shall be able to discover the snares which are laid for them and to hold unflinchingly to the truth? Scripture warns us very earnestly: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) This warning applies to sins both in life and doctrine. The apostle Paul, after having shown how the Jews have fallen away because of unbelief, warns the Christians in Rome against boasting of their superior knowledge in these words: "Be not high-minded, but fear." (Romans 11:12) And the disciples were reminded by their Savior: "The Spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:41)

Looking back upon the sad experiences of our old Norwegian Synod we have also historical reasons for taking the warnings to heart. An “heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject.” That is the stern command of God. If we still continue to negotiate with errorists on intimate terms, the punishment will not fail to come. “God is not mocked.”

We believe it in place and beneficial to append here a short history of union movements among the Norwegian Lutherans in America which resulted in the compromise merger of 1917 and, as it seems, gave impetus to unionism and indifference and new hope to unionists throughout the Lutheran world.

Historical Evidence

Efforts to unite all Norwegian Lutherans in America into one body began very early. A series of seven so-called free-conferences were held during the period of 1871 to 1887. Pastors and laymen calling themselves Lutherans were invited to take part in discussing doctrinal differences. Though these discussions may have been of considerable value to individuals as a means of getting information about the doctrinal position of other synods, there is nothing to show that any progress was made thereby toward real unity in doctrine.

At the last one of these free-conferences, which was held in Willmar, Minnesota, October 6 - 12, 1887, it was decided to continue these meetings. No more general free-conferences were held, however, owing to the fact that the Norwegian Synod shortly after this was divided as a result of the Election controversy, and the Anti-Missourian party became busy negotiating union with other bodies, which resulted in the organization of the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in 1890.

January 6 - 12, 1892, a so-called Delegate Meeting was held in Willmar, Minnesota. Thirty elected pastors and laymen from the Norwegian Synod and an equal number from the United Church assembled to discuss doctrinal differences. The printed report of the discussions would indicate that the prospects of attaining doctrinal agreement were now more remote than ever.

With the year 1900, the union movement entered upon a new era. The District meetings of the Norwegian Synod, held that year, passed resolutions inviting the United Church and the Hauge Synod through their respective presidents and the theological faculties to meet with a similar committee of the Norwegian Synod, for the purpose of discussing doctrinal differences with a view to ascertaining the exact doctrinal position of each body, and, possibly, of arriving at a God-pleasing agreement. The United Church accepted the invitation, and a meeting of the joint committee was held shortly before Easter in 1901. It was decided to meet again the following year, but as Dr. F. A. Schmidt, contrary to the decision of the joint meeting, published an account of the colloquy together with a sharp attack on the procedure followed in the discussions, the Norwegian Synod at its general meeting in 1902 passed a resolution to ask the United Church to appoint another man to take the place of Dr. Schmidt as a member of the committee. As an answer to this request, the United Church demanded evidence to prove the contention of the Norwegian Synod, that Dr. Schmidt "by his conduct during the long doctrinal controversy, as well as now, during and after the colloquy, had shown himself to be a hindrance, not only to reaching an agreement, but also to an understanding between the two synods." The Church-council of the Norwegian Synod published a pamphlet setting forth the evidence asked for. This brought out a bitter answer from the members of the United Church committee. It now seemed for a time that no more efforts would be made to continue these negotiations.

In 1905, however, an invitation to open negotiations between the Norwegian Lutheran bodies came from an unexpected source. The Hauge Synod, which up to this time had consistently refused to take part in these inter-synodical discussions, extended an invitation to all the Norwegian Lutheran bodies to open doctrinal discussions through committees, five members from each body. This invitation was accepted by the United Church and the Norwegian Synod, each appointing committees.

These committees held regular meetings once and twice a year, and in 1908 it was reported that theses on Absolution, Lay-preaching, The Call, and Conversion were agreed upon. No serious objection to these theses have been raised. A strong demand was

expressed, however, especially by members of the Norwegian Synod, that antitheses would be added, in order to make sure that false doctrines formerly championed by other synods were no longer held by them. The committee members from the Norwegian Synod assured us that this would no doubt be done.

At the meeting of the joint committee held November 10 – 13, 1908, the doctrine of Election was taken up for consideration. A subcommittee had been appointed at the previous meeting to prepare a basis for the discussion. This subcommittee reported that they had not been able to agree on anything to present to the plenary committee. Two sets of theses, one by Dr. Stub and the other by Dr. Kildahl, were presented, and a third set was read by Dr. Boeckmann. It was decided to make Dr. Stub's theses the basis of discussion. These theses were then discussed at this and the two following meetings, March 30-April 2, and November 2-5, 1909. At this last meeting, the committee members from the United Church moved that question 548 in Pontoppidan's *Sandhed til Gudfrygtighed* be made the basis for discussion, since no headway was made. It was decided, however, to elect a subcommittee to consider carefully if a satisfactory basis could be found, and to report at a meeting to be held March 30 - April 1, 1910. The subcommittee failed to agree on a report. It submitted three sets of theses. Though it had been decided at the previous meeting that the discussion should not be continued unless the subcommittee agreed on a report, a majority of the joint committee decided to continue the discussion on the basis of theses prepared by President Eastvold of the Hauge Synod. The committee members from the Norwegian Synod now left the meeting.

The 1910 District conventions of the Norwegian Synod endorsed the theses prepared by Dr. Stub. The President of the United Church, Rev. T. H. Dahl, in his annual report to the convention of this body blamed the Norwegian Synod committee members for breaking up the negotiations, and denounced the doctrines held by the Synod as "unbiblical and un-Lutheran." The committee members from the United Church issued a pamphlet entitled, "Election and the Union Movement," which was given wide publicity, in which they stressed their synergistic doctrines as strongly as they had ever done before. There is nothing in this pamphlet to indicate that they in

any way had profited by the discussions which for many years had been carried on in the inter-synodical committees.

In the meantime there seemed to be much dissatisfaction within the United Church with the action of their committee members. Seventeen pastors published a protest in the Norwegian press, and demanded that a new committee be elected. In response to this demand a new committee was elected at the convention in 1911. The Norwegian Synod magnanimously followed their example, though no dissatisfaction with the old members of the committee had been expressed. The Hauge Synod, which had not taken part in the Election Controversy, did not take active part in the deliberations which followed.

This new committee met in the fall of 1911. After this first meeting, several of the committee members from the Norwegian Synod expressed themselves to the effect that they had never suspected that there was such a great doctrinal difference between the United Church and their own Synod. However, a subcommittee was elected, two men from each of the conferring parties, to prepare theses to be considered at a later meeting. The whole committee met again in February 1912, and the sessions were continued about eight days. The result of these deliberations was the so-called "*Opgjør*," in which the conferring parties declared that they had reached a full agreement on the doctrine of Election. One of the members of the Norwegian Synod delegation was asked by a friend after coming out of the last session: "Well, did you get what you wanted?" He answered, "Not exactly, but we pressed them pretty hard."

A better characterization of *Opgjør* than this remark has probably never been given. Nevertheless, the result of the committee's deliberations was heralded throughout the length and breadth of the land as the Lord's doing. A wave of enthusiasm swept over the congregations of the conferring bodies. Little or no effort was made to put the new theses to a real test. The rank and file of the people simply refused to discuss them. They were satisfied with the assurance which the authors of *Opgjør* gave them that a real settlement of the Election controversy had been effected. And it is to be feared that history will always repeat itself in this respect under similar circumstances.

A considerable part of the Norwegian Synod voiced strong objections to *Opgjør* at the district meetings in 1912; but the committee members were on hand, offering oral explanations on the disputed points, explanations which never became a part of the document itself, nor were they ever endorsed by the committee members of other bodies. This, together with the strong pressure which was brought to bear by the popular demand for union, squelched the opposition, and *Opgjør* was accepted by a large majority of votes at these meetings. The theses of the former committees were also endorsed, and no opportunity was given for adding the much needed antitheses. No opportunity was ever given for a fair consideration of the agreement. Unscrupulous leaders made full use of the popular demand for union to intimidate and browbeat the objectors, and the consummation of the merger was hurried along with all possible speed.

The more influential Norwegian newspapers were requested by the leaders not to publish articles that might disturb the progress of the union movement. They complied. The church organs were practically closed to articles expressing dissatisfaction with *Opgjør*. The crusaders' cry, "God wills it," was heard on every hand. The regular general pastoral conference meetings were not held. The officers failed to arrange for and call said meetings.

The last act in breaking down the resistance of the objectors was the so-called Austin Agreement, a shrewdly formed, but meaningless document, intended to soothe the consciences of those who lacked the courage to stand up for the truth to the bitter end.

We, who have observed at close range and studied the history of the efforts made to bring the Norwegian Lutherans into agreement by means of committees, are constrained to say, when asked to follow this method again; "*Vestigia terrent.*" We are afraid of history repeating itself, and therefore consider it a God-given duty to sound a warning to all earnest defenders of the truth against exposing the true welfare of the Church of Christ to the dangers involved in this procedure.

Thesis 6

Scripture warns us clearly and emphatically against entanglements with errorists. (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 6:3-5) Any reluctance to heed these warnings and commands of Scripture is unionism already conceived in the heart, which if allowed to develop, will result in full fledged unionism, as history also attests.

God himself demands that we do not unite with errorists, that we separate from them, that we avoid them," says Prof. Laetsch. (CTM 6, 8) "Let us," he continues, "study some of the pertinent passages." This we have done and we endorse and subscribe to Prof. Laetsch's expositions which we quote here:

In the well-known passage, Romans 16:17, we read, "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." The apostle speaks of such as cause divisions and offenses. The word divisions occurs only three times in the New Testament, Romans 16:17, 1 Corinthians 3:3, and Galatians 5:20. It is derived from διχοστατέω, which is translated by Liddell-Scott "to stand apart," or "to disagree," Διχοστασία Cremer translates "*Verwirrung*," i.e. "confusion." The word "offense," σκάνδαλον, means properly "a trigger," then "a trap," then "anything whereby one is trapped or caught, a stumbling-block, offense." The articles before διχοστασίας, σκάνδαλα, and ποιούντας do not refer to any special class of divisions or offenses or to any special group of such as cause these special divisions and special offenses. The articles rather point to the whole class of divisions and offenses and makers of such irrespective of degrees, variations, etc., which may, and actually do occur within this class. The article is used in the same manner as in Romans 14:1, where not a special, well-known weak person, but the whole class of weak Christians is referred to. Every one and any one that is weak is the weak brother who is to be received. In like manner the article is used in John 10:12 (ὁ μισθωτός, ὁ λύκος — the hireling, the wolf). The Savior has in mind not a particular species of wolves or hirelings or only a well-known wolf or hireling; but every wolf, be he timber wolf or jackal or gray wolf, may be "the wolf" who is coming to destroy, and any and every hireling is "the hireling" of whom the Savior here speaks. Compare on this use of the article Romans 13:7

and Revelation 5:12 where the article is used but once, and verse 13, where it is placed before every noun. Any dissension, any offense, becomes the dissension, the offense, which an individual is causing; and any maker of such dissension the maker of dissension, whom we should avoid.

The apostle therefore has not in mind only such outspoken, anti-Christian errorists as openly and flatly deny every fundamental truth of Christianity. He does not say, "Avoid such as subvert completely the Christian truth or as at least deny some of the basic doctrines of the Bible." He warns us against such as cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which we have learned. Contrary to παρά (properly "beside, alongside of, side by side with"); hence these teachers may still be professing and teaching parts of the Christian doctrine. But side by side with this doctrine they make dissension and thus cause offenses. The reason for such dissension and offenses is the failure of such teachers to continue in the Word of Christ. (John 8:31) They do not teach all things Christ commanded, but either add to, or take away from, the doctrine as revealed in the Bible.

In this manner they themselves are standing apart from the Word of Christ and are causing others to stand apart by creating differences of opinion, dissension, divisions, beside, and hence contrary too, the doctrine laid down, divisions that would be impossible if all accepted, and continued in, the words of Christ. In making such divisions, they are certainly putting stumbling blocks in the way of their fellowmen, over which many a person may fall, receive painful injuries, perhaps die. Through their false doctrine they will deprive people of the liberty which Christ has earned for them, fill their hearts with fear and trepidation, cause spiritual security, perhaps spiritual death. The makers of such divisions may not realize that they are teaching false doctrine. They may spread their errors with the purpose of serving God. Christ tells us that they who kill the Christians think they are doing God a service. (John 16:2) And Paul confessed that in his bigoted zeal for the Jewish religion he thought that he was serving God by persecuting the followers of Christ. (Acts 22:3,4; 26:9; Philippians 3:6) We cannot look into the hearts of these errorists and determine their intentions. Neither need we do that.

What the apostle impresses upon us is, "Mark them and avoid them." By their words they are judged, and by their words they are condemned. (Matthew 12:37) And their words prove them

to be creators of divisions, disturbers of that unity of the Spirit which characterizes the Church of Christ. Mark them, observe them, plead with them, patiently show them the error of their way. If they hear you, you have not only gained them, you have also removed the offense and restored peace and thus kept the unity of the Spirit intact.

But if they continue making divisions, if they persist in teaching their error or remain in membership with a body that teaches such error and thus help to create and maintain the divisions and offenses caused by errorists, then the clear and plain injunction of the apostle, is, "Avoid them," sever fraternal connection with them. Ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶν. The apostle does not say, "κατακλίνετε σὺν αὐτοῖς," "lie down, associate with them," but "avoid them, turn out of the way, away from them." The apostle tells us verse 18: "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." These seem harsh words, yet truer words were never spoken. And they refer to all that cause divisions and offenses. †

Does anyone who causes divisions contrary to Christ's doctrine thereby serve the Lord Jesus? Certainly not. For Jesus has not told us, You may make divisions, but rather, "Continue in my Word." If one does not serve Jesus, does he not serve the devil, does he not actually serve his own belly, his own interests (Note the emphatic position of ἑαυτῶν), and not even the higher but the lower, material, selfish interests? And are not all his good words and fair speeches placed in the service of leading man into error and falsehood? Whether they do this intentionally and consciously or not is not for us to determine. The point of the apostle's admonition is to avoid those, all those, who cause those divisions. Neither should we wait until they have actually deceived, misled, people, until they have by their actions betrayed their true character; but as soon as they teach contrary to the doctrine laid down in the Bible, they are to be marked, admonished, and if they continue, avoided. If they will stand apart, do not follow them, let them severely alone. If this rule were followed by all Christians, if schismatics would gain no adherence, there either would be no schisms, or if they occurred, they would end with the death or the return to the church of the schismatics.

Another very instructive passage is found, Titus 3:10. "A man that is a heretic," one who is inclined to denominationalism, sectarianism, should not be permitted to follow his inclinations. His brethren should admonish him, and if he persists in teaching his own chosen opinion, (αἵρεσις) in contradiction to God's Word, if he continues in this sin, which excludes from the kingdom of God, Galatians 5:20, then we should reject not only his doctrine, but him, the heretic, and thus sever fraternal relations with him.

John, the apostle of love, writes, just because he is the apostle of true love: "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 10-11) The doctrine of Christ, of which the apostle speaks, is not the doctrine concerning Christ, but the doctrine which Christ teaches and reveals in the Bible. Wherever in the New Testament the word διδαχή (doctrine) occurs with the genitive of the person, the genitive is invariably the subjective genitive. See Matthew 16:12, the doctrine of the scribes and Pharisees, Acts 13:12, the doctrine of the Lord; Revelation 2:14, the doctrine of Balaam; verse 15, the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, Matthew 7:28; 22:23; Mark 1:22; 11:18; Luke 4:32; John 18:19; His doctrine, and Acts 5:28, your doctrine. In fact, the only passage in which διδαχή is used with an objective genitive is Hebrews 6:2, and even here quite a number commentaries do not accept this as the objective genitive.

In view of this general usage of the term διδαχὴν τινος (someone's doctrine), we are practically forced to take the "doctrine of Christ" in this sense here also, especially since this interpretation is in full keeping with the context. In verse 7, the apostle warned against anyone who denies Christ's person and redemptive work. In verse 8, he admonishes to faithfulness in retaining all those things which we have wrought in order that we receive a full reward. And in verses 9-11, he warns against every apostasy from the doctrine of Christ, against every deviation from the truth of God as laid down in the Bible.

Unionism is a lust of the flesh. All sins are first conceived in the heart. A thief is first tempted, then desires, then plans before he steals. Civil law punishes only the crime itself; but before God the initial steps are also transgression, as we learn, Matthew 5:28

“Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” James 1:14,15 records the progressive steps from lust to the consummated sinful act and to the final punishment: “Every man is tempted when he is drawn away from his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.”

Conclusion

Fellow Christians, we have again heard the instructions and warnings from God’s Word regarding unity, union, and unionism. These have been supported by the lessons of history and have been applied to conditions today. We have heard about the unity of the invisible Church, how this unity is brought about and preserved, namely by the life-giving Word, and how this unity has found expression among those who have adhered to the pure teachings of this Word. We have been warned against pernicious steps to bring about union when unity does not exist, fortified by the records of sad experiences which some of us have had. We have been clearly taught what the warnings of the Holy Spirit against those who teach contrary to the doctrines which we have learned really imply. Let us heed these warnings and lessons!

*One baptism and one faith have we,
One Spirit set to win us,
One Lord, one Father, and one God,
Above, and through, and in us.*

*Never by schism, or by sin,
May we that union sever,
Till all, to perfect stature grown,
Are one with Thee forever.*

Addendum

The fears expressed by our fathers thirty years ago, that history would repeat itself, are being realized today. For many years the

Lutheran Synodical Conference was a bulwark against all unionism and liberalism. But because the principles enunciated in this brochure, principles that have their origin in Scripture, were no longer being heeded by all member-synods of the Conference, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (formerly the Norwegian Synod) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod withdrew from said Conference in 1963. This withdrawal left the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches to continue the Lutheran Synodical Conference.

In recent years the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod again entered into doctrinal discussions with the new American Lutheran Church, with a view to establishing pulpit and altar fellowship with each other. There are individual pastors and teachers in the two bodies just referred to, who by word and in print have indicated that they no longer regard the entire Scripture as the inspired and inerrant Word of God. Others repudiate the cherished Scriptural principles on fellowship which their synods contended for throughout their earlier history. Since 1965 the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches has been along in these discussions between these two Lutheran church bodies.

The latest development is that the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches have joined with the liberal Lutheran church in America and the American Lutheran Church to form the Lutheran Council in the United States of America. This Council has been founded on the myth that since all subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions all therefore teach and practice according to them. Also, it is not clear to what extent the council obligates the individual synods “to further the witness, the work, and the interests of the participating bodies,” be they liberal or conservative. (Const. Art. IV, a)

These developments are the result of ignoring the danger signs that were pointed out in this pamphlet in 1938. Not only have the two aforementioned synods, which make up the Lutheran Synodical Conference today, become more involved with liberal Lutheran groups, but all have become more liberal in the process. The fact is that in 1967 there are only three or four Lutheran bodies, comprising but a small percentage of all the Lutherans in this country, which are

heeding the Scriptural injunctions expounded in this pamphlet. The observation of thirty years ago is even more to the point today: "*Vestigia terrent.*"

† Mark: οἱ τοιοῦτοι, not οὗτοι. The apostle shows hereby that he is speaking, in general, "those that are such" as cause divisions and offenses contrary to — i.e. all those who barter truth for error, whether much or little, then or now, whether many or few, whether openly and consciously or secretly and unconsciously. The expression aims more at the nature of the wrong than at the persons of those who commit it, as if the apostle would say, "For in this that they cause divisions and offenses they serve not the Lord Jesus but their own belly." —The Committee.

The Three Solas

Introduction: Dr. Martin Luther so beautifully identified the three great columns which support all true doctrine in Christ's church: grace alone, faith alone and Scripture alone. Upon celebrating her 25th anniversary the ELS paused to again reflect on these three pillars in essays delivered to the synod convention. In so doing, the synod showed her family ties to the great heritage of the early reformers. Cracks in the faithful reliance on each of these supporting columns had shown up in other synods, and the survival of the ELS as a Confessional Lutheran church body would depend on her adherence to the truth expressed in these "solas."

The true temper and test of a Church, as well as of each individual member thereof, may, aye, must, be summed up in her shibboleth, or watchword. This shibboleth at once becomes the standard around which her confessors rally, the mark by which she would be known and judged, the weapon with which she wages her battles, and the sign by which she hopes to conquer—which is all to the good when her shibboleth is God appointed, but all to the wrong when it is man-made.

The shibboleth of the true Lutheran Church of which our Norwegian Synod not only proudly claims to be, but really is a part, is a threefold one—the Word Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone. Thanks be to God alone, our watchword is not man-made but God-made, the end and goal of which cannot be tragic defeat, but glorious victory.

To me has been assigned the first of this three-leafed clover shibboleth, namely, the Word Alone. It may appear to be the least attractive and edifying of the three—and by far the least important. But it is only **apparently** so. Between these three, the Word Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone there is the closest connection. Without the first you can have neither the second nor the third of these spiritual treasures. Without the Word alone there is no vehicle for Grace alone. For it is through the Word alone that Grace alone is brought, imparted, and sealed to us. And without Faith alone there is no hand with which

to receive Grace alone. The three are as connecting links of a chain, none of which must be broken, lest all be lost. Verily, an inseparable shibboleth, this three in one—the Word Alone, Grace Alone, and Faith Alone.

Sola Scriptura

by Justin A. Petersen

The word *sola* is a Latin word, which means alone. *Scriptura* is also a Latin word, meaning Scripture, namely the Holy Scriptures, the Bible.

Now the Bible bears this clear testimony to itself that it is the Word of God, the divinely inspired Word of God from cover to cover, both as to its contents and its every word. Scripture identifies itself with the Word of God. As proof-texts we need but call attention to the following passages: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” (2 Timothy 3:16) “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Corinthians 2:13) “When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13) But the purpose of this paper is not to treat the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Bible. We mention it here because of its relation to the Scripture as the sole source and norm of all doctrine. The one stands and falls with the other. If we haven’t a **verbally** inspired Word of God, then we can have no sure and perfect source and norm of doctrine, faith and life. Dr. F. Pieper writes in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1928, p. 14: “The Church of the Reformation stands on the rock of Holy Scripture, on the *Sola Scriptura*. But she stands there, and can stand there, **only** because she identifies Scripture with God’s Word.”

Now the Bible itself clearly, repeatedly, and emphatically declares that God’s revelation to man, His revelation in Scripture, is the sole source and norm of all saving knowledge. That Scripture is to be the sole norm of theology we see from Is. 8:20, where we read: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this

word, it is because there is no light in them.” “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11)

That the Word of God is to be the sole source of saving knowledge, we see from such passages as John 5:39: “Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul writes to his son in the faith Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The Lord Jesus directed Abraham to inform the rich man in response to his petition to send Lazarus to his brethren that they might be warned against the hell-fire that awaited them unless they repented: “They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” (Luke 16:29), thereby designating the writings of Moses and the prophets—and we, in addition, have the writings of the evangelists and apostles—as the source of saving knowledge.

The Scripture is not only the sole source and norm of theology, but it is also—and for that very reason—“the only **sure and perfect** rule of faith and life,” as we confess in our *Explanation to Luther’s Small Catechism*.

That the Bible is perfect we see from its own testimony. In the 19th Psalm, verse 7, we read: “The law of the Lord” (the word **law** here is used in its wider sense, including both Law and Gospel) “is perfect, converting the soul.” Our Savior Himself testifies to the perfection of Scripture when He says: “The scripture cannot be broken.” (John 10:35) It is as a perfect ring.

Because the Word of God is a perfect Word, therefore it is also a sure Word, surer than the testimony of our senses, firmer than heaven and earth. “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” (Psalm 19:7) And our Lord assures us, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” (Matthew 24:35) That the Word of God is surer than the testimony of our senses we see further from the words of St. Peter, who had been an eyewitness of Christ’s majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration, and who with his own ears had heard a voice from heaven, testifying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” But still the apostle goes on to say: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark

place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Here we have the answer to the protest of a Dr. E. Lewis: “Give us a sure word, that is the cry we daily hear . . . We read our comparative religion, tell us, is there nowhere one word which stands above all other words, no truth of rocklike quality, which nothing can move? . . . Tell us, must we always flounder, must we always be experimenters, must we always build up only to tear down?” (*The Faith We Declare*, p. 188ff.)

Such a rock we have, thank God! Again the Savior assures us: “Whosoever heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, I will liken unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.” (Matthew 7:24-25)

We do well therefore in casting our anchor in this sure Word. “Cast thine anchor in the unchangeable, unbreakable, infallible Word of God. Cast thine anchor in the oaths and covenants of the Most High. Cast thine anchor in the everlasting Gospel. And come what may, that anchor will always hold.”

*God's word a treasure is to me,
Through sorrow's night my sun shall be,
The shield of faith in battle;
The Father's hand hath written there
My title as His child and heir,
"The kingdom's thine forever;"
That promise faileth never.*

Ever faithful to the Word of God, the true Lutheran Church teaches and confesses that the Word of God, the Bible, is the only sure and perfect source and norm of doctrine, faith and life.

The Lutheran Confessions are permeated with a holy awe of Scripture. Believe Scripture, bow to the authority of Scripture, is

written on almost every page of our Confessions. To quote but a few instances—in the introduction to the *Formula of Concord, Epitome*, p. 216 (we are quoting from the English text of the *Concordia Triglotta*), we read: “We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with (all) teachers should be estimated and judged are the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old Testament alone, as is written Psalm 119:105: ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’” The same clear-cut position is taken in *The Thorough Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, p. 234: “First then we receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged.” From Scripture, then, and from no other source, would the Reformation Fathers draw the water of salvation. In the *Smalcald Articles*, page 139, it is stated: “The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel.” These are Luther’s words.

In his classic on “The Evangelical Lutheran Church, The True Visible Church of God on Earth,” Walther writes in Thesis 13: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church recognizes the written Word of the apostles and prophets as the only and perfect source, rule, norm, and judge of all teaching—a. not reason, b. not tradition, c. not new revelations.”

Reason: There is probably nothing that has caused more damage in the Church than the misuse of human reason. Our reason before the Fall was a noble faculty. Luther says: “It is indeed true that it is of all things the highest and chief thing, above all other things of this life, yea something divine.” But “after the Fall,” Luther continues, “this finest and best of all things is under the power and rule of Satan.” (Luther, XIX: 1462)

Therefore Scripture warns us against following our reason in spiritual matters. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5) God exhorts us to “cast down imaginations and everything that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5) God tells us in His Word

that human reason is incapable of judging spiritual things. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them.” (1 Corinthians 2:14) Dr. F. Pieper in a series of lectures on the Lutheran Church, page 29, says: “To set up reason as the source and norm of theology is forbidden by Scripture, since Scripture declares that human reason, even when divine revelation is presented to it, is absolutely incapable of understanding it.”

Reason has its place and use in the study of God’s Word. We need our reason to understand the meaning of the words used in Scripture. We must observe the fixed laws of language. And we must be able to think logically. “Human reason must indeed be used in interpreting Scripture, never, however, as principle but always as instrument.” (F. Pieper, *Lecture etc.*, p. 50) Reason makes a good **servant** of theology, but a very poor **master**.

When human reason would sit in judgment upon God’s Word, it is setting itself up as God, placing itself above God. Luther uses harsh language, but not too harsh, in describing this brazen effrontery of human reason. He calls reason “Satan’s paramour,” and “the enemy of faith.”

Rationalism in a finer form concedes that natural reason is not a norm of theology, but insists that the case is quite different with enlightened reason, or the reason of regenerate man. Regenerate reason, it is held, is capable of judging spiritual matters and must be permitted to sit in judgment on Scripture. Modern theology, even the more conservative, is obsessed with the notion that in regeneration reason receives additional powers, so that it can understand more or less the mysteries of God and is privileged to sit in judgment on Scripture. This simply is not true. Christians understand the mystery of the Trinity, of the person of Christ, of the real presence in the Lord’s Supper, just as little as the unregenerate. What takes place in regeneration is that the Christian receives power to bring his reason “into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” When a Christian is tempted to criticize Scripture, and to place his own thoughts above the Word of God, he does this not according to the new man but according to the old man. Dr. Walther rightly says: “Nor can enlightened and regenerated reason be made the source and norm of

religious knowledge, equal to and on a plane with Scripture. For the nature of an enlightened and regenerate mind consists just in this, that it does not make itself, but Scripture, the source of knowledge in matters of faith. Besides, in no man is there to be found, in this life, a perfectly enlightened and regenerate reason.” (*Lehre und Wehre*, 13, p. 99)

Other aliases of regenerate reason are Christian consciousness, Christian experience, consciousness of faith, spirit and so forth. These terms are all in reality synonyms of enlightened reason, so we need not discuss them in detail.

A striking example of the use, or misuse rather, of enlightened reason as a norm in theology we have from the Reformation era. At the famous colloquy between the Reformed theologian, Zwingli, and Luther, held at Marburg in 1529, Zwingli insisted that he could not accept the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, stating that he did not believe that God expected him to believe that which he could not understand. To which Luther replied: “Neither can I understand it, but,” pointing to the words ‘This is my body’, “the words are too powerful for me.”

Another striking example we have from the doctrinal controversies waged by our Synod in the eighties. In one of his letters Dr. Koren writes: “in an address by Pastor Muus during a meeting of the Church Council in Minneapolis (see the printed minutes, p. 29) we read: ‘Pastor Koren says: “A person is either spiritually dead or spiritually living, there is no room for a middle condition.”’ I (Muus) say there is a middle condition. When one is under the influence of God’s Spirit, he is neither absolutely dead as a heathen nor absolutely living. When we are to solve this matter, we must, I believe, use our human reason and with it go to God’s Word to see what we find out there.”

In reply Koren says: “Let us now see what the Word of God says about this matter. In Luke 11:23 the Savior says: ‘He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.’ Pastor Muus now comes with his reason to the Word of God to see what he finds there, and then he finds that one cannot understand the words just as they read, there must be a middle condition; there must be some that are not absolutely with Christ, neither absolutely against.”

“In John 3:6, the Savior says: ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’ Pastor Muus again comes with his reason and finds that there must be a middle condition, that there must be some that are not altogether flesh, despite the fact that they neither are actually born of the Spirit. In Matthew 7:13-14 the Saviour speaks of two gates, a wide and a strait, and of two ways, a wide and a narrow. From this we teach that every man must be either on the one or the other of these ways. Pastor Muus knows of still another way, which is neither broad nor narrow.” (Koren, *Samlede Skrifter*, III, p. 220-221)

Tradition: Neither is tradition a source and norm of theology. The Catholic Church places the tradition of the Church, the fathers, the Pope, who is claimed to be infallible in matters of doctrine, alongside of or above the written Word of God. The specific Roman principle of theology includes four sources or norms—Scripture, tradition, the Church Councils, the Pope. (Cf. Bellarmine, *De Conciliis* II, 12, 1) The Roman Catechism states the same. But since the final interpretation of all these norms is left to the Pope, he in the last instance is the norm of Catholic theology.

Concerning traditions, which the Catholic Church insists are “divinely revealed truths or precepts otherwise than by Holy Writ” (*Council of Trent*, Session 4) Cardinal Gibbons has this to say: “The Catholic Church correctly teaches that our Lord and His apostles inculcated certain important duties of religion which are not recorded in the inspired writers. We must, therefore, conclude that the Scriptures alone cannot be a sufficient guide and rule of faith because they cannot at any time be within the reach of every inquirer, because they are not of themselves clear and intelligible even in matters of highest importance, and because they do not contain all the truths necessary for salvation.”

But what does the Bible say to all this? “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ,” (Colossians 2:8) In Matthew 15:6 our Saviour says to the scribes and Pharisees: “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” And in the last chapter of the last book of the Bible we read: “If any man shall add unto these things, God

shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.”
(Revelation 22:19)

New Revelations: As to new revelations, we are neither promised them, nor are we to expect them. On the contrary, God has directed all Christians to the end of time to the Word of the apostles and prophets. The Church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” (Ephesians 2:20) With the Word of the apostles and prophets the divine revelation of doctrine has been concluded. All Christians down to the end of time believe through the Word of the apostles. (Cf. John 17:20)

The true Lutheran Church, then, on the basis of Scripture teaches and confesses that the Word of God alone is the sole source and norm of doctrine, faith, and life. And it is the only Church that so confesses and practices. The Reformed Church, it is true, confesses the *Sola Scriptura*, but in practice places reason above Scripture, as witness its teachings on Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Our dear Synod, as a part of the true visible Church of God on earth, has always confessed and practiced the *Sola Scriptura*. When in the first constitution, adopted by the Synod in 1851, it was discovered that the leaven of Grundtvigianism had crept in, the Synod at its next meeting in 1853 dissolved the original organization, purged the Grundtvigian leaven, and adopted a new constitution based on *Sola Scriptura*. At the suggestion of Dr. Koren the Norwegian Synod adopted as its motto and engraved in its official seal the words “It is written.” And when we examine our Church’s many doctrinal controversies, we find from the very first controversy to the last, from that concerning lay preaching to the doctrine of Election, that what really was at stake, besides the particular doctrine in dispute, was the *Sola Scriptura*.

We shall close this part of our paper by making Dr. Walther’s words our own: “Hear, O heavens, give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken.” This is and must remain our battle cry. This is the device emblazoned on our banner. If our Synod should no longer hold this banner aloft, her fall would not be imminent, but would already have set in, and she would be fit only to be cast away as insipid salt, that no longer serves, but only deserves to be trodden under foot. (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1911, p. 158)

But the Word of God is not only the sole source and norm of doctrine, faith, and life; it is at the same time the means by which alone our spiritual life is conditioned, from beginning to end. It is the Word alone that creates faith: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) If it be objected that Baptism also creates faith, we reply that Baptism is nothing but the visible Word and that it is the Word in Baptism that gives it its regenerating power. It is the Word alone in the Word and Sacrament that nourishes and strengthens faith. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2) It is the Word that sanctifies us. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) It is through the "Word of faith" that we are justified. (Romans 10:8) It is only by continuing in the Word that we can continue as disciples of Christ. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." (John 8:31) It is with the Word alone that we fight our spiritual battles. The Word is called "the sword of the Spirit." (Ephesians 6:17) It was with this weapon alone that our Savior conquered Satan in the wilderness—"It is written." He could have spoken a word of His own—for He is the Word—but no, He employs the written Word of God, and the bare Word of God. With the Word the weakest Christian is strong, but without the Word the strongest is as a feather before the hurricane. It is the Word alone in Word and Sacrament that can give the alarmed sinner certainty concerning his state of grace. Here God speaks and deals with us. "Therefore we ought and must maintain this point that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through His spoken Word and Sacraments. It is the devil himself, whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments." (*Smalcald Articles*, p. 147) The believer dare not build upon his feelings or experiences, for these are changeable, and, in the hour of affliction prove to be but sinking sand. At such time our conscience will accuse us, and our heart condemn us. Then the Word of God, which is a higher court than our heart, can alone give us assurance of grace. Satan may change our feelings many times a day, but the Word of God is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

*Though no my heart should ever cry,
Still on Thy Word I will rely.*

*I cling to what my Savior taught
And trust it whether felt or not.*

This being true, that our spiritual life of faith is conditioned from beginning to end upon the Word alone, how absolutely necessary it becomes that we **use** this Word.

Koren concludes his powerful Synodical Address on The Inspiration of Holy Scripture, delivered in Chicago, 1908, with the warning: "God has given us His Word: Is there any greater gift? . . . But if we are to retain it, then we must use it. To that end may God help us!"

The most nourishing food may be prepared and placed on the table for us, but it is of no value to us if we do not partake of it. The soldier may go into battle well trained and strongly armoured. but his defeat is certain unless he wields his weapons.

"It is not the truth as it lies, silent and unread, in the Word, but the truth as it enters from the Word into the human heart with the applying presence of the Holy Ghost, which makes us believers." (Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation*, p. 166) And we may add, **keeps** them as believers.

Therefore the Bible urges: "Search the scriptures." (John 5:39) Therefore God from high heaven: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." (Jeremiah 22:29) "Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

We have and confess the Word of God, and the Word alone. Our greatest danger is not this that the Word shall be falsified among us—though that danger is indeed great and ever-present, but rather that we shall grow negligent in our use of the Word. In either case Satan is well pleased. For he cares little that we have the pure Word, if he can keep us from using it.

How about our use of God's Word? If Dr. Koren way back in 1897 felt constrained to say, after he had enumerated a number of sins that flourished in the Synod: "Should I in the meantime mention the sin which above all sins has alarmed me and humbled me as I have meditated on the condition of The Norwegian Synod, then it is the great and general indifference to, and neglect of, God's Word." What must we say about conditions among us today?

Is it not true that attendance upon divine services among us is far from what it ought to be at times? And what about the use of God's Word in our homes? What about family worship among us? And our private use of God's Word? Despite the fact that the Good Shepherd repeatedly stresses the importance and blessing of regular and sufficient feeding of His lambs, how few Christian day schools we have in our midst! And how weak these few often are, despised and opposed not only by the world, but at times even by members of the congregations! What discouragements and disappointments does not the pastor often encounter when he makes earnest efforts to induce parents to send promising young men and women to our one institution of higher learning—Bethany College. What do all these things reveal but a lamentable indifference to the blessings of God's Word?

How often the sects, and even non-Christian cults, put us to shame when it comes to the use of God's Word! I once entered the home of a sectarian family. On the table lay several New Testaments, one for each member of the family. And their worn condition showed that they were used. This winter I had opportunity to observe a Christian Scientist. Almost any time of the day or evening, I would see her with the Bible in one hand and Mary Baker Eddy's *Key to the Scriptures* in the other.

As to the indoctrination of the young, what strenuous efforts are not put forth by the Catholic Church in this direction. Within a distance of but a few blocks from my room in Duluth there are three large parochial schools operated by the Catholics.

And we who have the truth, the **full** truth, how negligent we often are in our use and application of that Word of truth!

To have the Word in its truth and purity, and then not take that Word seriously, use it diligently, bring forth its fruits, in other words, **live** that Word is a situation so serious that, unless repented of, will in the end cost us our salvation.

If the note of repentance over our neglect of God's Word is missing in our Jubilee Celebration. God will say to us as He did to His Israel of old: "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them." (Isaiah 1:14)

Let us, therefore, on this 90th anniversary celebration humble ourselves before God in true repentance. And may the genuineness of that repentance be evidenced by earnest improvement in the use of our spiritual heritage—God’s Word.

What a revival we then will experience in our midst, a **true** revival on the basis of God’s unfailing Word. Then shall we experience “a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19) Then “The voice of the turtledove shall be heard in our midst” (Song of Solomon 2:12), and “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose.” (Isaiah 35:1) The voice of the Lord hath spoken it. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?” (Numbers 23:19)

Sola Gratia

by J. B. Unseth

The subject which is to engage our attention at this time is the watchword of the Lutheran Church, termed *Sola Gratia*. This term tells us how a sinner is saved. When the question is asked how can a person become justified before God and saved, the answer which Scripture gives is: By grace alone.

The word ‘grace’ is the good will and favor shown to one who can plead no merit, but only his needs; particularly, the love of God in its relation to the sinner as such. “The term ‘grace’ used of God in regard to sinful man is the gracious favor or the forgiveness of sins, which for Christ’s sake is present in God’s heart toward all sinful mankind, is attested in the Gospel, and is to be believed by all men on the basis of the Gospel.” (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*) Saving grace is not something in man, not any good quality or ability of man, any good disposition or activity of man. Luther says: “The sophists teach falsely concerning grace, when they say that it is a quality hidden in the heart.” Saving grace is much more something in God: God’s loving, gracious disposition, God’s favor or God’s love, mercy, kindness. In His Preface to the Epistle to the Romans Luther says: “Grace, in the proper sense of the term, denotes God’s favor and good will toward us which He cherishes in Himself.” God

loves the world. The love of God toward us was manifested by the sending of His Son into the world, that we might live through Him. According to His mercy God saves us. God's grace is wholly independent of human works and human merit and it is not shackled by human guilt, Romans 5:20: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

This grace came by Jesus Christ. The grace according to which God is mercifully minded toward sinful mankind is according to Scripture not absolute grace, that is, grace independent of any cause, resting simply on God's omnipotence. There are those who think and teach that God can be gracious unto men solely on the strength of His divine supremacy, as supreme Judge, even without the substitutionary satisfaction of Christ. But it is useless and foolish, indeed altogether absurd to argue about what God can do after He has revealed to us in His Word what He wants to do and actually does. Now God declares in His Word that God is gracious to sinners only for Christ's sake, that He forgives sins "through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus." Chemnitz writes: "Outside of Christ there is no grace and mercy of God toward us sinners, for grace without Christ must not and cannot be conceived." Again: "It is useless to argue about God's power, when His will is evident from His revelation." Luther enjoins us not to imagine God's grace independent of Christ's vicarious satisfaction. He says: "Thus, indeed, grace is given to us gratuitously, so as to cost us nothing; but yet, for us, it cost another much, and was obtained with an incalculable, an infinite treasure; namely, the Son of God."

Scripture teaches that by the fall of Adam all men have become sinners and are now according to the verdict of divine justice (set forth in the Law) subject to damnation. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." And not only those who according to the verdict of men are wicked must die, but, "whosoever, shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10) "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." (Psalm 34:16) "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." (Galatians 3:10) God's wrath against sin is so great that He threatens to cast the evildoers into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

“where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” (Mark 9:43) And since there here is no difference, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23) all men are under the curse, have become enemies of God and children of wrath. According to His unalterable justice God must punish transgressors and give to every man as he has deserved. However, Scripture assures us that God is love. He does not want that any should perish, but that all should be saved. He therefore, before the world was, conceived a plan of saving sinners without abridging or curtailing in the least His justice. By grace God resolved to send His only begotten Son to be the substitute of sinful men and that He in our stead should fulfill that righteousness which God demanded from us. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5) Christ, God’s Son, has fulfilled the Law in our stead. But the keeping of the Law alone was not enough. Curse and punishment hovered over us. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13) “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.” (Isaiah 53:5) “God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21) “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust.” (1 Peter 3:18) By His life, suffering and death Christ has appeased God’s wrath, and everlasting justice is satisfied by His intervention. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,” (2 Corinthians 5:19) “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” (Romans 5:18-19) “We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” For Christ’s sake God cancelled the world’s sins from His account. When God raised Christ from the dead, He absolved the world of its sin and guilt and declared that He was no longer at odds with the sinful race of man. That is His grace. This is what St. Paul means when he says: “By grace are ye saved.” “For there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-24) Man is justified freely, (without merit, by grace alone) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

This scriptural teaching, that we are saved alone by the mercy and grace of God for Christ’s sake, has always been a stumbling block and foolishness to natural man. By nature man does not know otherwise and does not think otherwise than that salvation must be obtained by works. That is the teaching of all man-made religions. Man must, in some way or another, earn salvation.

But this “Godless opinion concerning works,” as the *Apology* calls it, with regard to man’s justification and salvation, is wholly contrary to the scriptural doctrine of salvation. It is paganism. Scripture takes great pains to inculcate the doctrine that salvation is by grace with absolute exclusion of works. St. Paul writes: “If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.” (Romans 11:6) Grace and human merit mutually exclude each other. It is either by grace alone, or it is by works alone. It cannot be by both conjointly. The moment work, even the slightest work, is added to grace, then it is no more grace. And now Scripture teaches that salvation, from beginning to end, is by grace alone without any merit or worthiness in man. “By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.” “They are justified freely by His grace.” “Where is boasting then? It is excluded.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law.” (Romans 3 and 4) “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9) From these and other passages of Scripture it is clear that man’s works, in every form, the outward good works of the unregenerate and the spiritual good works of the Christian are entirely excluded as far as our justification and salvation are concerned. We are justified by grace alone. The way of grace is the only way unto salvation. By this teaching of salvation by grace, the Christian religion distinguishes itself from all other religions, and to make salvation dependent on man’s own efforts is apostasy from the Christian faith.

As clearly as Scripture teaches *sola gratia*, so clearly does it also teach that saving grace is universal grace, that the gracious will

of God and the salvation wrought by Christ embrace all men. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." (Titus 2:11) "For God so loved the **world**." (John 3:16) "God will have **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) "He (Jesus Christ) is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 1:29) Scripture expressly states that universal grace pertains to each and every individual, 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is. . .not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." No less does God's will, aiming at the conversion of men, extend also to those who perish, Matthew 23:37: "How often would I have gathered thy children together . . . and ye would not."

On the basis of Holy Scripture our Lutheran Confessions maintain the universality of saving grace in its full extent. They teach the threefold universalism of the love of the Father, the merit of Christ, and the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, through the means of grace in all hearers of the Word. (*Triglotta*, p. 1071) A limited grace is expressly rejected in our Confessions: "Therefore we reject the following errors: 1. As when it is taught that God is unwilling that all men repent and believe the gospel. 2. Also, that when God calls us to Himself, He is not in earnest that all men should come to Him. 3. Also, that God is unwilling that every one should be saved, but that some, without regard to their sins, from mere counsel, purpose, and will of God, are ordained to condemnation, so that they cannot be saved." (*F. C.*).

Luther loudly proclaimed this blessed truth that God's grace is universal. Thus, to John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" he remarks: "In yonder life it will be our eternal joy and delight that the Son of God condescends so deeply and shoulders my sin, yea, not merely my sin, but that of the whole world committed from Adam on down to the very last man; this He would have regarded as committed by Him and would also suffer and die for it that I might be without sin and obtain eternal life and bliss . . . and this text is God's Word and not our word, nor devised by us, that God for this purpose sacrificed this Lamb, and that this Lamb, in divine obedience to the Father, took upon Him the sin of the whole world. But the world does not take to it . . . What more should the

Lamb do? It says: You are all lost (condemned), but I will take upon Me your sins; I have become the whole world, have assumed the part of all men from Adam on, so that, if we got sin from Adam, He will instead present us with righteousness. Here I ought to say: That I will believe! . . . That men, however, do not believe, is not due to a lack in the Lord Jesus, but the fault is mine. If I do not believe it, I remain in my condemnation. I must simply say, God's Lamb has borne the world's sin, and I am earnestly enjoined to believe and confess this, yes, to die in this faith. Well, you might say, who knows whether He bears also my sins? I well believe that He bore the sins of St. Peter, St. Paul, and other saints. They were pious people. If only I, too, were St. Peter or St. Paul! Do you not hear what St. John here says: 'This is the Lamb of God that bears the sins of the world'? Now, you certainly cannot deny that you are a part of the world . . . If then you are in the world and your sins a part of the world's sin, this text tells you: All that bears the name of sin, the world and the world's sin, from the beginning of the world down to us and to the end, lies on this Lamb of God alone; and hence, since you, too, are a part of the world and remain in the world, you, too, are to share in enjoying what this text here tells of."

But how is the grace of God, gained for all men through the vicarious satisfaction of Christ, transmitted and appropriated to man? Where can I find the saving grace? That is a question of life or death to the terrified sinner. In answer to this question, Scripture teaches that the grace of God can be found in no other way, at no other place, than in the means of grace which God has ordained. These means of God are the Word of the Gospel and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The word of the Gospel is the proclamation of God, in which He announces that He is through Christ reconciled with the entire world of sinners, 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation," viz., the reconciliation **which has been effected**, established by Christ. Again, Luke 24:46-47: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name." That Baptism also works forgiveness of sins is evident

from the answer which Peter gave on the first day of Pentecost to those who inquired, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" He replies: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:37-38) In order that the fact that God is reconciled through Christ may constantly be kept fresh in mind, Christ offers the body which was given for us and the blood which was shed for the remission of our sins in His Holy Supper. Scriptures are also very definite in asserting that the Holy Spirit, who engenders and sustains faith, operates in and through the external means which God has instituted. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) Luther says that the gospel bestows the forgiveness of sins, the grace of God: "The Gospel is nothing else than the Word, by which are offered unto us the spirit, grace, and the remission of sins obtained for us by Christ crucified; and all entirely free." Baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. (Titus 3:5) Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper are instruments or means of the Holy Spirit, whereby we become members of the body of Christ and are thus united with Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one spirit."

By way of objection the following has been asked frequently: Would it not be possible for the almighty God to bestow His grace, to work and sustain faith in Christ, without external means, without the preaching of the Word, without Baptism, without the Lord's Supper? Most assuredly, if God had chosen to do so. From Scripture we learn, however that God has determined it otherwise. The order which God has fixed is laid down in His Word: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) Luther sharply takes those to task who ignore the means which God has ordained under the plea that the almighty God is well able to work without means. He writes: "Surely, it **could** be done without the Gospel. For where is the person who could have hindered God from effecting salvation for us by any deed whatsoever, without proclaiming it, without sending Christ into the flesh? It is true: He has created heaven and earth and continues to uphold everything without external preaching, without becoming man. But from this the

conclusion dare not be drawn that the gospel is of no consequence. Now it is the will of God to bestow gifts through men, through the Word, through the bread of the Lord's Supper. Who are you, O arrogant and ungrateful wretch, to make bold to ask why He does not give in a different manner or without any means? Do you dare to prescribe ways and means? Are you so hard to please? You ought to leap with joy and exult over the fact that He does it in any way that is pleasing to Him, just so you receive the benefit." (From F. Pieper, *Unionism*). The grace of God, which supplies every need of the sinner, is stored up in the means of grace, and this storehouse, filled to overflowing, is opened to every sinner. "God determines that His gospel, which is necessary unto all, should be confined to no place, no time, but that it should be preached unto all, at all times, and in all places."—Luther. Thus God out of infinite grace and mercy has taken everything that pertains to the salvation of man in hand Himself. It is the work of God that grace and salvation have been purchased for men by Christ, and it is God who has ordained the means by which grace and forgiveness are bestowed and transmitted to man. Even faith itself, by which the grace of God and the merit of Christ are apprehended, is not a work of man himself, but is a gift of God's grace. We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. It is wrought in our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the means of grace. It is God that worketh in us both to will and do according to His good pleasure. Luther therefore says that the Christian religion is, in a word, a religion of gratitude. All the good that Christians do is not done to merit something. Everything has been given us: righteousness, our everlasting heritage, our salvation. All that remains for us to do is to thank God. Luther rejoices in the doctrine of *sola gratia* (grace alone) because it alone is able to engender assurance of salvation. He writes: "As for myself, I certainly confess that, if such a thing could somehow be, I should be unwilling to have free will given me, or anything left in my own hand, which might enable me to make an effort at salvation; not only because in the midst of so many dangers and adversities and also of so many assaulting devils I should not be strong enough to remain standing and keep my hold of it (for one devil is mightier than all men put together, and not a single man would be saved), but because, even if

there were no dangers and no adversities and no devils, I should still be compelled to toil forever uncertainly, and to heat the air in my struggle. For though I should live and work to eternity, my own conscience would never be sure and at ease as to how much it ought to do in order to satisfy God. No matter how perfect a work might be, there would be left a doubt whether it pleased God, or whether He required anything more; as is proved by the experience of all who endeavor to be saved by the Law, and as I, to my own great misery, have learned abundantly during so many years. But now since God has taken my salvation out of the hands of my will, and placed it into those of His own and has promised to save me, not by my own work or running, but by His grace and mercy, I feel perfectly sure, because He is faithful and will not lie to me; moreover, He is powerful and great, so that neither devils nor adversities can crush Him, or pluck me out of His hand. “No one,” says He, “shall pluck them out of My hand; for My Father, who gave them unto Me, is greater than all! Thus it comes to pass that, though not all are saved, at least some, nay, many are, whereas by the power of free will absolutely none would be saved, but every one of us would be lost. We are also certain and sure that we please God, not by the merit of our own work, but by the favor of His mercy which He has promised us; and that, if we have done less than we ought, or have done anything amiss, He does not impute it to us, but as a father forgives and makes us better. That is the glorying which all the saints have in their God.” (*Triglotta, Historical Introduction*, p. 217). In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* this thought of Luther’s is repeated as follows: “If the matter (our salvation) were to depend upon our merits, the promise would be uncertain and useless, because we never could determine when we would have sufficient merit. And this experienced consciences can easily understand (and would not for a thousand worlds have our salvation depend upon ourselves.)”

This doctrine of Scripture which down through the centuries after the time of the apostles had been almost obliterated, is the doctrine which by God’s grace was so gloriously brought to light again by Luther. From the Word of God he had learned that man’s salvation is obtained not by the works of the Law, but alone by the grace of God in Christ. Only when this is acknowledged and taught

does God receive the honor due Him. By God's grace this doctrine has been handed down to us as a legacy of Luther. The history of our synod is a long struggle for this truth that man, who by nature is dead in trespasses and sins and an enemy of God, is justified and saved alone by the grace and mercy of God through the redemption of Christ without any merit or cooperation on his part. Through God's unspeakable grace this blessed doctrine has for ninety years been kept pure within our synod. The confession of our synod has always been what is so beautifully expressed in the hymn:

*To us salvation now is come,
Through freest grace and favor,
Our works could not avert our doom,
They keep and save us never;
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.*

*As Christ hath full atonement made
And brought to us salvation,
So may each Christian now be glad
And build on this foundation:
Thy grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,
Thy death is now my life indeed,
For Thou hast paid my ransom.*

This blessed doctrine of God's grace in Christ is the doctrine which alone fully meets the sinner's need. Unless grace does all (*sola gratia*), the sinner is lost. And unless grace is for all (universal grace), the sinner must despair.

Yet this doctrine is hated and disavowed by many, not only by the world at large, but also by many within the outward visible church. In the church of Rome this doctrine is not only rejected but is actually condemned. In its chief confession, the *Decrees of the Council of Trent*, it says: "If any one saith that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in

their hearts by the Holy Ghost and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God; let him be cursed.” According to the Roman doctrine Christ has earned for men only so much that they now can earn salvation for themselves. The same is taught in the Reformed Churches. Many of them deny the divinity of Christ and consequently the atonement made by Him. They teach outright that man is justified and saved not by what God in Christ has done, but by their own outward morality and good deeds. And while some speak of salvation by grace alone, they virtually deny it, since they deny that God’s grace is seriously offered to sinners in the gospel and the Sacraments. They are therefore compelled to rely for the personal assurance of their justification on something within themselves or upon their renewal or their good words. That man is saved by grace alone, is also denied by the synergists within the Lutheran Church who teach that man’s salvation depends in part at least on his right conduct, self-decision, lesser guilt, etc. Synergism was introduced into Lutheran theology by Melancthon, who maintained that there are three causes of salvation: the Holy Ghost, the Word of God, and man’s assenting will. We who have learned that salvation is by grace alone need to be on our guard that we are not ensnared into the false teaching of those who deny this truth. Synergism is the old hereditary foe of true Lutheranism. We must fight it in our own hearts. “The natural man can never of himself get away from the attitude that salvation, at least to some extent, depends upon himself” and: “This delusion runs in our blood, too.” If we are to remain in the truth that man’s salvation is by grace alone we must let God’s Word be our sole guide and by God’s grace contend for the faith which once was delivered unto the saints.

Sola Fide

by Christian Anderson

The doctrine that we are justified and saved by **faith alone** does not in any way contradict or militate against the doctrine that we are saved by grace alone. The Apostle Paul, in speaking of the

justification of a sinner before God, says, Rom. 4:16: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Here it is clearly stated that justification by faith, so far from contradicting justification by grace, definitely serves to confirm it. For faith is not a virtue or good work which adds to or merits salvation wrought by grace, but it is simply the means or instrument through which sinners accept God's grace.

1

In His boundless love and mercy God has prepared salvation for all men. God so loved **the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Yes, even before the creation of the world, from eternity, God who knew that mankind would fall away from Him decreed that He would save them through the sacrifice of His own Son; for the Apostle Paul says, 2 Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **before the world began.**" And in Ephesians 3:11 he says, in speaking of his call to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, that it is now done according to the **eternal purpose** which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This eternal decree for the salvation of mankind was revealed to our first parents immediately after their fall. The promise of the Savior was made repeatedly to the patriarchs and to the people of Israel through the prophets, not only by direct prophecy, but also through the sacrifices and other symbols and types in their worship. The work of the Messiah, His suffering, death and resurrection, were foretold, so that those who lived in those ancient times could put their trust in Him for their salvation. The prophet Jeremiah calls Him: "The Lord our righteousness." In the Old Testament the people of God knew Him as their righteousness, as the one through whom they might be justified before God.

And "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." (Galatians 4:4-5) When the Savior came to the

earth He took upon Him the task of atoning for the whole world's sin. John says of Him: "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) "God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." (Romans 8:32) "Christ gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:6) He was thus given as a sacrifice, "That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." (Hebrews 2:9)

These and a host of other passages of Scripture assure us that Jesus Christ came to the world to assume the sins of all men and to give Himself as a sacrifice to atone for these sins. Just before His death on the cross the Savior said: "It is finished." He thereby declared that His work of atoning for the world's sin was then fully completed. And by raising Jesus from the dead the Father assures us that His just demands on the world are by the death of His Son fully satisfied. The apostle says: "If one died for all, then were all dead: and he died for all." (2 Corinthians 5:14) All our sins were laid on Jesus Christ, and He died as our Substitute in our stead. The sins of the whole world have therefore by the death of Jesus received the full punishment due them. And we know that God is satisfied with the ransom paid, for He would not have freed our Substitute from the bonds of death, so long as any of our sins were still counted against us. When He died for all it was counted by God as if all sinners had died. And when He was raised again, it is an assurance that God has declared Him just. And with Him, our Substitute, God has thereby declared all sinners just. Of this we are assured by the apostle, Romans 4:25: "He was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification," i.e., because our justification is an accomplished fact. This is also attested to by the apostle in the following chapter, Romans 5:8, where he says: "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Here the righteousness wrought by Christ is made just as general as sin which was brought upon all men by Adam. Just as surely as judgment has come upon all men by the offence of Adam, so it is equally certain that the justification of life has come upon **all men** by the righteousness which was wrought by Christ.

2

This glorious truth God proclaims to the world in the Gospel. The Gospel proclaims that the whole world has been reconciled to God. The Apostle Paul says, 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling **the world** unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” All sinners are reconciled to God through the redemption of Jesus Christ, their trespasses are not imputed, i.e. not counted against them. Christ, therefore, through His ambassadors pleads with all sinners to be “reconciled to God,” to accept this reconciliation and receive full benefit of His redemption.

God wants these glad tidings of the Gospel, that the world is reconciled to God and saved through the redemption of Christ, to be proclaimed to all men. Jesus gave this command to His apostles: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” (Mark 16:15-16) They are not only to tell all men about the boundless love of God and about the great self-sacrifice of the Savior, but they are to assure the poor sinners that **God is reconciled**, that their sins are taken away, and that a place is prepared for them in heaven: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:1-2) They are to bring this message to all, for Jesus says: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in **all the world** for a witness unto all the nations.” (Matthew 24:14)

3

However, this righteousness which has been procured for all men by the holy life of our Savior and by His suffering, death and resurrection is not enjoyed by all. God cannot in a general way justify all sinners and still continue to be a just and holy God. His just demands, that His holy law be kept to the last iota and that even the least transgression be punished by death, temporal and eternal, cannot be abrogated. It is only through the perfect obedience of our Savior and through His suffering and death in our stead that it is possible for

God to declare us sinners just. Therefore it is only **in Jesus Christ** that we can benefit by God's declaration that the whole world is justified. Without Christ, God is still the God of wrath, Who is as a burning fire against all transgressors. God's eternal purpose to save sinners is a purpose **in Jesus Christ** and in no other way. God's promises in the Gospel are "In him (i.e. in Jesus Christ) yea, and in him Amen." (2 Corinthians 1:20) Therefore it is only in Jesus Christ that we are justified and saved. The Apostle Paul says: "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Only in Jesus Christ who was made to be sin for us do we have and own the righteousness of God which is procured for us. Therefore does the same apostle say again: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Only those who are in Christ Jesus escape the condemnation which their sins have deserved.

How then, may we become so intimately united with Jesus Christ that we in Him may be clothed in the righteousness with which we can stand before God? Scripture teaches that it is through faith and faith only. When Jesus in His parting words to His disciples promised to send His Spirit to dwell in them because they were believers, He says: "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John 14:20, Comp. vs. 17,19) Through faith in Jesus we are united with Him, so that we partake of the fruits of His redemption. Thereby is the righteousness of God imputed to us. The Apostle Paul says Romans 3:21-22: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested. . . Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." And again he says: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

God has indeed in Jesus Christ declared all men righteous, but He does not force us to accept this righteousness. He brings it to us in the Gospel. The Gospel not only tells us about the righteousness which is procured for us through the redemption of Jesus Christ, leaving it to us to get possession of it as best we can, but it brings to us this righteousness itself by assuring us that God has already declared all

sinner's righteous when He raised Jesus from the dead. If we do not want to believe this message of the Gospel and put our trust in the gift which it brings, but insist on finding some other way to salvation or reject salvation altogether, we cannot expect to have any benefit from it. Speaking of those who were lost in the wilderness because of their unbelief, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "For unto us was the gospel preached as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (Hebrews 4:2) By refusing to believe in the promises of the Gospel, men reject the salvation which it brings to them. Jesus therefore says not only, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," but he adds, "But he that believeth not shall he damned." (Mark 16:16) And, "He that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:18) And in the 36th verse He says of the unbeliever: "The wrath of God abideth on him." Men's unbelief, then, is now, after God in Christ has declared all sinners righteous, the real cause of their damnation. When Jesus promises to send the Comforter to make men partakers of His salvation, He says that when this Comforter is come, "He will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." And then He adds: "Of sin because they believe not on me." (John 16:8-9) The real sin which condemns is unbelief, because it prevents men from partaking of the righteousness which is procured for all in Jesus Christ, and so the curse of all their other sins will fall back upon their heads. God has not promised that there is no condemnation to them who are not in Christ Jesus.

But through faith the poor sinner accepts and appropriates unto himself the righteousness of God in Christ. What, then, is this saving faith? Saving faith presupposes knowledge of the things which God has prepared for the salvation of sinners. John the Baptist's mission, in order to prepare the way for the promised Savior, was, "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people." (Luke 1:77) Paul says: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14) And Jesus says in His sacerdotal prayer: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

Moreover, faith assents to the message of salvation made known to the sinner. Faith regards this message as thoroughly true and reliable. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) St. Paul says of Abraham's faith in the promises of God, that he was "fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Romans 4:21) And, in His sacerdotal prayer, Jesus again says of His disciples: "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me." (John 17:8)

A true living faith also implies a sincere longing for God's grace and a firm reliance on His glorious promises. The Psalmist says, 84:2, "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." And the Apostle Paul gives expression to his trust in the promises of God in these words: "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) And again: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Romans 8:33-34, See also following verses)

These are only a few of the many passages of Scripture which describe a true living faith. Through this faith the penitent sinner receives and applies to himself the righteousness wrought by the redemption of Jesus Christ. The Evangelist John complains because, when the promised Savior came to His own in the world, they received Him not. Then he adds: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12) Those who believe on His name receive the Savior. They also receive the fruits of His redemption, for the apostle says: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43) And Paul says to those who are believers in Christ: "As ye have therefore **received** Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." (Colossians 2:6)

The believer receives Christ and applies His righteousness unto himself, not because his faith is a virtue or a good work which merits salvation, either wholly or in part, so that God imputes righteousness to him because he in himself is better than those who do not believe. After having spoken of those who will not accept salvation by grace alone, but insist on putting their trust in their own righteousness, the Apostle Paul asks, "What, then? are we better than they?" And he answers: "No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jesus and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." (Romans 3:9) Then he goes on to prove from Scripture the universality of sin, and concludes: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:20-24)

From these last passages especially, we learn in what manner we are justified and saved by faith: not by virtue of any merit inherent in the act of faith, but because our faith embraces and holds the merits of Jesus Christ's redemption. It is by God's grace that we are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. By grace God declares the sinner just. The redemption of Jesus Christ makes it possible for the perfectly holy and just God to do this. Our faith comes into consideration only as the organ or channel through which the fruits of Christ's redemption are transmitted to us.

Scripture speaks of faith, not only as an act on the part of the one who believes, but it often thereby denotes the contents of his faith, viz., that which he believes. In Galatians 3:2 the apostle asks: "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" And in the verse of the same chapter he says: "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed." It is very plain that by faith here is meant that which we believe, the object of our faith. Likewise in Romans 10:8 he speaks of the "word of faith which we believe." In Acts 6:7 we are told that "a great company of priests were obedient

to the faith” and in the Epistle of Jude, 20th verse, we read: “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.” But even in the passages where faith denotes the subjective act on the part of the believer, it is the idea of that which he believes which predominates. It is through the contents of our subjective faith that we are justified and saved, and not because of the act of believing. Not every kind of faith saves, but only faith in the grace of God through the obedience of Christ. Scriptures therefore parallel salvation by grace and salvation by faith. In Acts 15:9 we are told that men’s hearts are purified by faith: and in 1 John 1:7 we read: “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” Yet there is no contradiction here; for through faith we accept and apply to ourselves the cleansing which the blood of Jesus Christ alone can bring about.

Our Confessions in the *Formula of Concord* state, “Therefore it is considered and understood to be the same thing when Paul says that we are ‘justified by faith,’ Romans 3:28, or that ‘Faith is counted for righteousness,’ Romans 4:5, and when he says that we are ‘made righteous by the obedience of one,’ Romans 5:19, or that ‘By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life,’ Romans 5:18. For faith justifies, not for this cause and reason that it is so good a work, and so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merits of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel; for this must be applied and appropriated to us by faith, if we are to be justified thereby. Therefore the righteousness which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering and resurrection of Christ, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law, and paid for (expiated) our sins.” (*Triglotta*, p. 919)

Only through faith, which like a hand is stretched out to accept and hold the gift which is brought us in the Gospel, can we be justified and saved. Scripture very definitely excludes all merit through our own works: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:28) “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16) “For

by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The *Formula of Concord* says: “This remains the office and property of faith alone, that it alone, and nothing else whatever, is the means and instrument by and through which God’s grace and the merit of Christ in the promise of the Gospel are received, apprehended, accepted, applied to us and appropriated; and that from this office and property of such application or appropriation love and all other virtues and works are excluded.” (*Triglotta*, p. 929)

Now it is true that a living faith arises only in hearts that are filled with sorrow and contrition because of sin. Jesus says: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” (Matthews 9:12) Only those who have learned with concern to see their own misery of sin and their great need of salvation will long for deliverance. But this contrition and sorrow is worked by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Law in hearts that are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1) and filled with “enmity against God.” (Romans 8:7) The Apostle Paul says, Galatians 3:24: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” Therefore, since it is altogether the work of God, this contrition and sorrow cannot be regarded as a meritorious work in man.

Likewise faith itself is a work of God through the preaching of the Gospel which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) and through Holy Baptism. (Galatians 3:26-27; Tit. 3:5) In Philippians 1:29 we read: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” In Ephesians 1:18 the apostle says that we “believe according to the working of his mighty power.” Coming to faith is described as being “born of God” (John 1:12-13), as being “raised from the dead” (Colossians 2:12) and as a creation compared to the creation of the world. (2 Corinthians 4:6) Faith, then, as well as contrition and sorrow, is wrought by the operation of the Holy Spirit in those that by nature cannot know the things of the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

It is also true that good works are necessary fruits of faith, so that if no good works appear, it is a sign that there is no living faith.

Yet these good works of the believer do not come into consideration when he is justified. These good works will in this life always be too imperfect to merit salvation even in part. See St. Paul's complaint about his own works in Romans 7. Besides, the good works of the believer also are produced by the gracious power of God in those who are already justified by grace. The apostle says, Ephesians 2:10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them;" and Philippians 2:13: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

The *Formula of Concord* says: "But here very good attention must be given with especial diligence, if the article of justification is to remain pure, lest that which precedes faith, and that which follows after it, be mingled together or inserted into the article of justification as necessary and belonging to it, because it is not one and the same thing to speak of conversion and justification. . . ."

"True saving faith is not in those who are without contrition and sorrow and have wicked purpose to remain and persevere in sins: but true contrition precedes, and genuine faith is in or with, true repentance. Love is also a fruit which surely and necessarily follows true faith. For the fact that one does not love is a sure indication that he is not justified, but is still in death, or has lost the righteousness of faith again. as St. John says, 1 John 3:14. But when Paul says, Romans 3:28: 'We are justified by faith without the deeds of the law,' he indicates thereby that neither the contrition that precedes, nor the works that follow, belong to the article or transaction of justification by faith. For good works do not precede justification, but follow it, and the person must first be justified before he can do good works.

"Moreover, not love or any other virtue, but **faith alone** is the sole means and instrument by which and through which we can receive and accept the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins, which are offered us in the promise of the Gospel." (*Triglotta*, pp. 923-925)

How comforting it is for the anxious sinner to know that salvation from sin and death is prepared and given to him by God **by grace alone**, and that nothing is required on his part to partake of this grace; he may confidently put his trust in the assurance of the

Gospel that God in Christ has declared all sinners righteous, thereby applying to himself what God has done for all men. For salvation is accepted and appropriated by **faith alone**.

To this glorious divine truth our Synod has been given grace to testify faithfully through the past ninety years. God grant that this truth may be preserved to us and to our children in generations to come!

The Position and the Part of Faith in Justification

by C. Monrad Gullerud

Introduction: The early Norwegian Synod theologians always approached doctrinal questions or controversies with the thought: "How does this issue impact the Gospel?" Since all doctrines of Scripture are linked together, they must each be understood in light of their connection to the central teaching of justification by faith. The following essay serves as an example of how the spiritual descendants of the Norwegian Synod continued to study the doctrine of justification, and faithfully understood and proclaimed it as the heart and core of all true theology.

We are gathered here at these synodical sessions, as fellow-laborers in the Lord's vineyard, to consult together concerning the Lord's work. The fact that we have pastors and delegates present from all directions of the compass indicates that our Christian people are conscious of the far-reaching importance of this work, and that they are desirous of working together as a unit for its extension and expansion. However, our presence here would be of little meaning and our deliberations would be of no consequence, if we did not possess that central article in the entire Christian doctrine, the article concerning justification by faith. If there were no such doctrine, then our Synod, its pastors and congregations would be embarked upon a mission over which defeat would be spelled from sun to sun. If there were no such thing as justification by faith, then all the money which has flowed into the congregational and synodical treasuries would have been given by our people in support of a hopeless cause. If we have been mistaken in our adherence to the doctrine which sets forth the reconciliation of man with God, then it would be in order for us to pass a resolution to dissolve our Synod, auction off our property to the highest bidder, and advise our congregations to dismiss their pastors and to disband. Why indeed can we dare to draw such far-reaching conclusions from the acceptance or rejection of only one doctrine—the doctrine of

justification? The reason is well stated in these words of the *Formula of Concord*: "This article concerning justification by faith is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of the grace of Christ, as Dr. Luther also has written: 'If this only remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony, and without any sects, but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted.'" (FC SD III, 6, *Triglotta*, p. 917) Indeed it is upon this doctrine that our soul's salvation depends, for without it we should be hopelessly bound in the toils of the law which demands, prohibits, threatens, kills, and damns. It is the doctrine of justification by faith which is the only standard for judging all other doctrines, for from it, and into it, they all flow. If we lose this doctrine, we lose salvation, and if we teach it or permit it to be taught among us otherwise than the Word of God teaches it, then we profane the name of God and cease to be the true visible church. Then we shall be unable to withstand heresies and rightly to oppose unscriptural practices. That the vitiation of this doctrine has had these results, of this we have abundant proof in the sad history of many churches in our own country, among which, alas, are included some whom we formerly could greet as brethren in the faith.

Since the article of justification by faith is such an important article, the one indeed with which the Church stands or falls, therefore it is eminently in place that all our considerations here should find their motivation in this blessed doctrine, and that all resolutions passed here should have as their ultimate purpose the jealous preservation and dissemination of the doctrine of justification by faith. That essays should be assigned and delivered at our conventions on the doctrine itself is always in place, and, we believe, welcomed by our people. The only thing that gives this essayist the courage to step before this assembly to deliver such an essay is the assurance that what is required of him is not to present anything new, but to set forth once more what the Scriptures so clearly teach, what has been treated so well by the formulators of our Confessions and by our fathers.

Our theme: “The Position and the Part of Faith in Justification” shall be treated under the following theses:

***Thesis I.* God has, in Christ, justified the whole world. (Objective Justification.)**

***Thesis II.* Justifying faith is the acceptance of God’s justification of the whole world in Christ.**

***Thesis III.* The individual sinner is justified personally at the very moment when he comes to faith. (Subjective Justification.)**

***Thesis IV.* Faith *alone* justifies, exclusive of any works or merit on the part of man.**

***Thesis V.* Justification is by faith *alone* for Christ’s sake.**

***Thesis VI.* Justifying faith, which is the work of God in the heart of man, is produced and sustained by the Means of Grace.**

Thesis I.

God Has, in Christ, Justified the Whole World. (Objective Justification.)

(a) To present an essay on “The Position and the Part of Faith in Justification” would indeed be idle and useless if we could not be certain and sure that in Christ a full and complete reconciliation of the whole world with God has been effected. If there were no certainty in this matter, then there would be little meaning and no comfort in such words as these: “A man is justified by faith” (Romans 3:28); “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3); “The just shall live by faith.” (Galatians 3:11) If we could not be assured of the fact that there exists for all men a complete and full forgiveness of all sins, in the heart of God, then we could not speak of justifying faith at all, for there would be nothing for faith to accept and appropriate to us. It would be foolish and vain for us to speak of a justification, a forgiveness of sins, offered and conveyed to us in the means of grace, if such forgiveness were not already an accomplished fact. Before we can speak of faith, therefore, we must establish the fact that there is a justification before and apart from faith.

In order to establish the truth of a universal justification which embraces all men, we do not resort to experiments in the laboratory

or to a study of the writings and findings of men, or to the experiences and emotions of God's creatures. If we should proceed thus, then we should fail utterly; for the fact of universal or objective justification is unknown to natural man, and he would be in total ignorance of it if it were not made known to him by revelation. We cannot, therefore, sufficiently thank God for the fact that He has committed to us "the word of reconciliation," where His justification of the whole world is made known and the truth of it is established beyond any question or debate. We turn then to the "word of reconciliation," which is God's own Word.

No sooner had man fallen into sin and thus become a child of death, when God in His mercy made known to him the reconciliation to be effected through the mediation of His Son. (Genesis 3:15) That this reconciliation was not intended alone for Adam and Eve but for all men who have lived from man's lamentable fall into sin and who will live until the end of time, of this Abraham and his successors received definite assurance directly from the Lord Himself. God told him: "In thee shall *all families of the earth* be blessed." (Genesis 12:3) The truth, then, of the universal justification was clearly revealed also to the Old Testament people. As soon as Christ who came in fulfillment of these promises was born, we have the truth of universal justification proclaimed from the heavens by a multitude of angels, saying: "Glory to God in the highest and *on earth peace*, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14) When Jesus entered upon His public ministry, John the Baptist, His forerunner, greeted Him with words which clearly set forth universal or objective justification, when he said: "Behold the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Finally, when Jesus had reached the end of His public ministry and was hanging upon the cross, as the sacrificial lamb of God, He sealed the accomplishment of the justification of the world with these words: "It is finished." (John 19:30) With His resurrection from the dead on the third day, the final stamp of truth was placed upon the fact that through His mediation the sins of all men were forgiven—that the justification of the world was completed. "Christ was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification." (Romans 4:25) This whole glorious truth of the accomplishment of justification for all men is summed up in the words

which Paul, by the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost, wrote to the Romans: "By the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon *all men* unto justification of life." (Romans 5:18); and again in his words to the Corinthians: "God was in Christ, *reconciling the world unto himself*, not imputing their trespasses unto them." (2 Corinthians 5:19) To further ward off the false doctrine that this has been accomplished only for certain people, or that it is effective only for a select group, God has caused these words to be recorded: "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but *also for the sins of the whole world*." (1 John 2:2) Our Confessions clearly present this truth in the following words: "When the Lord Jesus Christ came, *He forgave to all sin* which no one could avoid, and, by the shedding of His own blood, blotted out the handwriting which was against us." (Ap IV (II), 103, *Triglotta*, p. 151)

In this whole presentation of universal justification, it will have been noted that not once has faith been mentioned in our own comments or in the passages from Holy Scripture. This is significant, for it shows that God has reconciled, that is justified (forgiven the sins of), the whole world *before* faith and *apart from* faith. At the resurrection of Jesus, God, in His heart, forgave the sins of the whole world, that is of all men that ever lived or ever will live. Absolution was pronounced upon all mankind. In this act, then, of God's justification of the whole world, faith had no part. That God has forgiven the sins of the whole world remains a fact whether it is believed or not, whether it is accepted or not. When we consider how this justification, or forgiveness of sin, is received and accepted and appropriated by the individual, then it is that we speak of the part of faith in justification.

(b) When we consider how this doctrine has been taught in some sections of the Lutheran Church, we meet a very strange and entirely foreign presentation of the blessed truth. A careful analysis of these erroneous views will show that many of them have their source in a misunderstanding of the position and the part of faith in justification. Faith has in them been given a position in God's justification of the world which Scripture and our confessions do not permit. Thus we find that there are those who confess that God indeed has reconciled all men unto Himself, but has not justified all men

(but only those who have come to faith), and that Christ indeed has removed all the world's sin, but that He has not actually forgiven them (but only the sins of those who have come to faith). A noted exegete of one of the larger Lutheran bodies of our country made the following comment on 2 Corinthians 5:19 in a book published in 1935: "We fail to find the idea that Paul here says, that when Christ died, when in and by His death God reconciled the world objectively, He then and there (or at Christ's resurrection) forgave all sins to the whole world." While it is here admitted that God reconciled the world by the death of His son, it is denied that this means the justification of the world, of the forgiveness of the whole world's sin. To make matters still worse, we find elsewhere in the volume that the same exegete denies the fact that this reconciliation is an *historic past act*, but affirms that it is a continuous work which God is engaged in performing now. God's justification of the whole world and the reception of this justification by faith are thus virtually rolled into one, as though God's forgiveness of sin does not become a reality until it is accepted by faith, and as though God's reconciliation of the world was not completely finished as a past act at the death of His son, but is a continuous reconciliation dependent upon the fulfillment of certain conditions. This view of the reconciliation of man with God is diametrically opposed to all that our Synodical Conference has taught these many years on justification. For instance, the sainted Dr. Pieper in an essay delivered in 1916 very definitely shows that we are among those who look upon the reconciliation as a *past accomplished act*, even dating it at the time when Christ arose from the dead on Easter morning. He writes: "Man's reconciliation with God is an accomplished fact; it is finished. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.' These words refer to the time when the Son of God sojourned here upon earth. Nearly nineteen hundred years ago, when Christ suffered and died, God reconciled the world unto Himself. When God raised Christ from the dead, He absolved the world from its guilt and sin and declared that He was no longer at odds with the sinful race of man." (*What is Christianity and Other Essays*, p. 63) This is our confession; and any other view which vitiates and changes the teaching that God has justified (that is forgiven the sins of) the whole world destroys the Scriptural

teaching of the part of faith in justification. Indeed, if the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world is not a past accomplished fact, then all we can offer in the Gospel and in absolution is a potential, conditional forgiveness. Then we dare not say to our people: "Your sins have been forgiven by God," but we must add, "This is true only if you believe it." In the final analysis, then, where such a view is held, justification becomes dependent upon faith, and it becomes wrong, sinful and heretical to teach that God has justified (forgiven the sins of) the whole world, for indeed the vast majority of men do not come to faith. It is impossible to teach the doctrine of justification correctly when faith is erroneously mingled with God's justification of the whole world; for here faith has no part. But what part, then, has faith in the doctrine of justification? This we shall see in our second thesis.

Thesis II.

Justifying Faith is the Acceptance of God's Justification of the Whole World in Christ.

(a) While it is true that God has reconciled the whole world unto Himself and in Christ looks upon the whole world as free from all sin and guilt, still it is not proper to draw from this the conclusion that, therefore, all men *have* the remission of sins and will be saved. Such a conclusion is inadmissible, for Scripture distinguishes between God's justification of the whole world and the possession of it on the part of the individual sinner. That not all men come into possession of the forgiveness of sins will be openly shown on the last day, when Christ will turn to those on the left hand and say: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41) Although God was in Christ reconciling also these unto Himself—although God has justified also these—yet they are lost; for they have not believed. Thus we see that God's justification is of no benefit to the individuals if it is not believed; for faith, according to Scripture, is the receiving hand which accepts, apprehends, and applies to us that which is already present in the heart of God, namely the forgiveness of all sins, which was gained by Christ. While it is true that God has in Christ reconciled the whole

world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, this does not become the possession of man except through faith; for it is through faith that we receive that which long since has been declared and pronounced by God, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Whether it be when the Gospel is preached, when the sacraments are administered, or when absolution is pronounced publicly or privately, it is always faith which receives and accepts and appropriates to us that which is given and offered, namely the forgiveness of sins. Thus Scripture continually speaks of justifying faith as *the means through which* we receive the peace with God which Christ has fully effected for all men by His vicarious atonement. Let us quote a number of these Scripture passages: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2); "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by faith of him" (Ephesians 3:12); "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith" (Romans 3:28); "To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name whosoever believeth on him, shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43); "The just shall live by his faith." (Habakkuk 2:4)

In strict accordance with Scripture, our Confessions speak of justifying faith thus: "Faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it *receives* the promised mercy." (Ap IV (II), 56, *Triglotta*, p. 137) "Justification is *obtained* by faith." (Ap IV (II), 106, *Triglotta*, p. 153) "These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the Holy Gospel; and *faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves.*" (FC SD III, 10, *Triglotta*, p. 919) Thus Chemnitz also writes: "Justifying faith deals with its object not merely by cold calculation nor by a general and superficial assent, but in such a way that it acknowledges, considers, desires, seeks, apprehends, accepts, and embraces, and so appropriates to the individual believer, Christ with all his merits and through Christ, by virtue of the promise, God's mercy, which forgives all sins." (Cf. *Examen, De Fide Justificante*, p. 161)

(b) But, alas, although Scripture has spoken so clearly concerning the part of faith in justification, yet the meaning of

justifying faith has been most grossly perverted by the false teachers. Chief among these are the papists who thus teach their children: "To believe means to firmly hold as true whatsoever God has revealed, for the very reason that He did reveal it." (J. Deharbe, *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, p. 2) In this way justifying faith is lowered to the level of the faith which also the devils have, for they, too, "believe and tremble." (James 2:19) Concerning this matter our *Augsburg Confession* states the following: "Men are also admonished that here the term 'faith' does not signify merely the knowledge of the history, such as is in the ungodly and in the devil, but signifies a faith which believes, not merely the history, but also the effects of the history—namely, this article: the forgiveness of sins, to wit, that we have grace, righteousness, and forgiveness of sins through Christ . . . Augustine also admonishes his readers concerning the word 'faith' and teaches that the term 'faith' is accepted in the Scriptures, not for knowledge such as is in the ungodly, but for confidence which consoles and encourages the terrified conscience." (*Triglotta*, p. 55ff.) How the papists regard such statements as these is most clearly brought out in their pronouncement at the Council of Trent: "If any one saith that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified, let him be anathema." (*Canon 12*) Thus it becomes clear that the Catholic Church is the greatest enemy of the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith and summarily condemns all those who teach it.

However, the papists are not the only ones who pervert the meaning of "faith," but this is also done by the modernistic theologians in many other churches. They look upon faith merely as an acceptance of Christ's life as an example and model for the community, whereby all political and economic problems will find their solution. Such preachers (and their number is legion) are engaged in draining all spiritual content out of the Christian doctrine of justification by faith and are making of it a code of conduct for this world. It is well for us to know that when these men speak pious words over the radio and otherwise about "The grace of God," "Justification by Faith," "Of salvation alone through Christ," they mean something entirely different from that which Scripture so clearly teaches and which we

confess. It is against such and other false teachers that the Scriptures warn in these words: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by *good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*" (Romans 16:17-18) When we consider how Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and his ministers into ministers of righteousness who speak fine words about faith in Christ and about justification by faith, then indeed we can well understand the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians and apply them to our times: "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3)

Thesis III.

The Individual Sinner is Justified Personally at the very Moment when He Comes to Faith. (Subjective Justification.)

Since faith justifies for this reason that "it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel," therefore it must be clearly evident that as soon as the first spark of faith is kindled in the human heart, then there is at once full possession of the merits of Jesus Christ. No one will dispute this fact that as soon as a person accepts a gift which is offered to him, he has it. It is his since he has laid hold of it, and it is his since it is the intention of the giver that it shall be his as soon as he accepts it. Thus it is in subjective justification. At the very moment when a man accepts (that is, believes) the forgiveness of sins, he *has* the forgiveness of sins (that is, he is justified personally). At that very moment when man comes to faith, God accounts and declares that sinner to be such a one who is personally in possession of Christ's merit and righteousness for his salvation. Thus we are told of Abraham: "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3); and again, "His faith is counted for righteousness." (Romans 4:5) God accounted Abraham's faith for righteousness, not because his faith was such a good work and so fair a virtue that it moved God to justify him, but because *by his faith* he laid hold on

Christ and His righteousness. It would, therefore, be wrong to say that first, man must believe; and then, God looks down from Heaven and sees this faith and so accounts him as righteous. To hold such a view would be to overthrow completely the doctrine of justification *by faith* and substitute in its place a justification *after faith*, which Scripture certainly does not teach. If we were to accept the view that man must first believe, and then he is justified, we would either have to claim that faith which grasps and accepts God's absolution through Christ does not actually receive that which it accepts (which is preposterous); or else we would have to hold that we are by faith actually in possession of forgiveness before we are forgiven by God (that is, justified), and this is entirely unscriptural and untenable.

In order to preserve the doctrine of justification by faith with all its comfort and consolation, we must hold fast to this truth that when a man comes to faith he is immediately, at once, simultaneously, accounted by God as righteous. There is no intermission between man's coming to faith and the reckoning of his faith for righteousness. It is unscriptural to suppose that the one takes place and then the other. It is true that it may *seem* as though there is a chronological or logical division to be drawn when it says: "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." As Luther points out, there are in this passage two parts, namely, that Abraham believed God, and that God accounted this faith for righteousness. From this it would seem that these two acts follow one upon the other (first faith, and then the accounting of faith for righteousness); but this is in no sense the intention of Luther, nor is it the sense of the Scriptures. That this is not the interpretation which Scripture itself places upon this passage is shown by the numerous passages which say that we *are justified by faith*. Our Confessions state, "Therefore it is considered and understood to be the same thing when Paul says, we are justified by faith, Romans 3:28, or that faith is counted to us for righteousness, Rom. 4:5, and when he says that we are made righteous by the obedience of one, Rom. 5:19, or that by the righteousness of one, justification of faith came to all men, Rom. 5:18." (FC SD III, 12, *Triglotta*, p. 919) According to human logic, it might seem as though faith and the accounting of faith for righteousness could not happen at the same time, but this matter is by no means to be

understood according to human logic. Experience has shown how dangerous it is to operate with human logic in interpreting the actions of God.

That we must not permit the use of human logic in explaining the passage: “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness” is shown by Dr. Luther in his comments on Galatians 2:16, par. 196, where he says: “But here it must also be noted, that these three things, namely faith, Christ, and *acceptatio*, that is, that God receives us into His grace, or *imputatio*, that is, that God accounts our faith for righteousness, always belong together.” Accordingly, Dr. Luther very definitely repudiates any attempt to separate (whether logically or chronologically) faith and the accounting of faith for righteousness. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* in this connection states: “Faith reconciles and justifies before God the moment we apprehend the promise by faith.” (*Triglotta*, p. 213) We therefore interpret Romans 4:3 in this way: Abraham believed God, and at the identical moment when the first spark of faith entered his heart, his faith was accounted for righteousness. Abraham was justified by faith. And thus it is with every individual who comes to faith in Christ. He is justified, that is *personally* declared righteous, and free from sin, in that very instant when he comes to faith. Indeed, at that very moment he is absolved “from eternal punishment for the sake of Christ’s righteousness which is imputed by God to faith.” Whether the faith be a strong faith where the Christian finds his experiences in harmony with the Word of God, or it be a weak faith where the Christian scarcely dares to call forgiveness his own, yet yearns for the grace of God in Christ Jesus, in both cases justification took place at the very *moment* when the first spark of faith entered the heart. Here is true comfort for every afflicted Christian who is tempted to believe that he must experience certain pleasant emotions before he can be sure that his faith has been accounted for righteousness.

Thesis IV.

Faith Alone Justifies, Exclusive of any Work or Merit on the Part of Man.

(a) When Scripture speaks of the doctrine of justification by faith, it is very definite in excluding from this doctrine every work, merit, or worth on the part of man, and this is done in order that it may be without question or doubt that faith *alone* justifies, and that it may be clear and evident that all is by grace. Among the many passages which emphasize this truth we have the following: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith." (Galatians 3:11) "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay; but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:27-28) Here it is shown that the very fact that we are justified by faith in itself rules out all works and merit of man and this preserves the doctrine that we are saved by grace alone, as we are told in Romans 4:16, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace." Indeed, what happens to grace when we mingle the works or merit of man into the doctrine of justification is shown by the following: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work." (Romans 11:6) What happens to man when he seeks to be justified by works or character is expressed in these words of Scripture: "But Israel which followed after the law of righteousness hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." (Romans 9:31-32) Indeed, whosoever would be justified by the law must keep the demands of the law perfectly in thoughts, words, and deeds, and this is impossible for any man. Those who attempt to attain righteousness by the law are blaspheming Christ, as we are told: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:4) When we seek to be justified by the law partially or entirely, we spurn the righteousness of Christ, as though it were wholly or partly insufficient for our salvation. But how impossible it is for man to do any good works or even have a godly thought before his coming to faith is shown when Scripture describes man as being by nature dead in trespasses and sins

(Ephesians 2:1, 5) and unable even to incline his heart or will to God or that which is good. Thus Scripture clearly sets forth the truth that, since justification is by faith alone, all works of man are excluded from the doctrine of justification, and that when this truth is set aside, the entire doctrine of justification by faith is overthrown.

Our confessional writings most carefully and earnestly guard this truth of Scripture. Our *Thorough Declaration, Article III*, speaks thus: "Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above, that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness. These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the holy Gospel; and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply and apprehend them to ourselves." (*Triglotta*, p. 919) "Good works are excluded from the article of justification before God, so that they must not be drawn into, woven into, or mingled with the transaction of the justification of the poor sinner before God as necessary or belonging thereto." (*Triglotta*, p. 927ff.)

(b) One of the saddest and most lamentable occurrences among men is this that, although the Holy Scripture speaks so clearly and definitely in this matter, yet just this truth has been most often perverted by many of those who wish to be pious men and Christian teachers. Following the example of St. Paul, it becomes our duty, therefore, to expose and reject such false doctrines which have arisen regarding the article of justification. In order to preserve this doctrine pure, we must not only state the doctrine as it is taught correctly, but also call attention to the errors which have arisen that we might avoid them and testify against them. We must be able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers. (Titus 1:9) In proceeding to expose error, we follow also the example of the confessions where

false doctrines are listed separately and rejected one by one. We follow the example of the synodical fathers who were unwilling to compromise where even the least leaven of false doctrine was in evidence, but on the other hand openly exposed the errors and rejected them on the basis of Scripture.

At the head of the list of those who mingle works with the doctrine of justification stands the pope who here especially displays his exclusive right to the title of the Anti-Christ spoken of in 2 Thessalonians 2. The pope and the church which he heads teach that a man who is unconverted can, through certain deeds of devotion, etc., prepare himself for grace, so that God for the sake of his deeds shows favor to him and grants him His grace. Furthermore, they teach that when such a one has thus, by virtue of his good conduct, received grace, he can from then on do good deeds through which he receives such merit that God becomes his debtor and owes him eternal life. We can well understand how Luther suffered under this delusion as he struggled hopelessly to gain such merit that he might become acceptable before God. In spite of all his prayers, self-denials, self-inflicted tortures, and pilgrimages, Luther's conscience continued to accuse him, and he received no peace. What joy it brought Luther when he learned, therefore, the full significance of those words of grace, "The just shall live by faith." As a prisoner bound by the chains of the law, Luther who had been oppressed by his sins day and night now found freedom in the blessed doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. He now made it his task to uncover this doctrine which had been so long hidden under Roman tradition and superstition, but in this he met the fiercest opposition on the part of the Catholic Church which clung tenaciously to its doctrine of salvation by works. When Luther found that Scripture received no hearing in the Catholic Church except as interpreted by the pope and beclouded by human tradition, he separated from it. Thus we see that the Reformation had as its express purpose the preservation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in its purity, free from commingling with the works of the law.

If the followers of the Reformer had remained true to the principles of the Reformation, Scripture Alone (*Sola Scriptura*), Grace Alone (*Sola Gratia*), and Faith Alone (*Sola Fide*), then there would

not be the strife and contention and disharmony which we have in the church today. But, alas, many of the followers of Luther both of earlier and of more recent date, permitted themselves to sink into errors which are different from the papistic errors only in this that they are couched in different language and clothed in more subtle terms. For this reason these errors are not always so apparent, but they are none the less real and dangerous. These false doctrines which have arisen concerning the doctrine of justification by faith follow the errors of the papacy in this that they mix into this precious doctrine some work or worth of man. Closely following the Roman error which ascribes some good works to man before his conversion, there are those who hold that there is some spiritual activity in man before he actually comes to faith. This spiritual activity is variously described as: the good conduct or disposition of man which commends him to the gracious attention of God; man's feeling of responsibility towards the acceptance of grace (this latter expression is contained in *Opgjør*); man's self-determination and self-motivation towards accepting Christ; and, the faculty of applying oneself to divine grace. Again there are others who look upon faith itself as being so good a work and so fine a virtue that it merits the grace of God and is even looked upon as the cause why God has elected some to salvation (*intuitu fidei*). All these expressions have this in common that they in the final analysis declare that man's salvation depends more or less on some worth or merit in him. Thus the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, is overthrown and undermined. Of such teachings the sainted Dr. Walther has said: "A theology which changes faith into a work of man and seeks to show that the reason why certain men are saved while others are lost is to be found in man's own free decision, or in his conduct, or in his cooperation, is distinguished from the papistic doctrine of justification only as to its terminology." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1872, p. 352)

It is only when we clearly and definitely exclude works from the doctrine of justification and *openly* confess that it is indeed by faith alone, through grace, that we are saved, that we can combat error and oppose it when it raises its deceitful head. It is notable that among those who have strayed from the pure doctrine of justification by faith alone, one error after another finds toleration. Among such

we find, for instance, that the Anti-Christian lodge is not openly and definitely opposed; whereas, on the other hand, we find that the lodge evil is openly and unequivocally condemned among those who have remained true to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Why is this? The reason is simply this that where the least error which attributes something to man in his salvation has crept in and found room, there is not the ability to oppose those systems which make Christ's work of no effect by attributing salvation to the character of man—as the lodge teaches. Notice also the breakdown of clear cut testimony against the Roman doctrine and the friendliness of many Protestant and even Lutheran clergy towards the pope's emissaries. Note the silence among many nominal Lutherans with regard to our Confessions' branding of the pope as the very Anti-Christ. Notice the unionistic spirit (indifference toward doctrine) which holds sway among bodies which formerly were conservative. Notice how, among them, errors (whether fundamental or nonfundamental) are not openly opposed and disciplined and how unscriptural practices are tolerated without official censure. All these are the fruits which are being reaped from the sowing of the tares of synergism. Yes, the fruits of false doctrine are not long in making their appearance. May God keep the remnant which is left from falling into these errors of mixing works into the article of justification by faith alone.

But now it may be asked: Since works do not in any wise justify, and since even faith itself is not such a work as to merit salvation, how can it be that faith justifies? This we shall see in the consideration of the following thesis.

Thesis V.

Justification is by Faith Alone, for Christ's Sake.

When it is said that faith justifies, this must not be understood as though faith is such a change in the heart of man that God for the sake of it justifies him, that is, declares him righteous and free from sin. It is not, indeed, the act of faith, as a work, which causes God to justify us, but it is the object of faith, which is Christ. Thus when Scripture states that we are justified by faith, we understand this to be the same thing as when it says: "by the righteousness of one,

justification of faith came to all men.” (See *Triglotta*, p. 919) It is in this way that our confessions express it, and thereupon in the *Thorough Declaration* we are told: “Faith justifies not for this cause and reason that it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel; for this must be applied and appropriated to us by faith, if we are to be justified thereby.” (*Triglotta*, p. 919) It is common for us to say that our hunger is satisfied by eating, and still it is not the act of eating which satisfies us, but the food which we eat. Thus it is with faith. It is not the receiving which gives us peace with God but that which is received, namely, Christ. It is with this as it is, for instance, with a diamond ring. It is not the ring itself which is of great value, but it is that which the ring encloses, namely the diamond which makes the ring precious and of great worth. Thus faith justifies because of the object which it grasps, namely “The merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness.” Therefore Paul and Silas could tell the jailer at Philippi simply, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” In the same way our Savior Himself told Nicodemus who came to him by night: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:14-16) Concerning this matter Luther writes: “I have said repeatedly that faith in God alone is not sufficient, but that the cost—the vicarious satisfaction—must also be considered. The Turk and the Jew also believe in God, but without the means and the cost. But what is the cost? This the Gospel shows us—Christ there teaches us that we are not lost but have eternal life, that is, that God so loved us that for our sakes He went to the greatest of all costs—He offered up his only dearly beloved Son, subjecting him to our misery, to death and hell, and making him drink this cup of bitterness to its dregs.” (St. L. XI, 1085)

Accordingly, we see that there can be no justification by faith without Christ, for without Christ there is no forgiveness, no salvation. Among those who reject the substitutionary atonement, there are those

who hold that God forgives sins by His mere sovereign will. Such a view casts a dark shadow over the justice of God as well as over His sincerity and truth; for has not God indeed said, "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not?" (Ecclesiastes 7:20) And has He not furthermore said: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them"? (Galatians 3:10) Has He not told us that this curse is nothing but eternal and everlasting death in Hell? Indeed these words still stand as the Words of God and their validity has not been removed. It is only the Devil who denies the truth of these words and says to us as he did to Eve: "Ye shall not surely die." (Genesis 3:4) Since then the curse over sin is eternal death and since all men are sinners and subject to this curse, how can man be justified before God?

In preparing salvation for the world, God in no wise set aside His justice, but His demands for salvation remained the same, freedom from guilt and sin, perfect righteousness and holiness. These demands had to be fulfilled, and in order to fulfill them God laid the complete burden of the world's sin upon His Son, Jesus Christ, and thus "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) The curse which rested on all men, Christ shouldered and removed from man's charge; for "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." (Galatians 3:13) Yes, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust." (1 Peter 3:18) When Christ came to this world, He placed Himself under the law that He might fulfill it in man's stead. "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." (Galatians 4:4-5) All this Christ could do because He is true God as well as true man; and in answer to those who ask how Christ could atone for the sins of all mankind, we merely say that a drop of that precious blood of the lamb of God is sufficient to cleanse the whole world from sin.

Now the relation that all this work and suffering of Christ has to justifying faith is shown very clearly, for instance, in these words of the article on "Righteousness of Faith" in the *Thorough*

Declaration: “The Righteousness which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law, and paid for (expiated) our sins.” (*Triglotta*, p. 919) All this, then, that Christ has done in man’s stead is imputed by God to faith. When we, therefore, believe in Christ, even though this faith be ever so weak, yet Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us, and we are freed from sin and absolved from eternal punishment. It is therefore that faith justifies—*for Christ’s sake*.

Of how this faith is received, we shall hear in the sixth and final thesis which reads:

Thesis VI.

Justifying Faith Which is the Work of God in the Heart of Man is Produced and Sustained by the Means of Grace.

All that has so far been said of justifying faith would be of small comfort to us if God had left us in uncertainty as to how such saving faith is produced in us. However, the good Lord has made this also so clear that there need be no doubt among us with regard to this matter. In the first place, the Holy Scriptures clearly teach us of man’s inability of his own reason or strength to believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, when it for instance states: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14) “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Romans 8:7) “Ye were dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1) Accordingly if it were left to man to incline his own heart to receive these things of the Spirit which are proclaimed to him and offered to him, he would never come to faith, because in his natural condition he rebels against all these things and considers them only foolishness.

The entire doctrine of justification would, therefore, only serve to add to our misery, if its wonderful truths should be known to us and its wonderful gifts set before us without the ability to receive it and accept it. Our desperation would be much similar to that of the mythical character, Tantalus, whose punishment consisted in this that

he was placed in a lake whose waters receded from his lips whenever he attempted to drink, and in this that he was tempted by delicious fruit overhead which withdrew whenever he attempted to eat. But God be praised, we have not been left to be tantalized by gifts of salvation which are unsearchable and unattainable, for God the Holy Ghost not only offers to us the blessings necessary for salvation, but He also produces the faith which He requires for its reception. This He does, not by some unknown means, but it is all accomplished by means of that which He has committed to us, namely, by "The word of reconciliation," or the Gospel. This word of reconciliation is not a mere announcement or proclamation of the fact that God has had mercy upon us, but it is, as the apostle Paul says, "the power of God unto salvation." The word of reconciliation, then, is a mighty power in itself, which produces the very faith which it requires for its acceptance. Thus we are told: "We believe according to the working of His mighty power." (Ephesians 1:19) And again: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:15-16)

When we are, therefore, told: "Baptism doth also now save us" (1 Peter 3:21), we are assured of the fact that in baptism the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are not only offered, but the faith required for its acceptance is produced by the Word which is in and with the water. This is indeed a most wonderful doctrine, for it assures us of the fact that our little infants who are brought to baptism there receive justifying faith which lays hold on all the merits of Christ, and thus they have become children of God, heirs of salvation. In the case of adults who have grown up without baptism but have come to faith through the preaching of the Word (even as in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch), there baptism is a means of strengthening the faith which has already been produced.

But it is not only necessary that faith be produced in man's heart, it is also necessary that this faith be preserved and sustained. Man by his own natural powers is likewise unable to preserve this faith in his heart, once it has been received. If man were left to himself, he would lose his faith and thus lose the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. How then is man's faith preserved and by what means is a

weak faith strengthened? This likewise is the work of God, for we are told: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun the good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6) Concerning the means whereby this is accomplished we are not left in doubt or uncertainty; for God says: "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Our faith then is preserved and kept by the same means whereby it was produced—"The power of God"—the Gospel—the word of reconciliation. Whenever we, therefore, hear the preaching of the Gospel or read it in our homes, we are to know that the Holy Ghost is there active in the Word to sustain and preserve our faith. Whenever we attend the Lord's table, we are assured of the fact that through the words "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins," which are, besides the bodily eating and drinking, the chief thing in the sacrament, our Christian faith in the forgiveness of sins through Christ is strengthened and preserved.

As we see how wonderfully the Lord has provided not only for the producing of our Christian faith but also for its preservation, we should be everlastingly thankful to Him for this His goodness and mercy. It is indeed a sad and lamentable thing that so many of our Christian people should neglect these means, the preaching of the Word and the Sacrament of the Altar, by infrequent and irregular use. Such neglect is most hazardous and dangerous, for it gives Satan the opportunity he is always waiting for, namely, to overtake us in weakness and rob us of our Christian faith. That Satan may never accomplish this purpose, but that we may be preserved in faith to our dying day, let us be sober and vigilant in a diligent use of the means of grace. May we, furthermore, be found faithful in doing the Lord's work of spreading the good tidings of salvation into all the world, that others may come to faith and thus receive the forgiveness of sins through Christ for the salvation of their souls.

God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The Ministry of Reconciliation

by Norman A. Madson

Introduction: The fellowship which had been re-established in 1918 promoted a great unity among the church bodies of the Synodical Conference. For years many young men from the ELS traveled to St. Louis, Missouri, and Thiensville, Wisconsin, for seminary training from their brethren in the faith. This sermon, by Rev. N.A. Madson, Sr., was delivered at the Missouri Synod seminary in St. Louis, in July of 1945. The ELS decided to open its own seminary in September 1946, calling Rev. Madson to serve as its first Dean. Dr. Madson was well known for his powerful preaching. Here he sets forth the great certainty and clarity which we have in the Scriptures, and lays before the seminary graduates the importance of sound, biblical preaching to effect the ministry of reconciliation.

Thou God of all grace and truth, who through Thy blessed Son Christ Jesus hast not only reconciled the world unto Thyself, but hast also instituted a ministry of reconciliation through which Thy gifts of grace are made available to all sinners, we thank Thee for this group of earnest young men who now stand ready to go out into the world with the marvelous message of reconciliation. Grant each and every one of them, through Thy Holy Spirit, that measure of humble faith, that steadfastness of purpose, that holy zeal which shall make them true ambassadors for Christ. We ask it in Christ's Saviour name. Amen.

Text: We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

Fellow redeemed—and especially you who now have completed your theological studies, grace be unto you, and peace, from God Our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Disce ut semper victurus: vive ut cras moriturus.” These classic words which have come down to us from the distant past are as worthy of our consideration as they are pregnant with meaning. *“Study as though you are going to live forever,”* they tell you. And you would be unfit for the calling which you have chosen as yours, if you did not believe in life eternal. *“Live as though you are going to die tomorrow,”* they conclude. And you would be equally unfit for your high calling, unless you also believed and preached that the end of life’s pilgrimage may come at any moment.

While there may be very little of Herbert Spencer’s philosophy in general to which we as believers can subscribe, there is one concept of his to which we all may say “Amen” with our whole heart, and that is his definition of education. What does he conceive it to be? *“To prepare us for complete living is the function which education has to discharge.”* And since the believer’s concept of life is not that of the worldling, but that of Him who is come that we might have life, and have it more abundantly, he knows that for the complete life we must be prepared for that which stretches beyond the life which now is.

But how are we to prepare ourselves as well as the souls committed to our charge for that life beyond? Were we to be in doubt as to how men are to pull themselves out of the “Slough of Despond” and reach the “Delectable Mountains of Beulahland,” we would be as unworthy of our calling as we would be unfit. But, thanks be to God, we have a directive which is just as certain as it is clear and convincing. And it is this “fountain of living waters,” whence all true wisdom flows, concerning which we desire to speak on this occasion, when we, on the basis of our text and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seek answer to the question:

When Shall We Do Well In Our Ministry Of Reconciliation?

1. When we believe and preach the Word as something which is *sure*.

2. When we believe and preach the Word as something which is *clear*.
3. When we believe and preach the Word as something which is not of *men*, but from *God*.

1. "Preach the word," is Paul's admonition to his coworker Timothy. Now that admonition might seem a bit old-fashioned and ineffective, if the word to which he directs Timothy were something which had served well in days ago, but which was long since antiquated. But the word to which Timothy is directed has this quality that it never becomes shelf-worn and out of date. It is as sparkling with life and power today as it was when it first emanated from the mouth of God. It meets man's most clamant needs today as in the days of the patriarchs.

There is a slogan which has been rather popular in certain Lutheran circles for the past decade or so: "A changeless Christ for a changing world." But that is rather a misleading statement. For while the world is ever changing so far as scientific research, technological development, and the thousand and one things which go to make up our everyday life is concerned, the world which Christ is come to save hasn't changed. It is the same evil, godless world it was on the day that Christ said of it: "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19) Has the old world changed so very much since the Psalmist penned these words: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us"? (Psalm 2:2-3) No, the heart of natural man has not changed down through the centuries. That which is born of the flesh is still *flesh*. And flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. This is a fundamental fact of which you, as preachers and *Seelsorgers*, must never lose sight. For if you do, you shall most miserably fail in your ministry of reconciliation.

Now there be those who would reduce theology to a mere science. If it were that and nothing more, then it would be ridiculous to tell you that you should go on proclaiming a word which hasn't passed through the alembic of modern thought. You will naturally have to adapt your preaching to the language of our day, in order to

make the average man grasp your meaning. But the *meaning* must never be changed. God is still holy, righteous, yea, a consuming fire, who still reveals the wrath of heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. But He is also—O glorious truth—still the loving Father who knoweth our frame, who remembereth that we are dust, and who still tells us as in days of yore: “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Matthew 9:13) Rightly has therefore the sainted Daniel March said of this more sure word of prophecy: “It is so conservative as to make it a solemn duty to study and revere the past, and it is so progressive as to be in advance of the most enlightened age. It is strict enough to denounce the very shadow and semblance of sin, and it is liberal enough to save the chiefest of sinners.”

And to save poor lost sinners is your one and only calling, my dear young theologians. You are to bring comfort to those who mourn. You are to speak to the *heart* of Jerusalem, as Isaiah puts it. Callous and indifferent as the world may be, it isn't quite so blasé as it imagines itself to be. There is a lot of spiritual whistling in the dark. For it will be true while the earth remaineth: “We come from God, and shall be homesick until we return to Him.” Deep down in the heart of the most rebellious there is *unhappiness*.

But the word which you are commissioned to bring is still a *sure* word. Had Peter been a Zwichau prophet or a Pentecostal, he would have spent the rest of his life going into ecstasies over the special privilege which he had enjoyed in the holy mount. But he doesn't do that. Instead he points us back to the recorded word of Moses and the prophets. It is as though he would say: “Get back to your Bibles, there you will find the promised Seed of the woman.”

If at times it may appear that the word has overstated the case, it is only *apparently* so. When Christ tells His contemporaries that “The scripture cannot be broken” (John 10, 35), He does so after He has quoted a portion of the Psalm 82, where the magistrates are called “gods.” Men may scoff, as many in our day are doing, about the so-called “divine right of kings.” But tell me: Is there any power possessed by any of the powers that be which is not of God? If so, then Paul would be teaching a bit of false theology in Romans 13.

Then our Saviour would have told us an untruth when He answers Pilate: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." (John 19:11)

So do not become confused because popular opinion may be against you. If you have the divine word on your side, do not surrender it though an host should encamp against you. It is a *sure* word. May you then be given grace to confess:

*We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord;
And though assailed on every hand,
Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.*

2. But now a thing might be ever so sure, and still be so mysterious and difficult to understand that the average man would not be able to grasp it. In that event you would feel more at home in the camp of the Roman Catholic Church than in our blessed Church of the Reformation. But again the apostle tells you that God's word is *clear*. What does he here call it? "*A light that shineth in a dark place.*" And you are to take heed unto that clear word "until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." Not clear in the sense of your being able to grasp it at all times with your mere intellect, but clear in the sense that it may be believed unto salvation. It is this fact to which our dear Luther refers when he speaks of Scripture as being so shallow a water that the little lamb may safely wade across it, but at the same time so deep that the elephant will be drowned in its depths. Luther insists on the clarity of Scripture. He says: "He who once departs from this (doctrine) will fall from one error into another, as we see among the Jews and heretics." (St. L. VI, 417)

And our own Dr. Koren, speaking on the clarity of Scripture, had this to say: "According to the Word of God, we have reason to be certain that many an unschooled man or woman, and by the world despised, has gotten farther in the knowledge of God and His saving grace than have the vast majority of the most learned pastors and professors. Above all, we must not become wise above that which is written. To all of us our Saviour says: 'Except ye be converted, and

become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:2)

And isn't that the burden of Paul's very first chapter in his First Epistle to the Corinthians? "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." (1 Corinthians 1:26-29) No wonder that Christ should offer this prayer: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." (Matthew 11:25)

I would warn you not to imagine that because you have been found fit to teach and preach the word of God publicly, that you for that reason have now mastered Scripture. God take pity on the preacher who goes out among his people with the vain notion that he is now master, while old fathers and mothers in Israel are looked upon as having nothing to add to the preacher's learning. I shall never forget the well-earned rebuke administered to me as a young pastor by one of the old faithfuls in my congregation. It was Saturday afternoon, and I was in my study struggling with what should have been attended to earlier in the week. But a long conference away from home, numerous sick calls, and other pastoral duties had kept me from the orderly study and preparation which ought to be our ideal. When he noticed that the corners of my mouth were a bit depressed, he asked me why I was downcast. When I said: "It is rather hard to be a preacher when you have to walk the floor with your child most of the night, and then try to write your sermon on Saturday," he at once replied: "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Rather thank God that your child is still so small that you can carry her in your arms. Wait until your child is out all night, and you are walking the floor wondering where she is, then you will have occasion to be concerned." He had a wayward daughter. I broke down and confessed that it was a well-deserved rebuke which I would take to

heart. By the grace of God that wayward girl was again won back to the Church and its saving truths. And the father has long since gone to his eternal reward. But I shall never forget.

Do not make the mistake, then, of thinking that God's revealed word is so dark and difficult that the average layman who faithfully reads it shall be left in doubt regarding the way to life. These words of the Psalmist are meant for laymen as well as for the most learned theologian: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105) It is not only for the preacher, but for the man in the pew as well that the following words have been penned:

*God's word a treasure is to me,
Through sorrow's night my sun shall be,
The shield of faith in battle;
The Father's hand hath written there
My title as His child and heir,
"The kingdom's thine forever;"
That promise faileth never.*

3. But it will be such a treasure to you only when you regard it, not as the word of *men*, but as the living word of the living God. There was no doubt in Peter's heart regarding the verbal inspiration of Scripture. For if there had been, how could he then have written as he does in our text: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"? (2 Peter 1:20-21)

You may make all manner of concession to the so-called "human side" of Holy Writ, but the fact remains that what God has caused to be recorded is not due to human thought or human ingenuity. For if it were a mixture of man-made opinion and divine doctrine, how could we then be certain that when we are speaking, we are speaking "as the oracles of God"? There be those who would tell us that Luther was in doubt as to the inspiration of Holy Writ. But if Luther were in doubt here, how could he then have written, as he does: "A tittle of the word is greater than heaven and earth, and that is why we damn and curse all who *in the least* would pervert the

majesty of God's word"? (St. L. IX, 655) And again: "Neither numbers, nor power, nor tyrants, neither the dreams of the errorists or the foolishness or weakness of the believers, must move us to doubt the truthfulness of God's word." (St. L. IX, 1839)

Let them speak, as a number of those who call themselves Lutherans do, that only that part of Scripture is inspired which pertains to our soul's salvation, but they must not seek to hide under the mantle of a Luther. For he tells us in no uncertain words: "When the heart clings to God's word then it may unhesitatingly say: That is God's word, it cannot deceive me nor fail me, of that I am certain." (St. L. XI, 441)

Oh, cling to the inviolability of the written word as to the very sheet anchor of your soul. For the devil knows that if he can but make you begin to doubt that all of God's word is divinely inspired and therefore absolutely trustworthy to the last detail, he will have won half the battle. If the outposts have given way, it will only be a matter of time when the citadel itself will fall.

Yours is a high and holy calling. It is the most momentous work which mortal men are called to do. But you may go confidently to work, if you make use of this word first of all for your own soul needs, and then apply it to the needs of those over whom the Holy Ghost will make you overseers. And don't be too much disturbed if you do not at once see tangible fruits of your work. Something big always happens whenever you minister in sincerity and in truth of your Lord and Saviour. May Luther's prayer ever be yours:

*Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy word,
Curb pope, and Turk, and all that horde,
Who fain would hurl from off Thy throne
Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son!*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom, that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee!*

*O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife,
And lead us out of death to life.*

Amen.

Baccalaureate Address at St. Louis, Missouri
July 12, 1945

A City Set on a Hill

by Theodore A. Aaberg

Introduction: The two pages which form the shortest and final chapter of A City Set on a Hill by Rev. T.A. Aaberg, may have been quoted more often than any other portion of the book. Having vividly brought us through all of the history and challenges of the Norwegian Synod and the ELS, the author concludes here with a very relevant, present-day lesson for each generation. The study of our past will have no real significance if we do not learn from it, to emulate the faith of those confessors who, by God's grace, have placed His truth before us.

The title for this anniversary volume has been chosen with the knowledge that a city has many people, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod but few; likewise, that a city set on a hill has prominence while the Evangelical Lutheran Synod is insignificant in the eyes of the world.

Why then the title? The answer is this: because it is the Savior who has designated the Christian as the light of the world, and has said in elaboration: "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." (Matthew 5:14) The Savior therefore also determines what makes the Christian the light of the world. In following His instructions the Christian is what the Lord has declared him to be.

Christ's directions for being the light of the world are plain. He has said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) He has said, further: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Possessing God's Word, that is, believing it, confessing it, abiding in it, refusing to turn aside from it either to the right or to the left, this makes the Christian the light of the world. Walking in God's ways, in repentance, in faith, in sanctification, this makes the Christian

the light of the world. Doing God's will, striving to pattern one's life according to the divine Word, laboring to witness faithfully to the world of God's grace in Christ, working in confidence and trust, leaving all to God's gracious will and direction, this makes the Christian the light of the world.

He is the light of the world who holds forth the Word of life, knowing that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." (1 Corinthians 1:25) He is the light of the world who, though surrounded and outnumbered by the enemy, proceeds with his Christian tasks in quiet confidence, knowing that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." (2 Kings 6:16)

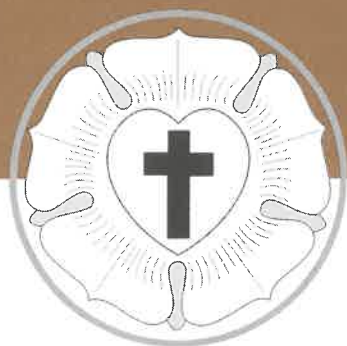
The Christian members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod have been the light of the world these past fifty years; their history is rightly called "*A City Set on a Hill.*" There undoubtedly have been hypocrites in its membership, and with every member there has been much that has not been right. Yet for all of that, the membership of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod has been characterized by a people who have continued in Jesus' Word, who have sought to do God's will, and who have put their trust in the promises of God.

This is the key to the Synod's future. Let it be that the future is hidden, that time brings changes, that there is much to cause apprehension; there is still that which is as sure as God Himself is sure, namely, His Word, His directives, and His promises. If the Synod's membership can be characterized in the future, as it has been in the past, by a people who continue in Jesus' Word, labor to do His will, and commit all their cause to Him in confident trust, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod will, under God, continue to be what it has been in the past, "*A City Set on a Hill.*"

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod must give prime consideration to this matter as it enters a new era of synodical history. Earthly inheritances can be handed down from generation to generation more or less automatically, but not so the *great* heritage. Truth, as a body of doctrine, can indeed be set before a people by the preceding generation, but each succeeding generation must, through the Holy Spirit, make this truth its own as a part of its very faith and life before it can actually be said to possess it. There is in this sense no continuity to synodical

history. Each succeeding generation must start all over again. In this way alone is a synod spared from offensive pride, dead orthodoxy, and liberalism. In this way alone is a new generation enabled to sing: “God’s Word is *our* great heritage.”

Tomorrow is hardly soon enough for those who celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod to begin anew the task of making that inheritance their own.



Front Cover:
Dr. Ulrik V. Koren (1826 - 1910)