

A STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURAL
AND CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLES.

(From CRESSET 36. May, 1973)

STUDY EDITION OF A STATEMENT OF SCRIPTURAL AND
CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLES.

St. Louis, Missouri, 1972. Pp. 47. \$1.45 per dozen.

The true knowledge of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is not only a glorious light, affording the correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, but without this knowledge Scripture is and remains a sealed book.

C. F. W. Walther

We have this year attempted to develop a definite style of review essay for theological books that we considered to be of immediate significance for the life and work of the church. We have assumed that significant books and documents deserve detailed attention. And we have structured our reviews around a simple basic outline:

We have attempted:

1. to give a brief description of the content of the books;
2. to describe the significance that the book would have, if its assertions and conclusions were valid (at this point, we have hoped that the reader could decide whether he was interested in knowing anything more about the book or note);
3. to evaluate the validity of the book and its conclusions;
4. to provide, where we disagreed with the book, at least some statement of a more valid alternative or to point the direction in which we thought such an alternative was to be sought;
5. to describe, where possible, the implications of the book for the pastoral ministry.

This review essay is the co-operative effort of four professors in the Department of Theology, Valparaiso University: Walter E. Keller; Kenneth F. Korby; Robert C. Schultz; and David G. Truemper.

THE FOLLOWING REVIEW ESSAY DIFFERS from previous review essays in that it is a group effort. The undersigned met together and discussed and analyzed the material involved. Then different members of the group assumed the primary responsibility for formulating our common thinking and conclusions. The reader will thus notice different styles of thinking and of writing. We have accepted such diversity in the hope that its disadvantages will be more than compensated for by the stimulation and balance that resulted from our group discussions.

A number of our reviews this year have assumed that the current doctrinal discussions in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod are of decisive importance not only for the future of that synod but for the shape of relationships among Lutherans during the foreseeable future. On that assumption, we are this month focusing our review on one of the most significant documents produced out of that discussion: J.A.O. Preus, *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*. Careful discussion and analysis of this document is of great significance both for the future course of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and for the flowering or the dessication of the tender flower of Lutheran unity in the United States.

As far as we know, neither those who accept nor those who reject this document have given it the careful, serious attention which it deserves: a clear,

simple analysis of what it actually says. In November of 1972, the executive secretary of the Missouri Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR), Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann, issued a "study edition" of *A Statement*. However, this study edition merely reprints the text of each article of *A Statement* and follows it with "proof texts" from Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, Missouri Synod Statements, Study Documents, and Resolutions. Some indication is given of the part of *A Statement* to which these quotations supposedly apply, but Dr. Bohlmann never clarifies how this imposing array of proof texts really supports the assertions of *A Statement*. The weaknesses of such a proof-text approach are too apparent to need extensive comment. Dr. Bohlmann's citations once again demonstrate that there is no necessary correlation between the understanding of such proof texts and the purpose for which they are cited. These citations are then followed by an unusual kind of catechism, in which many difficult questions are raised but no answers are offered. We shall occasionally refer to this study edition material for illustrative purposes, but our essay focuses primarily on the content of *A Statement* itself.

The study edition of *A Statement* specifies two goals of this document:

1. "to serve as a tool to identify theological and doctrinal issues which the synod needs to consider and resolve."
2. "to offer guidance in applying Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to those issues." (Study edition, Preface, p. 5)

We have studied *A Statement*. We have carefully analyzed its content in terms of its stated goals. We have also read the supporting material in the study edition and thought through the questions which the study edition raises. We conclude that *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* adequately fulfills neither of the tasks which it has set for itself. It does not "identify the theological and doctrinal issues which the Synod needs to consider and resolve." And the "guidance" which it offers "in applying Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions" to the issues it specifies and which are further defined in the study edition is frequently misleading. We shall identify those failures and inadequacies in the article-by-article discussion of the *Statement* which follows. That evaluation does not, of course, imply that we disagree with any particular assertion of *A Statement* except as here specified. We shall begin our analysis of this document by first reprinting the article of *A Statement* under discussion and, where pertinent, the "Questions" suggested by the study edition. We shall then respond to this material in whole or in part.

BEFORE BEGINNING THAT ANALYSIS, however, we need to address ourselves briefly to a question, raised by Dr. Bohlmann's "Preface" to the study edition, which is in our opinion counterproductive of the kind of analysis which *A Statement* requests and deserves. Dr. Bohlmann raises the specter that we cannot differ with the statement without condemning the entire Missouri Synod. He first quotes an evaluation by a Lutheran Church in America theologian, Leigh Jordahl, who describes *A Statement* as "solid Missouriianism." Dr. Bohlmann then asks: "If indeed *A Statement* is 'solid Missouriianism,' how can it be said to have 'a spirit alien to Lutheran confessional theology' without thereby indicting the entire Synod?" (p. 5)

That question deserves two loud and clear answers. First, Professor Jordahl is in error. His evaluation of *A Statement* as "solid Missouriianism" is wrong, whether one views that evaluation as a historical or as a theological judgment. Second, *A Statement* represents the opinion of its authors and those who have subscribed to it. We may safely reject the inadequacies of its theology "without thereby indicting the entire Synod." We may even reject *A Statement* without fear of dealing inappropriately with its authors. For the *Formula of Concord* itself advises us to avoid repeating the inadequate formulations of "not a few orthodox teachers" (SD, IV, 36; Tappert, p. 557). And theologians of the Missouri Synod have never considered one another's writings as being above criticism.

Now, however, we turn our attention to the issues themselves, to examine where *A Statement* does in fact "identify theological and doctrinal issues which the Synod needs to consider and resolve" and whether it provides acceptable "guidance in applying Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to those issues."

I. Christ as Savior and Lord

We believe, teach, and confess that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord, and that through faith in Him we receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. We confess that "our works cannot reconcile God or merit forgiveness of sins and grace but that we obtain forgiveness and grace only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake, who alone has been ordained to be the mediator and propitiation through whom the Father is reconciled" (AC, XX, 9). We believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven and that all who die without faith in Him are eternally damned. We believe that those who believe in Christ will enjoy a blissful relationship with Him during the interim between their death and His second coming and that on the last day their bodies will be raised.

We therefore reject the following:

1. That we may operate on the assumption that there may be other ways of salvation than through faith in Jesus Christ;
2. That some persons who lack faith in Christ may be considered "anonymous Christians";
3. That there is no eternal hell for unbelievers and ungodly men. (p. 9)

This first article is laudably concerned to affirm that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone, and is furnished with appropriate negative corollaries rejecting any alternative faith or alternative savior. That is, unquestionably Scriptural and Confessional, and reproduces the essential content of the heading of this article: Christ as Savior and Lord.

However, the explicit purpose of *A Statement* is to identify theological and doctrinal issues which the Synod needs to consider and resolve. Is *A Statement* suggesting that significant numbers of theologians and pastors do not believe, teach, and confess this central evangelical truth? If so, the absence of any supporting documentation can only have the effect of creating needless anxiety and suspicion, or can only be regarded as resorting to the dubious tactic of accusation by innuendo.

But we must ask even more pointedly: "What *theological* problem is here being identified?" To this question we find no hint of an answer, for it is one thing to imply widespread denial of a fundamental article of the Gospel, but it is an altogether different matter to describe the tangled theological issues. There may indeed be a theological problem, but *A Statement* does not identify it. Consequently, its purpose to give guidance in applying Scripture and the Confessions to "those issues" must necessarily also falter. A list of Bible passages, Confessional citations, and Synodical resolutions is really not very helpful, since these have no specified target and are directed to no articulated theological problematic.

If *A Statement* does not clearly identify a theological problem and therefore cannot offer guidance in reaching a resolution, it nevertheless succeeds in exhibiting a theological problem. Consider how this first article stresses that Christ is sole Savior and Lord by faith alone. The affirmative thesis then continues by stating that believers in Christ will enjoy a blissful relationship with Him during the interim between their death and their resurrection on the last day. The study edition returns to this subject in question #6, where it asks a series of three questions:

6. Is there a conflict between Scripture passages that refer to or imply the interim state of believers after death (i.e., Philippians 1:3; Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Romans 8:38) and those that refer to the resurrection of the body (i.e., 1 Corinthians 15: 42-44; John 5: 28-29)? Can sound Christian teaching or pastoral care be exercised when one or the other aspect of eternal

life is neglected or denied? What significance should be attached to the fact that the Scriptures place a greater emphasis on the resurrection of the body than on the interim state? (p. 11)

It is evident that *A Statement* regards it as important that an affirmation of Christ as Savior and Lord include also a positive assertion about the interim state of the believers, and an interim moreover that, according to a cited theological opinion of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, cited in the study edition (p. 10), provides for full consciousness of bliss.

Now, the theological problem exhibited by this position may be formulated thus: By what theological principle is the Scriptural teaching of Christ as sole Savior and Lord through faith alone extended to validate pious speculations regarding the interim as necessary church dogma? How do either the questions or the expected answer grow out of the central affirmation of Christ as Savior and Lord? Suppose that, despite a CTCR opinion to the contrary, someone were to hold (as none other than Luther himself does, *WA* 31/1, 517) that there is no consciousness of bliss in the interim, encouraged in this alternative opinion by the numerous biblical metaphors of death as a sleep. How would this undermine the sole Saviorhood and Lordship of that Christ who died for us and revealed his triumph over death for us in his resurrection from the dead? According to apostolic preaching, Jesus Christ is our Savior and Lord because he died for our sins according to the Scripture, he was buried, and he was raised on the third day according to the Scripture. To raise the question of the interim at this point either trivializes the doctrine of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord or introduces a hidden theological agenda. Perhaps for the sake of comprehensiveness, the study edition does both.

II. Law and Gospel

We believe that the two chief doctrines of Holy Scripture, Law and Gospel, must be constantly and diligently proclaimed in the church of God until the end of the world, but with due distinction (FC, SD, V, 24). The Law, as the expression of God's immutable will, is to be used by the church to bring men to a knowledge of their sins as well as to provide Christians with instruction about good works (FC, SD, V, 17-18). The Gospel receives the primary emphasis in the ministry of the New Testament, for it is the message that "God forgives them all their sins through Christ, accepts them for His sake as God's children, and out of pure grace, without any merit of their own, justifies and saves them." (FC, SD, V, 25)

We therefore reject the following:

1. That the Gospel is any message or action which brings good news to a bad situation.

2. That the Gospel is a norm or standard for the Christian life, or that the Gospel, in effect, imposes a new law upon the Christian.

3. That what God's law declares to be sinful (for example, adultery or theft) need not be regarded as sinful in all times and situations.

4. That Christians, as men who have been freed from the curse of the Law, no longer need the instruction of the Law to know what God's will is for their life and conduct. (p. 12)

A Statement, in insisting that the Law and the Gospel must be constantly proclaimed in the church, "but with due distinction," reminds us that it is not enough to make a distinction between the Law and the Gospel, as if all that were required were that *some* distinction between them be made; rather a *particular*, "due" or, as the heirs of Walther would have it, a "proper" distinction is required. Not every distinction between Law and Gospel is that *due* distinction called for by the Lutheran Confessions. Indeed, Walther's great series of lectures was concerned to clarify that proper distinction over against inappropriate, improper, undue, misleading, and wrong ways of distinguishing. It is in Missouri's best tradition to recognize that there is *one* "due" distinction, as the *Formula of Concord* (SD, V, 24-25; Tappert, p. 563) says, "the *due* distinction" must be made "so that in the ministry of the New Testament the proclamation of the law and its threats will terrify the hearts of the unrepentant and bring them to a knowledge of their sin and to repentance, but not in such a way that they become despondent and despair therein. Rather, . . . the proclamation of the Gospel of our Lord Christ will once more comfort and strengthen them with the assurance that if they believe the Gospel God forgives them. . . ."

ONE OF THE MAJOR CONCERNS WHICH *A Statement* addresses, however, is not that this "due distinction" be made, but rather that the applicability of the Law to Christians be maintained. Although *A Statement* does not appeal to Article VI of the *Formula of Concord* (Tappert, pp. 563-568) and its discussion of the so-called "third use of the law," it nevertheless twice expresses its concern for that idea. It does so by speaking of the Law's function "to provide Christians with instructions about good works" in the thesis, and, in the fourth antithesis, by rejecting the idea that Christians "no longer need the instruction of the law to know what God's will is for their life and conduct." To be sure, the *Formula of Concord* does in fact speak of the Law's function of providing instruction. But what is not made clear, either in *A Statement* or in the citations of the study edition, is that the *Formula of Concord* is careful always to relate the instruction of the Law to the need for repentance. There is no justification in the *Formula of*

Concord for separating a purely instructional function of the Law from its principal, theological, accusing function; and the reason for that is stated quite plainly in the *Formula of Concord* (SD, VI, 9; Tappert, p. 595): "because of the desires of the flesh the truly believing, elect, and reborn children of God require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well, to egg them on so that they follow the Spirit of God." And the preceding sections of that article of the *Formula of Concord* make that point even more fully.

Further, in its insistence that the Law be proclaimed in the church to Christians, *A Statement* fails to indicate the real reason for that proclamation, the context or alternative against which the Law is to be proclaimed. It implies, unfortunately, that the Law's place for Christians is to give them information which they otherwise would not have about the conduct of their life, as if the new man in Christ were without moral direction or aim until the Law of God was proclaimed to him, so that he would then "know what God's will is for [his] life and conduct." But the *Formula of Concord* seeks not simply to assert that the Law remains valid, but also to show *why* and *how*, in accord with the "due distinction" between the Law and the Gospel, the Law is to be proclaimed to Christians. And it does this by two devices: first, Article IV of the *Formula of Concord* shows that the antithesis is that entire system of self-chosen, holy, good works which a person performs with a view to gaining God's favor; and, second, Article VI shows that whatever instruction the Law gives to the Christian serves to expose his sin: "The law of God prescribes good works for faith in such a way that, as a mirror, it shows and indicates to them that in this life our good works are imperfect and impure"; and it concludes: "The Old Adam, like an unmanageable and recalcitrant donkey, is still a part of them and must be coerced into the obedience of Christ, not only with the instruction, admonition, urging, and threatening of the law, but frequently also with the club of punishments and miseries" (SD, VI, 21 and 24; Tappert, p. 567f.). Thus the *Formula of Concord* makes clear that the need for the Law in the church is to oppose any system of self-chosen works, and to expose the imperfection even of those works which the Christian does in response to the Law of God.

A Statement properly rejects the idea that "the Gospel is any message or action which brings good news to a bad situation." The imprecision and inadequacy of that slogan are quite obvious, for although it has the virtue of underscoring the *situation* to which the Gospel is *Good News*, it is notoriously imprecise in specifying what is *bad* in that

situation or what is *good* about the news of the Gospel message. Would, however, that *A Statement* were even that concerned about the genuinely bad situation created by the Law of God, from which the Gospel about Jesus Christ is in fact the good news of release. However, *A Statement* in Article II underplays the seriousness of the situation which any and every look into the *mirror* of God's Law discloses. One simply cannot cozy up to God's Law as if it were a source of pious directives for an otherwise un-directed life; the Law *always* accuses and exposes. What believers do as *Christians*, their good works, "are still imperfect and impure," as the Law makes clear; yet those sinful good works "are acceptable to God through Christ because according to their inmost self they [Christians] do what is pleasing to God not by coercion of the law but willingly and spontaneously from the heart by the renewal of the Holy Spirit" (SD, VI, 23; Tappert, p. 568).

The third rejection is also symptomatic of *A Statement's* lack of sensitivity for the full seriousness of that reality called "the Law of God." Rejected is the assertion "that what God's law declares to be sinful (e.g., adultery or theft) need not be regarded as sinful in all times and situations." Now, *A Statement* is quite right in its insistence that what the Law calls sin is indeed sin. It rightly rejects the idea that Law is only a bit of divine whimsy, altering itself according to the divine mood—or, worse, according to the human mood. But the understanding of Law in *A Statement* is only that of divine legislation or command. The essential word of Law in this view is "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not," and the corollary is that the contrary is sinful. In contrast to the *Formula of Concord*, *A Statement* fails to see that the Law in exercising its proper function "to condemn sin and to lead to a knowledge of sin," aims always to expose unbelief, the "root and fountainhead of all culpable sin" (SD, V, 17; Tappert, p. 561). *A Statement* speaks as if, in terms of the Law, the Christian were in a position different from the non-Christian; as if the Law's accusation were not equally true of all men; as if, before God's Law, all men were not receivers of a divine verdict of "Guilty—Death!" For if Law is, as *A Statement* seems to believe, only legislation, then one could use it like a boy scout's handbook; one could conclude that he had in fact done some things that were not sin, that he had done a deed that in fact pleased God. By contrast, the genuinely Lutheran insight into the *due* distinction between Law and Gospel is maintained when one makes clear that it is only under the Gospel that any works are pleasing to God.

BUT WHAT MORE IS THE LAW BESIDES

legislation? And what good is it to insist on that larger view of the Law of God? First, we should say that Law, or life under God's Law, is the whole of reality outside of Christ and the Gospel. Thus, it includes those situations or relationships which the specific commandments presuppose; for example, the command against adultery assumes the existence of a marriage, and the command to honor parents assumes the parent-child relationship. In this way, one can say that the whole factual reality, good and bad, promising and threatening, full of man's best and worst actions—all that is "under the Law," the realm of what the *Formula of Concord* and *A Statement* after it, calls "the immutable will of God" (except that *A Statement* uses also that phrase in a purely legislative way). The *Formula of Concord* makes clear that it includes an awareness of this creational reality when, in defining the word "necessary" as it was applied to good works, it refers "to the immutable order which obligates and binds all men to be obedient to God, but at times it implies the coercion with which the law forces men to do good works" (SD, IV, 4; Tappert, p. 551). But, because of that "order" and that "legislation" of the Law, the sinner's situation vis-a-vis the Law of God is always the wages of sin. And for that reason it is necessary to say that God's Law also is the whole reality which St. Paul calls the *wrath* of God, the disclosure that the creature is out-of-bounds, guilty, marked for death. In other words, Law is also, finally, the divine verdict and execution of sentence on man the culprit.

In view of all this, the *Formula of Concord* speaks quite clearly when it says, "to reprove is the real function of the law" (SD, VI, 14; Tappert, p. 566). And that same clarity is apparent when it regularly qualifies the Law's function for Christians with clauses such as this: "Since, however, believers are not fully renewed in this life . . ." (SD, VI, 18; Tappert, p. 567). For the Christian, as for the non-Christian, a look at the Law is always a look into a "mirror," in which "it shows and indicates to them that in this life our good works are imperfect and impure" (SD, VI, 21; Tappert, p. 567).

That same third rejection fails to make clear, as any serious churchly confessional statement should, that man's situation of utter jeopardy under the Law of God cannot be repaired by the Law of God, by some better or different or wiser or more equitable application of Law. Here Missouri's pastoral practice outstrips her vain attempts, in public utterance, to repair either church or world by *legal* statements. But it takes only a couple of examples of genuine moral dilemmas to convince the curate of souls that the Law does not solve its own problems; so he counsels with warm evangeli-

cal assurance to free a trapped soul from the "damned-if-you-do-and-damned-if-you-don't" dilemma with freeing words of forgiveness. A fully serious understanding of the radical jeopardy of life under the Law of sin and death would help one to see that we are always in that situation when we encounter the Law, and that only the Gospel about Jesus Christ can bring good news to that bad situation. Then such counsel as the pastor gives is not mere sloppy indulgence, nor is it a deft bit of casuistry or finding a legal loophole or appealing to a higher law; the counsel is the freeing word of the Gospel, rectifying the sinner's wrong situation and setting him again on the path of God's good pleasure. As the *Formula of Concord* puts it, "The Law demands a perfect and pure obedience if it is to please God. It does not teach us how and why the good works of believers are pleasing to God, even though in this life they are still imperfect and impure because of the sin in our flesh. But the Gospel teaches us that our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through faith for Christ's sake (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 11:4; 13:15)" (SD, VI, 22; Tappert, p. 567).

To summarize: because *A Statement* understands the Law of God merely as legislation, as divine commands, and thus omits the reality of the wrath of God against sin from consideration, it comes to moralistic conclusions about the Law, conclusions which betray its fundamental failure to observe the *due* distinction between the Law and the Gospel. Though it *calls for* a proper distinction, it does not *do* that distinguishing properly. Thus its Law is moralized and its Gospel is, correspondingly, emasculated.

III. Mission of the Church

We believe, teach, and confess that the primary mission of the church is to make disciples of every nation by bearing witness to Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Other necessary activities of the church, such as ministering to men's physical needs, are to serve the church's primary mission and its goal that men will believe and confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

We therefore reject any views of the mission of the church which imply:

That an adequate or complete witness to Jesus Christ can be made without proclaiming or verbalizing the Gospel. (p. 15)

Much of Article III is praiseworthy, especially its rejection of any conception of the mission of the church which imagines that adequate witness to Jesus Christ can be made without proclaiming or verbalizing the Gospel.

A Statement proposes to give guidance to the Synod in applying the Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to issues facing the churches.

It appears that this article wants to supply such guidance in the matter of the relation of the "external" word of the preached Gospel (whereby the saving faith in Jesus Christ is engendered) and the life of love (whereby believers bear witness to Jesus Christ and care for men's physical needs). The study edition underlines this emphasis by raising the following questions about the relationship between evangelism and a "social welfare program":

4. Should a congregation give greater attention to its evangelism efforts than to its social welfare program? Why or why not?

5. Should the church as such engage in humanitarian efforts (e.g., aiding the poor, helping refugees, or assisting the victims of injustice), or is it better for the church to encourage individual Christian action? Are these proper alternatives?

6. What, if anything, is distinctively Christian about the church's humanitarian actions?

7. Suggest ways in which all the various activities of your congregation can be more directly and explicitly related to bearing witness to the Gospel. (p. 17)

We agree that these issues are deeply important for the life of the church and her mission. Lutherans frequently have had difficulty in describing adequately the relationship between justification (being effectively declared righteous before God by faith in Jesus Christ) and sanctification (living the life of holiness in one's vocation). And, certainly, the tradition of the "social Gospel" in American church life makes it even more imperative for Lutherans in America to come to grips with questions of social engagement by the churches. Jesus himself calls to us: "Let your light shine before men *that* they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Deeds need the illumination of the light before they can be seen in such a way as to glorify the Father in heaven. That illumination is nothing else than the Light, Jesus Christ, preached and witnessed to as both Source and End of the deeds.

However, although we applaud some of the manifest intent of Article III and welcome guidance in these matters, we must still ask how much guidance *A Statement* really gives us in these matters. There are some striking omissions:

First, *A Statement* does not help us think about the mission of the church in the light of what the church is. The distinctions made by the study edition in question #5 are misleading: "Should the church as such engage in humanitarian efforts . . . , or is it better for the church to encourage individual Christian action? Are these proper alternatives?" We answer, "No; they are not proper alternatives." No clarification is given to the phrase "the church as such." However she may be defined in the questions, the church is there set apart from

the "individual Christian action," as if the church were not the ethos for that member's action. We certainly need guidance in our day to learn more clearly what the church is. We also need clarification on the relation between the ethical actions of individual members and the Christian community as ethos for those actions. *A Statement* helps us toward neither goal. That failure is closely related to its unclear presentation on the lordship of Christ (Article I) and its distorted perspective on the preaching of Law and Gospel (Article II). Given such limitations, we ought not have expected a deeper understanding of the nature and mission of the church.

Second, although some of the supporting confessional and synodical material in the study edition hints at resources which could guide congregations and pastors to an increased understanding of the union between faith and love, *A Statement* not only offers no help, but even sets the diaconal work of the church in a context that corrupts love at its heart. Is that love genuine which loves only for another purpose? Is not the love of God for us and the love of God's people for the world willing to rest content with loving? Is Christian love a kind of "Marshall Plan," carried out to extend the influence and power of the doer? Divine and Christian love will indeed to give the supreme gift of the Gospel to everyone. But deeds of love have a righteous integrity in God and in the faithful heart which cannot allow them to be used for serving some other end. The witnessing church has a passion, a love, also that the hearer be ready and able to hear the word of the Gospel spoken. Compulsion to talk about the Lord while doing the deed of love may in fact reveal the compulsive guilt of the doer — something quite different from a free and glad witness to the Lord Jesus, who is both Source and End of the good deed.

STUDY QUESTION #7 REVEALS AN INTERESTING dimension of this kind of thinking. As our discussion of the Law in Article II already indicated, *A Statement* does not take the Law with the same radical seriousness as the *Formula of Concord* does. As a result, there is no emphasis on the preaching of the Law as an essential part of the mission of the church. Correspondingly, there is no guidance given for the activity of the congregation for preaching the Law. Hence, no instruction is given toward that activity which is done for the sake of preserving and maintaining God's good creation. Christians join God in His work in creation and in His work in redemption. The works are distinct and Christians need guidance in making distinctions between them while joining in both. But *A Statement* and the study edition collapse the work of creation into the redemption,

just as the Law has been subsumed under the Gospel. Even the goodness of God can at best bring men to repentance. Yet there are some things that are worth doing for the sake of God's creation even though they cannot be related to bearing witness to the Gospel. God himself continues to perform many good and merciful deeds in the lives of men, even though those merciful deeds do not become a proclamation of the Gospel; that happens only when the good news about Jesus is spoken. *A Statement* suggests that "there can be no adequate or complete witness of Jesus . . . without proclaiming or verbalizing the Gospel." That is too cautious: there can be no witness to Jesus as Lord *at all* unless the Gospel is preached or the sacraments administered. But that emphasis leaves the church free to do acts of mercy with integrity, for the sake of doing those acts of mercy and not for some other goal.

This misdirection about the relationship between faith and love is grounded precisely in the failure of *A Statement* to give clear and accurate guidance in the matter of saving faith and its relationship to the preached and sacramentally-administered Gospel. This failure is, in turn, related to the failure to distinguish properly between the Law and the Gospel as was shown in our comments on Article II. It follows from this that obedience loses its demands; faith loses its consolation; love loses its energy.

Thirdly, the consequences of this failure in *A Statement* can be seen in the neglect to give guidance to the church in her mission as a teaching and worshipping community. While difficult questions are raised, no guidance is given to the congregations for teaching or disciplining the members in holiness to care for the needs of the members of the congregation. In fact, it seems encouragement is given in the opposite direction! But the church has always been aware of the obligation to care for the members of the household of faith. And for many years the congregations of the Missouri Synod opposed fraternities, societies, insurance groups, and the like, precisely on the grounds that the Christians were to care for their poor, sick, dying, injured, and unemployed members. We need continually to be taught, guided, and disciplined in this work. But in these days of bad manners, evil conduct, and poor inner disposition, nothing is said in Article III about the mission of the church as the solicitous mother who teaches her children to walk in holiness before God.

Finally, *A Statement* gives not one word of guidance about the mission of the church in relation to her worship life. In a time when commissions on worship, worship committees, young people, indeed almost everyone is changing liturgical forms, using new texts and hymns, casting off what is tried and true, re-orienting the focus of worship,

introducing forms that are strange and maybe even trivial, it is appalling that *A Statement* and its study edition should give no guidance to this dimension of the mission of the church.

IV. Holy Scripture

The lengthiest part of *A Statement* is Article IV, "Holy Scripture." Its length is disproportionate to its importance—unless *A Statement* intends to say that this is the major question confronting the church today. But in that case, *A Statement* would have seriously failed in its task of identifying the issues which the church needs to discuss. Theoretical questions about the authority of Scripture that divert us from that task do not help but impede the mission of the church. *A Statement* does not demonstrate that the issues which it raises actually are current and central issues in the church's use of Scripture in the apostolic mission assigned to us by our Lord, that of hearing and communicating the full message of Scripture.

Thus we respond to *A Statement* in a variety of ways. One of our responses is, "We hear what you are trying to say, but that is neither confessional nor Scriptural." In order to maintain reasonable limits on the length of this discussion we shall focus on this response. We omit any detailed discussion of sections F, G, H, and I, on the infallibility and unity of the Scripture, on Old Testament prophecy, and on methods of biblical interpretation. We omit these, not because they are not at issue in the present controversy, but because they are *relatively* secondary in the Lutheran Confessions' view of Scripture, and because those very technical matters need much careful study before they can be defined in a confessionally appropriate way, as *A Statement* wishes to do. For the Lutheran Confessions teach us to *begin* the discussion of the doctrine of Scripture by affirming the illuminating power of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel, "an especially brilliant light which serves the purpose that the Word of God may be rightly divided and the writings of the holy prophets and apostles may be explained and understood correctly" (*Formula of Concord*, SD, V, 1; Tappert, p. 558). They also affirm that "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments" are "the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated" (*Formula of Concord*, Rule and Norm, 3; Tappert, p. 503f.). There is no confessional fascination with the question of the canon. And, regarding methods of interpretation, it should be clear from Article IV of the *Apology* that the Symbols insist on the priority of *theological* criteria (specifically, the due distinction between the Law and the Gospel) over *intellectual* (rational, critical, historical) criteria in interpreting the Scriptures.

One response is appropriately addressed to all sections of this article: *A Statement* is very Gospel-conscious. That is good. However, unlike the Confessions and the Scripture, *A Statement* here says very little about the Law. We have already indicated why we feel that the references to the Law in Article II are quite shallow in comparison with the Confessions. In this article on Scripture, assertions are made that are true of the Gospel but that cease to be true when made of Law and Gospel. Because *A Statement* is unaware of this, it fails to identify one of the major problems confronting theological interpretation today: the effective application of the distinction between the Law and the Gospel to our doctrine of Scripture.

A. The Inspiration of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true Author of every word of Scripture. We acknowledge that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness of every other form of human expression, making the Bible a unique book.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the Holy Scriptures are inspired only in the sense that all Christians are "inspired" to confess the lordship of Jesus Christ.
2. That the Holy Spirit did not inspire the actual words of the Biblical authors but merely provided these men with special guidance.
3. That only those matters in Holy Scripture were inspired by the Holy Spirit which directly pertain to Jesus Christ and man's salvation.
4. That noncanonical writings in the Christian tradition can be regarded as "inspired" in the same sense as Holy Scripture.
5. That portions of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ contain imaginative additions which had their origin in the early Christian community and do not present actual facts. (p. 18)

These assertions seem to prove too much. When *A Statement* asserts that the inspired witness of the Holy Scripture is qualitatively different from "the witness of every other form of human expression," it excludes the oral, never-written-down preaching of the apostles about what Jesus said and did. The author of John's Gospel reminds us that he knows much he did not write about. St. Paul does not hesitate to call his own preaching the very Word of God.

We accept the inspired Scriptures as the Spirit's gift to the church of a uniquely reliable and attested witness to the apostolic preaching about Jesus. The end served by that preaching (together with the written Word in the service of that preaching) is to make men wise to salvation, to equip, train, rebuke, and prepare the people of God for

every good work. The fact that faith comes by hearing (Romans 10) underscores that the Word of God is essentially an oral action and the church is pre-eminently an auditor. The witness of the Spirit, making the apostles witnesses of Jesus Christ, grounds the church in Christ and the apostles. The Spirit inspired their writings so that the church would be embedded in the apostolic message and guarded against the propensity of sin to pervert the saving message. The perversity of sinners to modify the Law of God by turning it into a moral pattern, to revise the Gospel of God by turning it into any self-styled, cheery message, thus engendering false faith, is resisted and corrected by the norm of the written Word. The uniqueness of the Scriptures lies in their being the only attested witnesses to the apostolic preaching and teaching today. The inspired Scriptures norm the apostolic message preached today in the church; they also norm all confessions of faith and doctrinal statements. Holy men of God still speak today as they preach God's Law to reveal and reprove sin and God's Gospel in Christ Jesus for salvation by faith. Or is our absolution less certain than Paul's or Peter's? Luther's *Small Catechism* teaches us to believe that the absolution we hear "from the confessor [is] as from God himself."

However, all claims by any person or in a document to be inspired must be tested against the apostolic norms, for the Spirit does not contradict Himself. We today test such claims in exactly the same way that Luther tested the book of James and other New Testament books whose apostolic character was in doubt. He found some of these books to be non-apostolic.

This article of *A Statement* rejects the inspiration of non-canonical writings. By what authority does *A Statement* distinguish between canonical and non-canonical writings? The authors of *A Statement* surely know the tradition of the Missouri Synod. The assertion that James, Hebrews, 2 and 3 John, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation are canonical cannot be made binding doctrine nor can it be made grounds for an accusation of false doctrine. Are they inspired? If we do not hold them to be canonical, may we hold them to be inspired? May we decide they are inspired but not canonical? What decision is primary? When canonicity is questioned we find *A Statement* offers no other clue than inspiration. And when inspiration is questioned, it offers no other clue than canonicity. There is no other clue; for any two people may agree or disagree about the canonicity and/or inspiration of James (and therefore also about this section of *A Statement*) without any necessary consequences for agreement or disagreement on any point of doctrine or practice — not on the six-day creation, the deity of Christ, the firmament and

the windows of heaven, nor even on justification through faith without works, and the distinction between the Law and the Gospel.

B. The Purpose of Scripture

We believe that all Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ and that its primary purpose is to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We therefore affirm that the Scriptures are rightly used only when they are read from the perspective of justification by faith and the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Since the saving work of Jesus Christ was accomplished through His personal entrance into our history and His genuinely historical life, death, and resurrection, we acknowledge that the recognition of the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That knowing the facts and data presented in the Scripture, without relating them to Jesus Christ and His work of salvation, represents an adequate approach to Holy Scripture.

2. That the Old Testament, read on its own terms, does not bear witness to Jesus Christ.

3. That it is permissible to reject the historicity of events or the occurrence of miracles recorded in the Scriptures so long as there is no confusion of Law and Gospel.

4. That recognition of the primary purpose of Scripture makes it irrelevant whether such questions of fact as the following are answered in the affirmative: Were Adam and Eve real historical individuals? Did Israel cross the Red Sea on dry land? Did the brazen serpent miracle actually take place? Was Jesus really born of a virgin? Did Jesus perform all the miracles attributed to Him? Did Jesus' resurrection actually involve the return to life of His dead body? (p. 20)

The assertion that "all Scripture bears witness to Jesus Christ" is an example of *A Statement's* Gospel-reductionism. All Scripture does not bear witness to Jesus Christ. The Scripture is full of statements that do not do so — neither as individual statements nor in their proper context. Statements such as "Nimrod was a hunter," and "The man who sins shall die," are not Gospel; they do not bear witness to Jesus Christ. On the contrary, they are Law. We thus have no quarrel with this article's first rejection, for example. However, we would suggest to the authors of *A Statement* that they are very close to the anti-nomianism condemned by Luther and Melancthon in the *Instruction to the Visitors* (1528). Like those anti-nomians, *A Statement* preaches the Gospel of Jesus without relating it to the Scriptural understanding of sin (see Article V) and the confessional proclamation of the Law as a call to repentance (see our comments on Articles II and III).

C. The Gospel and Holy Scripture

(Material and Formal Principles)

We believe, teach, and confess that the Gospel of the gracious justification of the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ is not only the chief doctrine of Holy Scripture and a basic presupposition for the interpretation of Scripture, but the heart and center of our Christian faith and theology (material principle). We also believe, teach, and confess that only the Word of God shall establish articles of faith" (SA, II, ii, 15), and that "the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 1) (formal principle). The Gospel which is the center of our theology is the Gospel to which the Scriptures bear witness, while the Scriptures from which we derive our theology direct us steadfastly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We reject the following distortions of the relationship between the Gospel and the Bible (the material and formal principles):

1. That acceptance of the Bible as such, rather than the Gospel, is the heart and center of Christian faith and theology, and the way to eternal salvation.

2. That the Gospel, rather than Scripture, is the norm for appraising and judging all doctrines and teachers (as, for example, when a decision on the permissibility of ordaining women into the pastoral office is made on the basis of the "Gospel" rather than on the teaching of Scripture as such).

3. That the historicity or facticity of certain Biblical accounts (such as the Flood or the Fall) may be questioned, provided this does not distort the Gospel.

4. That Christians need not accept matters taught in the Scriptures that are not a part of the "Gospel." (p. 23)

The conceptual tools of the material and formal principles introduced by *A Statement* are neither Scriptural nor confessional. They were developed by late eighteenth-century rationalism as a way of looking at various positions without involving the question of truth. They were brought to the United States by theologians who had been trained by rationalistic and semi-rationalistic theologians and used without reflection. F.E. Mayer used these terms effectively and appropriately as tools to compare various Christian denominations as long as he was concerned with understanding and explaining various positions apart from the question of their truth. As soon as one asks the question of whether this is true for me, the distinction between the formal and material principle cannot be maintained. The four rejections in this section of *A Statement* rest upon the attempt to maintain this distinction in connection with questions of truth; they are therefore inadequate and inappropriate.

For example, the first rejection asserts that the acceptance of the Gospel is "the heart and center of Christian faith, and the way to salvation." Such an assertion can be properly made only of Jesus who is the way to the Father and of the grace of God revealed in kind; it is never true of "acceptance of . . . the Gospel."

This inadequate formulation of *A Statement* underlies the formulation of the next three rejections as well. For example, we personally know of no Lutheran who would assert that "the Gospel . . . is the norm for appraising all doctrines." To say that would imply the Gospel is the norm of the Law. Consequently, questions #3 and #5 are inadequately formulated:

3. Some people argue that since the Gospel is the object of faith it should also be regarded as the norm of theology. What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of this argument?

5. Must all theological questions be "elevated" to "Gospel questions" in order for them to be truly Lutheran? For example, is it Lutheran to ask Holy Scripture simply whether it is God's will for children to obey their parents, or must that question somehow become a "Gospel question"? (p. 26)

Now we shall reformulate them and address them to the authors of *A Statement*: the possibility suggested by question #3 is very weak. We would rephrase it thus: 3. The Confessions assert that all Scripture, which is the norm of all theology, is to be divided into the Law and the Gospel. The doctrinal content of the church's preaching and teaching is to be evaluated in terms of its adequate proclamation of and proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel. And its faithfulness to the Scriptural norm is to be evaluated in terms of its skill in properly dividing the Law and the Gospel. Why are some theologians who consider themselves faithful to the Scripture unwilling to accept such an evaluation? We would then also rephrase question #5: Are any theological matters of doctrinal significance if they do not involve the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel? Is it Lutheran to insist on the acceptance of any Scriptural statement as a matter of doctrine unless we are able to show how it depends on the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel?

D. The Authority of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that because the Scriptures have God as their author, they possess both the divine power to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (causative authority), as well as the divine authority to serve as the church's sole standard of doctrine and life (normative authority). We recognize that the authority of Scripture can be accepted only through faith and not merely by rational demonstration. As men of faith, we affirm not only that Holy Scripture is powerful and efficacious, but also that it is "the only judge,

rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong." (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 7)

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That the authority of Scripture is limited to its efficacy in bringing men to salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. That the authority of Scripture has reference only to what the Scriptures do (as means of grace) rather than to what they are (as the inspired Word of God).
3. That the Scriptures are authoritative for the doctrine and life of the church, not because of their character as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, but because they are the oldest available written sources for the history of ancient Israel and for the life and message of Jesus Christ, or because they were written by the chosen and appointed leaders of Israel and of the early church, or because the church declared them to be canonical.
4. That the Christian community in every age is directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and is therefore free to go beyond the doctrine of the prophets and apostles in determining the content of certain aspects of its faith and witness. (p. 26)

The title of this section would more appropriately read: "The Authorities of Scripture." *A Statement* first distinguishes two kinds of authority (normative and causative) without making any attempt to integrate the two; then it immediately speaks as though it had not distinguished two kinds of authority. Thus, when question #7 asks, "Do you think that the *power* of Holy Scripture is sometimes confused with its *authority*?" we can only answer, "Yes." And when the next question is, "If so, how?" we know of no better answer than, "See the section of *A Statement* under discussion for a very clear example of that confusion."

What seems to be happening, again, is the result of that failure we diagnosed already in the second article of *A Statement*, namely, the failure to make the *due* distinction between the Law and the Gospel; thus, *A Statement* makes a misleading distinction between causative and normative authority, and misses the really crucial distinction between the authority of the Law and the authority of the Gospel. The Law is that divine authority to bind and obligate us and to punish us finally with the divine verdict of death—an authority which resides in the Law's divine *author* Himself, from whose verdict we have, under Law, no appeal. And the authority of the Gospel is that authority which the Son of Man has, on earth, to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6), and which he has given to his church—and that is the only authority, again grounded in the divine *author* Himself, that can grant a stay of execution of the Law's verdict on the sinner.

For the rest, we suggest to the interested reader that he take a careful look at the section on the

authority of Scripture in, for example, Schmid's compendium, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 51-64), where the normative authority of the Scriptures is grounded in their inspiredness, which, in turn, is admitted to be demonstrable finally only by virtue of the believer's experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in making the Scripture's causative authority have its way in bringing him to faith. Translated into the terms of the current debate, this means that for the orthodox dogmatists the Scripture as rule and norm for doctrine and life has its (normative) authority precisely because its witness to Jesus Christ is believed as Gospel *for me* (causative authority). In other words, the Bible has authority for the sake of the Gospel; any other authority it has (and it does have that other, normative authority) grows out of and serves the Gospel.

E. The Canonical Text of Scripture

We believe, teach, and confess that the authoritative Word for the church today is the canonical Word, not precanonical sources, forms, or traditions—however useful the investigation of these possibilities may on occasion be for a clearer understanding of what the canonical text intends to say.

We therefore reject the following views:

1. That there are various "meanings" of a Biblical text or pericope to be discovered at various stages of its precanonical history, or that the meaning a canonical text has now may differ from the meaning it had when it was first written.
2. That Biblical materials that are judged to be "authentic" (for example, "authentic" words of Jesus, "authentic" books of Paul, or "authentic" ideas of Moses) have greater authority than "non-authentic" Biblical statements.
3. That certain pericopes or passages in the canonical text of Scripture may be regarded as imaginative additions of the Biblical authors or of the early Christian community and therefore need not be accepted as fully authoritative.
4. That extracanonical sources may be used in such a way as to call into question the clear meaning of the canonical text.
5. That the essential theological data of Biblical theology is to be found in the precanonical history of the Biblical text.
6. That certain canonical materials have greater authority than other canonical materials because of their greater antiquity or because they are allegedly more "genuine" or "authentic."
7. That various statements of Jesus recorded in the Gospels may not actually be from Jesus and therefore lack historical factuality or the full measure of His authority. (p. 29)

Such an emphasis on the canon and the implicit assumption that it is clearly defined or definable is neither Scriptural nor confessional. The Lutheran Confessions contain no list of canonical books

because there is no Scriptural basis for such a list. In the course of history the church has recognized some books as representative of apostolic preaching and teaching. But the authority of that list is neither more nor less than the authority of the church. There is no way to establish an authoritative list of biblical books except by an exercise of the authority of the church. But to assert that the church has such authority is neither confessional nor Scriptural. For example, Luther had serious questions about the traditional list. At the time the Confessions were written, Luther's introductions to the books of the Bible, in which he challenged the apostolicity of several New Testament Epistles, were being circulated. Yet these introductions were not repudiated by the Confessions. Consequently, this section on the canonical texts of Scripture must be called into question. And we call on the authors of *A Statement* to cite the authority for their definition of the canon.

We can illustrate our position by responding to two of the study questions:

3. Since the Lutheran Confessions have no official list of canonical writings, is it un-Lutheran to place extra-canonical sources (e.g., pre-canonical traditions or apocryphal writings) on the same authoritative level as the Scriptures? (p. 311)

No, it is not un-Lutheran to do that. Holsten Hagenberg, for example, points out that the Confessions refer to the Apostles' Creed as "God's Word" without distinguishing it from the inspired text of Scripture; and he cites the Apology of the Augsburg Confessions' interpretation of Tobit as evidence that "the whole of Scripture is looked upon as a uniform divine word." (Holsten Hagenberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions* [1529-1537] [St. Louis: Concordia, 1972], pp. 16 and 37).

4. If you assume that the words of Jesus recorded in the New Testament were not actually spoken by Him but were in fact developed by the early Christian community, what does this do to our understanding of the Lord's Supper?? of Holy Baptism?? of the Sermon on the Mount?? (p. 311)

Jesus spoke Aramaic most of the time. Thus every saying that has been preserved is almost certainly a translation. The translations are clear enough and the written Scriptures are the norm for all doctrine and life in the church, but they do not permit us to say that we have the words *actually* spoken by Jesus.

For reasons noted above, we omit extensive comments on the remaining sections of Article IV. These last sections name, but do not clarify, key questions and real issues, and therefore do not facilitate the discussion. We intend to publish an article in *The Crosslet* in which we will treat the technical issues involved, showing how *A State-*

ment, in these sections (E-II, pp. 31-41), obscures the nature of saving faith. The issues surrounding methods of biblical interpretation are vital for the teaching and preaching of the Church, and for her pastoral care, worship, and evangelism. Anti-evangelical conclusions can be and have been drawn by users of the historical-critical method, as well as by users of the grammatical-historical method or a fundamentalistic, literalistic method. Such issues call for and deserve ongoing discussion.

For further comment on this section on Scripture, we refer the reader to "A Scrutiny of A Statement on Scripture," by Walter E. Keller, *The Crosslet* (June 1972), pp. 6ff.

V. Original Sin

We believe, teach, and confess that God, by the almighty power of His Word, created all things. We also believe that man, as the principal creature of God, was specially created in the image of God, that is, in a state of righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We affirm that Adam and Eve were real historical human beings, the first two people in the world, and that their fall was a historical occurrence which brought sin into the world so that "since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin" (AC, III, 1). We confess that man's fall necessitated the gracious redemptive work of Jesus Christ and that fallen man's only hope for salvation from his sin lies in Jesus Christ, His Redeemer and Lord.

We therefore reject the following:

1. All world views, philosophical theories, and exegetical interpretations which pervert these Biblical teachings and thus obscure the Gospel.
2. The notion that man did not come into being through the direct creative action of God, but through a process of evolution from lower forms of life which in turn developed from matter that is either eternal, autonomous, or self-generating.
3. The opinion that the image of God in which Adam and Eve were created did not consist of commanded righteousness, that is, a perfect relationship to God.
4. The notion that Adam and Eve were not real historical persons and that their fall was not a real historical event which brought sin and death into the world.
5. The opinion that original sin does not deprive all men of their spiritual powers and make it impossible for them to be in the right relationship to God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. (p. 42)

We have previously drawn attention to the way in which *A Statement* does not understand or apply the Law with the radical seriousness which characterizes the Lutheran Confessions' use of the Law. Vague statements about man's need for salvation lead to inadequate statements about the work of our Lord Jesus. Similarly, *A Statement* defines the church's mission and proclamation in

terms of the preaching of the Gospel without the Confessions' corresponding emphasis on the preaching of repentance. Now Article V offers us a statement on original sin which, it seems to us, exposes the basis for the deficiencies we have been observing. The doctrine of original sin in *A Statement* in fact marks a retreat from the theology of the Lutheran Confessions; it could have been written by any of a number of medieval theologians or opponents of the Reformation, for *A Statement* mentions none of those accents which are characteristic of the Confessions' teaching on original sin. The *Augsburg Confession* says, "Our churches also teach that since the fall of Adam all men who are propagated according to nature are born in sin. That is to say, they are without fear of God, are without trust in God, and are concupiscent" (Article II, Tappert, p. 29). It is the second sentence, not the first, that distinguishes the genuinely Lutheran understanding of original sin from a variety of pre- and post-Reformation versions of that doctrine.

The emphasis in the presentation of the doctrine of original sin in *A Statement* is certainly different from the emphasis in the Lutheran Confessions. This difference can be noted in the concentration on affirming that "Adam and Eve were two real historical human beings," as if the church's teaching about original sin could be more effectively done and more firmly grounded by getting us to focus primarily on the two original sinners rather than to hear the truth of Genesis 3 as it reveals and explores our own lack of fear and trust in God and our own endless cravings.

Serious warning is to be made about the use of "real" and "historical" in *A Statement*. Of course, the authors of *A Statement* know that these terms are neither biblical nor confessional. But that in itself is neither our criticism nor our warning: rather, the problem is that they are undefined, they are diversionary, and they lead us to trivialize and underuse Genesis 3. Being undefined, that is, not clearly excluding anything, they could invite the thoughtful reader to ask whether there might be "unreal historical human beings" or "real unhistorical human beings"? Furthermore, they are diversionary in that they are symptomatic of this article's leading us away from the truth of Genesis 3 as it diagnoses people, locked in their sinnerhood in their particular time and place. Between the truth of the situation in which Adam and Eve found themselves and our own confrontation with that truth, the link is a deduction about our own original sin. The weight of the confrontation is lightened to the weight of a conclusion managed by our minds. Thereby sinners are allowed to hide behind the fig-leaves afforded by such terms as "real" and "historical." Finally, these terms lead

to trivializing the biblical account of the fall. People should not be led to think of Genesis 3 as if it were a story merely of what happened once upon a time, but should be helped instead to hear it as the very Word of God diagnosing sin, condemning sinners to death, and promising rescue to believers, not only Adam and Eve, but also the present readers and hearers. An illustration of the Article's underuse is provided in the thesis and the fourth rejection, when it there uses the biblical text merely as the basis for saying that Adam and Eve were the first sinners; it fails to give the church the guidance she needs in using the biblical text for her preaching of the Law and the Gospel to sinners today. We make this warning precisely because we do not want the Genesis material to be regarded as mere myth. In this we feel we share the concern of *A Statement*.

VI. Confessional Subscription

We reaffirm our acceptance of the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, and our unconditional subscription to "all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God" (Constitution, Article II; cf. also Bylaw 4.21). We accept the Confessions because they are drawn from the Word of God and on that account regard their doctrinal content as a true and binding exposition of Holy Scripture and as authoritative for our work as ministers of Jesus Christ and servants of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

We accept the following clarifications of the nature of our confessional subscription:

1. We acknowledge that the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions includes not only those doctrines of Holy Scripture explicitly treated in the Confessions but also those Biblical doctrines set forth somewhat indirectly or incidentally, such as the doctrines of Holy Scripture, creation, the Holy Spirit, and eschatology.

2. With the fathers, we recognize that not everything in the Lutheran Confessions is a part of its doctrinal content, but we reject all attempts to abridge the extent of this doctrinal content in an arbitrary or subjective manner. We recognize, for example, that subscription to the Lutheran Confessions does not bind us to all strictly exegetical details contained in the Confessions, or even to the confessional use of certain Bible passages to support a particular theological statement. However, since the Confessions want to be understood as Biblical expositions, we reject the notion that we are not bound by our confessional subscription to the exposition of Scripture contained in the Confessions or to the doctrinal content which the Confessions derive from individual Bible passages.

3. We recognize that the Confessions must be read and studied in terms of the historical situations in which they were written, but we reject the view that our confessional subscription means only

that we regard the Confessions as a historically correct response to the problems encountered by the church when the Confessions were written.

4. We recognize that the doctrinal content of the Confessions centers in Jesus Christ and the Gospel of our justification by grace through faith, but we reject the view that the doctrinal content of the Confessions includes only those confessional statements which explicitly and directly deal with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, we do not accept the idea that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions permits us to reject such confessional positions as the existence of the devil and of angels or that Adam and Eve were real historical persons whose fall into sin was a real historical event.

5. We recognize that the Lutheran Confessions contain no distinct article on the nature of Holy Scripture and its interpretation, but we acknowledge and accept the confessional understanding of the nature of Holy Scripture and of the proper theological principles for its interpretation.

6. We recognize the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of Holy Scripture and therefore reject the opinion that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions leaves us free to reject any doctrinal statements of the Confessions where we feel there is no supporting Biblical evidence.

7. We acknowledge that our subscription to the Lutheran Confessions pledges us to preach and teach in accordance with the entire Holy Scripture. We therefore reject the opinion that all Biblical matters not explicitly treated in the Lutheran Confessions are open questions.

8. We confess that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule and norm for faith and life, and that other writings "should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture" (FC, Ep, Rule and Norm, 1-2). We therefore reject the notion that it is legitimate to maintain the doctrinal conclusions of the Confessions without accepting their Biblical basis, or to regard formal confessional subscription as an adequate safeguard against improper exegetical conclusions.

9. Finally, we affirm that our acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions means not only that we tolerate the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions as a viable option for Lutheran Christians today but that we in fact preach, teach, and confess the doctrinal content of the Lutheran Confessions as our very own. (p. 45)

The question of confessional subscription does need to be discussed. The appearance of *A Statement* is itself a symptom of the seriousness of the problem. However, this article of *A Statement* makes such general and ambiguous assertions, that to subscribe to it would either be an act of implicit faith or an oath in uncertain things. The authors of *A Statement* owe the church much greater clarity than this section provides.

As for the questions, we suggest that one ought not raise a question such as this

1. Doctor C.F.W. Walther held that "the servant of

the church is not bound by . . . the interpretation of certain Bible passages." Can you give examples of certain exegetical judgments to which this principle would apply? (p. 46).

without giving his own list. And as for question #2, which asks whether confessional subscription binds us "to the confessional interpretation of specific passages" (p. 47) dealing with the Virgin Birth, we have not been able to find, nor has the study edition provided, an instance where the Confessions discuss any of the passages connected with the Virgin Birth: Isaiah 9; Matthew 1; Luke 1 and 2. There is no "confessional interpretation" of these passages.

*

Our review essay is not presented lightly or with a love for quarreling. As serious and sober churchly theologians we have responded to requests from alumni to make an analysis of *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*. Furthermore, we have listened to and heeded the request of the President of the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, as he expressed himself in the Preface to the original edition of *A Statement*:

We pray that this statement will promote Biblical study and discussion which will aid our dear church in solving its theological and doctrinal problems and in concentrating its efforts on the great work of proclaiming the Gospel of the risen Christ.

The Synod can use serious and sober analysis of *A Statement*, so that it may be known that disagreements with it do not come from frivolous theologians who have neither desire nor knowledge to be Missouri Synod Lutheran theologians. Neither does this review essay arise from a desire to serve any political cause within the Synod.

A Statement has not received the careful analysis it deserves. Its proponents are pushing it with apodictic pressure; its opponents attack it with slogans. But, to our knowledge, it has not been seriously studied in print and in public debate, in terms of its content, purpose, and context. In this sense *A Statement* has been dishonored by all.

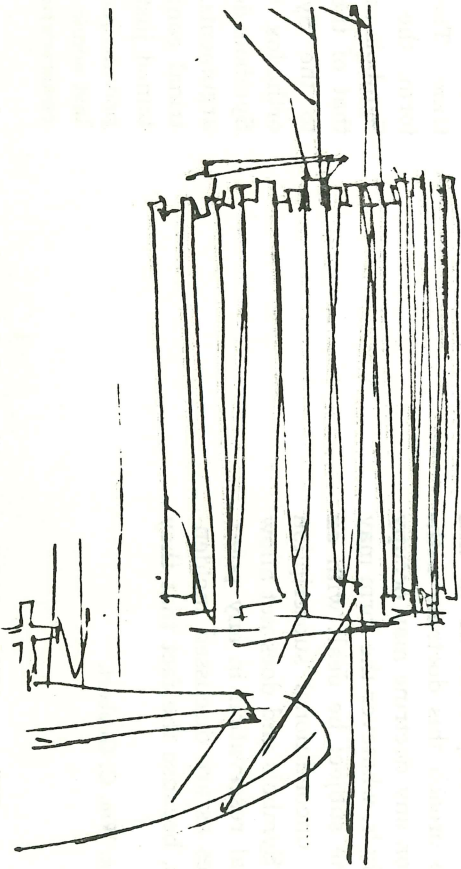
A Statement does not fulfill its stated goals: "to serve as a tool to identify theological and doctrinal issues which the Synod needs to consider and resolve"; "to offer guidance in applying Holy Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to those issues" (study edition, Preface, p. 5). It does not clearly identify, much less define, the burning theological issues in the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. This already cripples its effort to offer guidance. But *A Statement* is itself confes-

sionally deficient in its misunderstanding of the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel for the church's life and mission, her teaching and care of souls, and, above all, of her interpretation of the Scriptures.

We do not share the opinion that the church under the Gospel is permitted to be an undisciplined mob or that true doctrine is a matter of indifference for the life, worship, and work of the church.

On the contrary, we applaud those efforts which seek to clarify the issues facing the church and to bring us under the discipline of the truth. Our commitment to these efforts and our pastoral concern for the church have led us to take *A Statement* seriously. Our own will to be normed by the Sacred Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, as *A Statement* would have it, compels us to register our objections to it. **||**

From the Chapel



When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him; but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.

ST. LUKE 9:51-56