

“The Inadequacy of the Common Confession as a Settlement of Past Differences”

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Introduction

The position of our Wisconsin Synod over against the Common Confession, Part I, is summarized in a resolution adopted at our New Ulm convention in 1951. Prior to the adoption of this resolution we devoted the greater portion of our convention to a thorough study of the Common Confession, because it had been submitted to us by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, in accordance with the constitution of the Synodical Conference, to secure our consent to it. As a result of our study, held in the presence of members of Missouri’s Committee on Doctrinal Unity who were given every opportunity to defend their synod’s acceptance of it, we unanimously resolved to concur in the findings of our Standing Committee on Church Union, which in its “Review of the Common Confession” had specifically noted a number of points in which the Common Confession had failed to provide adequate settlement of doctrinal controversies which had existed between the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The resolution which we then adopted, and which still summarizes our position today, reads as follows: “*That we inform the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod that we not only find the Common Confession to be inadequate in the points noted (cf. Review of the Common Confession), but that we also hold that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled.*” (Proceedings, 31st Convention, Wisconsin Synod, p. 147).

In this essay we wish to consider:

- I. Our understanding of the word “*settlement*” in this resolution.
- II. Our reasons for finding the *Common Confession, Part I*, to be *inadequate* as a settlement in the chief points noted by our Synod’s Standing Committee on Church Union.
- III. The *further inadequacy of Part II* of the Common Confession as far as the allaying of our doubts and misgivings over against Part I is concerned.
- IV. Our serious charge that the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a settlement of past differences “*involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation.*”

Part I

Our Understanding of the Word “Settlement”

Our Synod has protested against the adoption of the Common Confession by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod “since this action has been officially interpreted as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled.” Perhaps no single word has raised so much animated discussion, particularly between men of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods in local areas, as the use of this word “settlement.” At a mixed conference

held in Benton Harbor, Michigan last December we asked our brethren of the Missouri Synod to answer the question, “In what sense does the Common Confession constitute a settlement of doctrinal differences which have hitherto divided the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the American Lutheran Church?” The answer we received can be summarized by a statement often repeated by our Missouri brethren at this conference: “The Common Confession settles nothing.” They could not see how the official resolutions of their Synod could be interpreted to mean any such thing. Statements were made by several of them to the effect that these negotiations were merely serving to strengthen the hand of conservative men in the American Lutheran Church, and that they would possibly never experience the day in their lifetime when an actual union would be consummated between the two negotiating church bodies. When we of the Wisconsin Synod called attention to the fact that the use of this word was the official interpretation of their own Committee on Doctrinal Unity on their Synod’s resolutions, they continued to maintain that as far as they were concerned, nothing was officially settled, and urged us not to act hastily but to await further developments.

We certainly do not question the sincerity of these Missouri Synod brethren, who happen to be conservative men. We merely mention this to show the difficulty of discussing the whole matter of the Common Confession on local levels when we are of such different opinions as to what this document is supposed to represent in the first place. We have heard its significance variously interpreted in other areas as a “progress report of the committees,” “a first rung in a doctrinal ladder,” a document vaguely described as “defining an area of doctrinal agreement.” We have been cautioned in the latest appeal by the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod not to press the word “settlement” to mean more than it can mean. Our attention is called to the fact that official resolutions of the Missouri Synod allow for “clarification” of the Common Confession. We are reminded of the fact that a second part has been added to Part I to be studied with it “as one document.” We are told that the Constitution of the Synodical Conference, which prevents unilateral action by one of its Synods, forbids the interpretation of the word “settlement” to mean that it is absolute and final. We are urged to regard it as “*only.... a settlement in good faith,*” for only “the carrying out of this agreement with its provisions can show how final and conclusive this settlement really was.” (*Another Fraternal Endeavor*, p. 7).

In spite of all these words of reassurance and caution on the part of men of the Missouri Synod, well intended as they might be, we are of the considered opinion that they only serve to becloud the real issue which is at stake. Let us consider the circumstances which led to the formulation of the Common Confession. Negotiations toward a unified statement on doctrine between the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church had been in progress for a period of years. Already in 1939 our Synod warned its Sister Synod against negotiating with a church body which declared that it was “firmly convinced that it is neither necessary nor possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines,” and which for this reason was unwilling to accept the conservatively doctrinal position of the Missouri Synod as presented in its *Brief Statement* unless viewed in the light of its own erroristic Declaration. (Resolutions of A.L.C. at Sandusky, Ohio, 1938), and which frankly stated that it was not willing to give up its membership in the American Lutheran Conference. Negotiations, however, continued, with a persistent unwillingness on the part of the American Lutheran Church to employ the terminology used in the *Brief Statement*. We continued to warn against dealing with a church body that had in the meantime reached an Agreement with representatives of the United Lutheran Church at Pittsburgh, in which a very compromising position was taken on the doctrine of Inspiration, stating that a continuation of negotiations with the American Lutheran Church under such existing conditions would only serve to “cause confusion and disturbance in the Church.” (*Proceedings*, 25th Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1939, p. 61). Negotiations seemed to be stalemated for a time after an attempt to frame a single document of agreement through a fusion of Missouri’s *Brief Statement* with the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church miscarried. The American Lutheran Church at this time, as late as 1946, despaired “of attaining Lutheran Unity by way of additional doctrinal formulations and reformulations” and stated again that “the chief obstacles to Lutheran unity are not matters of doctrine as much as differences of background.” (A.L.C. Convention Resolutions at Appleton, Wis., 1946). Which brings us to the “Friendly Invitation” of the American Lutheran Church Fellowship Committee of 1947, in which it was declared by the A.L.C. Commissioners that there was an area where there existed “an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological

opinion on the basis of the teachings of the Word of God,” and that to demand a unified statement of doctrine as an absolute condition of fellowship constituted a “threat to evangelical liberty of conscience by demanding a degree of uniformity in the statement of Christian truth that is incompatible with the Scriptures and with strict intellectual candor.” This invitation was accepted by the Centennial Convention of Missouri in 1947, although no specific reference was made to it, and the Synod’s Committee on Doctrinal Unity was encouraged to continue discussions, “on a soundly Scriptural basis,” to be sure, and to “make every effort to arrive ultimately at one document which is Scriptural, clear, concise, and unequivocal.” (Resolutions of Centennial Convention, Missouri Synod, 1947). To say that our Synod continued to raise its voice against a continuation of negotiations based upon such loose principles as expressed by the American Lutheran Church Committee is putting it mildly (cf. *Proceedings*, 29th Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1947, p. 113).

It is out of this background that the Common Confession, Part I, was produced. Is it any wonder that we were somewhat taken aback by the fact that the Missouri Synod Convention at Milwaukee in 1950 was so quick to adopt it? Or should we have expected this all along? But that is just exactly what happened. We look at these Milwaukee resolutions, and we read them carefully. It was resolved by Missouri “*that we rejoice and thank God that the ‘Common Confession’ shows that agreement has been achieved in the doctrines treated by the two committees*”; “*that we accept the ‘Common Confession’ as a statement of these doctrines in harmony with Scriptures*”; “*that if the American Lutheran Church, in convention assembled, accepts it, the ‘Common Confession’ shall be recognized as a statement of agreement on these doctrines between us and the American Lutheran Church.*” (Emphasis our own). Further resolutions of this convention, it is true, provided for the formulation of phases of doctrine not treated in the Common Confession, and the fact that “*further study or future developments may show the need of clarification or expansion,*” so that “*additional statements... may be submitted to future conventions*” of Synod, but they certainly do not alter the fact that the doctrines treated in Common Confession, Part I, were presented as a settlement of the doctrinal differences which hitherto separated the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the American Lutheran Church. (Quotations from Resolution No. 14, *Reports and Memorials*, Missouri Synod Convention, 1950, Emphasis, the writer’s).

That is the only possible interpretation we can place upon these resolutions. Of course the question was raised, and repeatedly so in our own circles, as to whether or not our Synod’s Standing Committee on Church Union was pressing the meaning of these resolutions beyond their intended significance. Was this, perhaps, merely our own pessimistic interpretation? The answer lies, however, not with our Committee, but with the Missouri Synod’s Committee on Doctrinal Unity, which states in its official minutes of April 10, 1951, that the Common Confession is to be regarded, not as defining an area of doctrinal agreement, but as furnishing “*a settlement of those doctrinal controversies that were before the church at the time of the adoption of the Common Confession.*” (Quoted in *Proceedings*, 31st Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1951, p. 146). Who would be in a better position to give us the correct interpretation of the Missouri Synod’s resolutions on the Common Confession than the committee which was to the greatest extent instrumental in formulating it and presenting it for its adoption?

That is also the reason for having submitted this confessional document to us, as stated in Resolution No. 16 of Missouri’s 1950 Convention, “*to secure the consent*” of our Synod, as a constituent synod of the Synodical Conference, to the course of action which had been taken. Certainly it was not submitted to us as a document which actually “*settles nothing officially,*” as a mere “*progress report,*” or as something on which we could supply necessary improvements so that it might meet with our satisfaction. We were to give our opinion on it as a document which had been officially adopted as an adequate settlement of past controversies in the doctrines treated therein. And it has been consistently defended as such by official representatives of the Missouri Synod. At no time when the Missouri Synod has been officially represented at meeting or convention in a discussion of the Common Confession have we heard any admission of our charge that the presentation of Part I is not an adequate settlement of the doctrinal controversies which existed in the past between the contracting church bodies. The writer of “*An Analysis and Evaluation of Certain Charges Made against the Common Confession*” in Missouri’s *Another Fraternal Endeavor*, after cautioning us not to press the interpretation of the word “*settlement*” to mean more than it can mean (p. 7), proceeds to take up the various

doctrines which our Committee has declared inadequate and attempts to prove how every one of our charges is absolutely groundless, how Part I adequately safeguards the orthodox position in every respect, both in its positive statements as well as in its antitheses.

This all simply bears out the fact that our Committee on Church Union was not jumping to any hasty conclusions in their understanding of the Missouri Synod's resolutions. Part I of the Common Confession is a settlement of the doctrinal differences which have hitherto divided the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod from the American Lutheran Church. To eliminate once and for all every bit of doubt on this matter we quote the opening paragraph of *A Fraternal Word*, officially prepared and widely circulated throughout our Synodical Conference circles: "When the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1950 adopted the Common Confession, it did so in the conviction, which it still holds, that the Common Confession represents a settlement of the doctrinal differences which have hitherto divided it from the American Lutheran Church. At the same time, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod provided for the allaying of doubts and misgivings on the part of its own membership or of sister synods by resolving that additional statements made necessary by further study or future developments might be submitted by way of clarification and expansion." (*A Fraternal Word*, p. 3). The meaning is clear. The settlement of doctrinal differences is found in Part I. Other parts might be added to allay doubts and misgivings and to provide for future developments.

Certainly this settlement is not absolute and final in the sense that actual fellowship has been entered into by the two church bodies. Our Committee has never pressed the word to include this thought. Certainly it is a "settlement *in good faith*," if one wishes to call it such, pending certain developments which must be taken care of before actual church fellowship can be consummated. One wonders, however, whether or not this "good faith" is warranted in the case of a church body which extends the hand of fellowship in two directions at the same time, as the American Lutheran Church is doing today. One wonders whether or not this "good faith" is in order when dealing with such who say that it is neither necessary or possible to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines, and who include in these so-called non-fundamental doctrines such which are clearly set forth in the Word of God. One wonders whether or not such a "settlement in good faith" becomes a matter of breaking faith with those who in clear language hold to the wording of the Brief Statement, especially when the issues supposedly settled are in fact not settled.

But this is something which remains to be presented, and in our second part we shall state our reasons for finding the Common Confession inadequate as a settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled.

Part II

Our Reasons for Finding the Common Confession, Part I, to be Inadequate

A. Justification

The chief objections of our Synod to the Common Confession, as stated before, are summarized in a "Review of the Common Confession," prepared by our Standing Committee on Church Union before the New Ulm convention. This convention unanimously concurred in the findings of our Standing Committee as found in its "Review." Since the first article treated in this document is fittingly the one described by Luther as the "article on which the church stands or falls," the very heart of *sola gratia*, the article on Justification, we shall begin with this article also.

We are all certainly aware of the fact that a serious clash over this doctrine existed between the old Ohio Synod and the Missouri Synod fifty years ago. At that time Ohio flatly rejected the truth upheld by Missouri that God already declared the whole world justified of all sins in the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 5: 18-19; Romans 4:25; 2 Cor 5:19). Particularly Dr. Stoeckhardt in his beautiful exegesis on Romans emphasized Missouri's position that justification was basically a forensic act, a pronouncement of God in which

forgiveness of sin was declared to the whole world, that this objective truth was an accomplished fact, not conditioned by any attitude, merit, or faith on the part of man. God did not, in other words, justify only those whom He knew would come to faith. Although it is true—as Dr. Stoeckhardt and others pointed out—that man by faith apprehends or accepts this universal imputation of righteousness which avails before God, this faith is a passive instrument. It never enters the picture as a cause of justification. The Scriptures do not state, as our Lutheran Confessions also emphasize, that man is justified “on account of faith” (διὰ πίστεως). By faith we “lay hold of Christ, and thus in Christ of that righteousness which avails before God” (*Formula of Concord*, Epitome). Dr. Stoeckhardt was especially interested in calling attention also to the comfort derived from this objective truth. “God has in Christ,” he writes, “already forgiven the sins of the whole world. ‘The entire Pauline doctrine of justification, and also all comfort derived from this doctrine stands and falls with this special article of objective justification. For thus alone does it become unmistakably clear that justification is in no way dependent upon man’s conduct (*Verhalten*). And thus alone can the individual become certain of his own justification. For it is a compelling conclusion: if God has already in Christ justified all men and forgiven them their sins, so I also must have a gracious God and the forgiveness of all my sins” (*Römerbrief*, p. 264). In answer to those who felt that neither Luther nor the early Lutheran Confessions made this distinction between “objective” and “subjective” justification, and that we must consider faith as something necessary to complete a justification which God has only made possible, Dr. Stoeckhardt declares: “Never in this sense do we hear it presented: I believe; I am conscious of the fact that I believe on my Savior. Therefore I am justified in the sight of God. A believing Christian does not make the pulse of his faith-life the criterion of his state of grace.... The believer rather makes this conclusion: O, how godless I still am: Out of my heart godless thoughts continue to arise. There is no doubt but that I am a poor, unworthy sinner. My sin is ever before me. But now God’s Word tells me that God has already declared godless sinners righteous. Thus I belong without any doubt whatsoever in the number of those whom God justifies.” (*Römerbrief*, p. 185).

In 1905 Ohio called this position of Missouri on Objective Justification a “sin against holiness,” “insanity,” “night of error,” a “miserable figment of man’s own invention,” whereby the central doctrine of Scripture was destroyed (*Lehre u. Wehre*, Vol. 51, p. 385 ff.). Ohio defined its own position this way, “Through the reconciliation of Christ the holy and gracious God has made advances to us, so that forgiveness of sin and justification have been made possible on his part; justification itself, however, does not occur until through God’s grace the spark of faith has been kindled in the heart of the poor sinner” (*Lehre u. Wehre*, Vol. 51, p. 388).

It is but natural that we ask whether or not this position has changed within the American Lutheran Church during the course of the years. Statements appearing in church periodicals repeatedly present the thought that God is “ready to forgive” all those who come to faith. Universal redemption is taught, but not universal justification. Interesting to observe is the exegesis of Dr. R. C. Lenski on the “*sedes doctrinae*” found in Romans. Dr. Lenski agrees that the word “justify” as used by Paul is always forensic but goes to great lengths to attempt to prove that this justifying act of God applies only to believers after they have come to faith. On Romans 4:5, where Paul speaks of God justifying the ungodly, Dr. Lenski says, “God declares the ungodly righteous by reckoning his faith for righteousness.... But for faith there would be no justification. I must ever say: I believe, therefore am I justified. The strength of my faith is the degree of my certainty” (*Commentary on Romans*, p. 299). On Romans 5:19, he comes out with the flat statement: “Nowhere in the Bible is any man constituted or declared righteous ‘without faith, before faith’, all asseverations and argumentations to the contrary notwithstanding.” Dr. Lenski plainly recognized no biblical doctrine of objective justification and was very clear in saying so. The same can be said of Dr. Reu. Although he uses the term “objective justification” in his *Lutheran Dogmatics* (1945 ed., p. 279), he explains it as meaning that forgiveness of sins has been procured and is available to all men through the suffering and death of Christ, and that it becomes an accomplished fact if and when the sinner comes to faith in Christ. “Christ’s righteousness is available for the entire world,” Dr. Reu states, and then continues, “The indispensable *condition* for the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and for the subsumption under universal justification, is faith.” (*Lutheran Dogmatics*, p. 287 f.).

The position of the American Lutheran Church on objective justification is therefore precisely and concisely stated in its 1938 “Declaration” (II, A) with the words, “(God) purposes to justify those who have come to faith.”

We are told that the Common Confession has resolved this doctrinal divergence. Self-evidently we approach it with the question: “Will it contain an unequivocal statement on objective justification? Will it rule out the thought that faith is first necessary before any justification on God’s part has already taken place?”

We read, “By His redemptive work Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; hence, forgiveness of sin has been secured and provided for all men. (This is often spoken of as objective justification.)” The first sentence sets forth the doctrine of universal redemption. The essential characteristics of objective justification as set forth in the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod, that God “has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ,” are simply not there. “Secured and provided,” if anything, come closer to the old position of the American Lutheran Church that the means for justification have been provided, but that the justifying act of God does not actually take place until faith is present.

The Common Confession continues by quoting *2 Corinthians 5:19*. We readily agree that this is a fine passage on justification. The mere quotation of a passage, however, settles nothing, especially since we have seen leading exegetes of the American Lutheran Church take some of the “*sedes doctrinae*” from Romans and flatly deny the remotest possibility of a doctrine of objective justification on the basis of them, “all asseverations and argumentations to the contrary notwithstanding.”

The Common Confession continues: “Hence no sinner need be eternally lost on account of his sins. God offers this propitiation and reconciliation freely to all men through his means of grace. There is nothing in sinful man or in what he may do to merit God’s declaring him righteous.” The last sentence may seem to bring us closer to the point of the matter. but although God’s act of declaration is referred to, and although man’s merit is ruled out as a factor in this act of declaration, nothing is really settled. Nothing is said as to when God’s act of declaration takes place. Man’s merit may be ruled out, but the American Lutheran Church never did say that man could do anything to merit his justification. They will readily admit that even faith is not a meritorious act on man’s part. The point under consideration remains the same. When does God’s justifying act really take place? Not until faith has been kindled in the heart? Or already in Christ’s death and resurrection.

The next statement in the Common Confession gives support to the thought that justification occurs only when faith is already present: “God justifies the sinner solely on the basis of Christ’s righteousness, which He imputes to the sinner through the Gospel and which the sinner accepts by faith.” In this sentence God’s act of imputation and the sinner’s acceptance by faith are linked together so closely, without even a comma separating them, that the old position of Ohio is strengthened: The thought is conveyed that the justification of the sinner is not complete until the missing factor of personal faith is supplied. This sentence also states that God imputes Christ’s righteousness “through the Gospel.” It would certainly be far more in keeping with Scripture, however, to state that the Gospel proclaims the imputation that has already taken place, rather than that God imputes Christ’s righteousness “through the Gospel.”

No matter how often we read and reread the Common Confession, we cannot see how it adequately defends the position which has been valiantly upheld and defended by the Missouri Synod for many years. Has God on the basis of Christ’s redemption forgiven all sins to all men? Has He declared the whole world just in the death and resurrection of His Son? Is that what we mean by objective justification, basing this doctrine especially on Romans 5:18-19, and Romans 4:25? Or does this doctrine merely set forth the truth of an accomplished atonement, stating that Christ has secured and provided forgiveness of sin for all men, leaving room for the interpretation that God’s actual declaration of righteousness must be held in abeyance until the missing factor of personal faith is supplied? With much logic the Common Confession’s statement on justification has been defended by men of the Missouri Synod. This has been done by defining the phrase “forgiveness of sin” as a “declaration whereby the ungodly have been declared godly.” The correct meaning, in other words, is inherent in the proper understanding of what we mean by “forgiveness of sin.” Pieper’s *Dogmatics* and the Lutheran Confessions are cited to show. that if we understand the term forgiveness of sin correctly, we shall see that the Common Confession says exactly the same thing as the *Brief Statement*. The

only difference lies in the fact that different terminology is used, it is claimed. We certainly do not question the fact that those who have defended the Common Confession in this way may as far as they themselves are concerned have a correct understanding of objective justification. But their interpretation in the light of Dr. Pieper's *Dogmatics* is certainly no proof that the American Lutheran Church subscribes to the same interpretation. Especially since such a wide divergence of opinion has existed on this very doctrine between Dr. Pieper and men like Drs. Reu and Lenski. If we wish to defend this article on Justification through definitions which have been set forth by Dr. Pieper, why should we not be satisfied to use the words which he employed in the first place? Why not simply remain with the wording of the *Brief Statement*?

No article of the Common Confession is more open to the charge of ambiguity than this article on Justification. No article leaves the old issue more unsettled. The points carried out at some length above are the very same called attention to in the "Review" of our Synod's Standing Committee on Church Union three years ago. Our Synod already then unanimously agreed with its conclusion, "Since this formulation (of the Common Confession on Justification) admits of false answers to the question concerning the function of faith in justification, the article must be rejected." (*Proceedings*, 31st Convention, Wisconsin Synod, p. 129).

B. Conversion

The next subject dealt with by our Synod's "Review" concerns itself with Article VII of the Common Confession, the article on Conversion. The Common Confession presents this doctrine in three sentences, one of which is a quotation from Scripture. We quote its concise paragraph on this subject in full: "*The sinner's conversion takes place when God brings the contrite sinner to faith in Christ as his Savior. This change of heart with respect to sin, and this reliance upon Christ for salvation from sin, is the work of God the Holy Spirit, without any cooperation whatsoever from sinful man. 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost,' I Corinthians 12:3b.*"

The objections of our Synod's Union Committee to this article are centered in the following statement: "In view of past controversies on this subject a clear and correct presentation of the doctrine of Conversion must include a rejection of the untenable distinction between a natural and a willful resistance of man, as well as any other attempt at explaining the mystery '*cur alii prae aliis*'? (Cf. *Brief Statement*, Art. 12-14)."

To one approaching this subject with little knowledge of or consideration for the historical background involved, several questions will immediately be raised by our objections. First of all, why drag into this simple presentation such a confusing issue as an "untenable distinction between a natural and a willful resistance of man"? Furthermore, if such a distinction ever had been made in an effort to explain why some are converted and others not, would not the exclusive particles in trebled form decisively and categorically exclude any and every possibility of cooperation in conversion on the part of man? "*Without any cooperation whatsoever*" should certainly be a strong enough form of expression to satisfy the most exacting critic.

"*In view of past controversies on this subject,*" our Synod's objection begins. This prepositional phrase covers seventy years of continuous discussion on this matter between representatives of the Ohio and Iowa Synods over against men of the Missouri and Wisconsin Synods. This discussion arose out of the controversy over the doctrine of Election, and in its early stages the issue was very clear. Early utterances of Iowa and Ohio were distinctly synergistic as to form and substance. Dr. G. Fritschel, for example, attempted to explain the mystery of conversion in this way "... By some His (God's) gracious purpose is frustrated because they stubbornly and willfully resist the grace offered to them, whereas in the others God's work is accomplished because they do not willfully resist *but let God's work be done on themselves.*" (*Monatshefte*, 1872, p. 99). We note here the distinction made between those who stubbornly and willfully resist the grace of God, and those who do not do so, rather letting God's work be done on themselves. At about the same early period Ohio flatly stated, "Everything depends on the conduct of man over against the grace of God and the means of grace: Whether he lets the grace operate on himself, which he can do by the strength inherent in him, or whether in spite of it he willfully thrusts it away" (*Kirchenzeitung*, 1885).

This synergism so evident in these earlier writings, however, gradually gave way to a newer mode of expression. Pastor J. Buenger states the subsequent dilemma which arose at the time of the formulation of the Chicago Theses: “What most of all bewilders a person unaccustomed to their new mode of expression is the fact that *they now ascribe the whole conversion from beginning to end. and in every respect, wholly and solely to the grace of God, who without any cooperation on the side of man performs the work of conversion, man doing nothing but resisting the divine grace. And still they insist that this is essentially the same doctrine they have always confessed*” (*The Old and the New Differences*, p. 66 ff.). Pastor Buenger goes on to show how in spite of their terminology used in ascribing the whole conversion from beginning to end wholly and solely to the grace of God without any cooperation on the side of man, they still taught two kinds of resistance, the natural and the willful. Natural resistance, found in all men, never prevents conversion. Willful resistance, however, goes beyond this natural wickedness and cannot be overcome by the Holy Spirit. Thus *the kind of resistance* offered by man finally decides the matter of conversion, whether we say that conversion itself is entirely a work of God’s Holy Spirit or not.

We have no way of knowing today whether or not the American Lutheran Church has given up this false distinction between natural and willful resistance unless they actually say so in a confessional document in so many words. They may positively ascribe the whole act of conversion solely to the grace of God. They may rule out with a heaping up of exclusive particles any and all cooperation whatsoever on the part of man in this act of conversion itself. And they may do so in good faith, since their distinction according to their viewpoint concerns a state or condition in man before the act of conversion ever takes place. The writings of Fritschel, Reu, Lenski, and Stelhorn on this matter still bear powerful testimony in their circles. These writings have to this day, to the writer’s knowledge, never been declared erroristic by any official pronouncement of the American Lutheran Church.

This is one of those places where our Synod feels that a plain and an unqualified antithetical statement is needed. This fact was sensed by the Missouri Synod’s committee, which in 1929 was appointed to examine the Chicago Theses. They criticized the fact that “the distinction between natural and willful resistance (was not) ruled out.” Pastor Buenger speaks of the “gravest neglects” of the Chicago Theses on this point, which left the door open for duplicity. Defining these he states, “The one is, that the false distinction between two different kinds of resistance is in no way rejected. This omission made it possible for the colloquists from the Iowa and Ohio side, while they stretched themselves to the uttermost to come as near as possible to our phraseology yet to take every expression in their own sense” (*The Confession of the Missouri Synod and the Desired Unity of the Lutheran Church*, p. 15).

The *Brief Statement* subsequently took care of this matter in a most satisfactory way. Where the Common Confession uses three sentences, the *Brief Statement* found seven paragraphs necessary. After carefully stating the Scriptural doctrine itself, it continues, “On the basis of these clear statements of the Holy Scriptures we reject every kind of synergism, that is, the doctrine that conversion is wrought not by the grace and power of God alone, but in part also by the cooperation of man himself, by man’s right conduct, his right attitude, his right self-determination, his lesser guilt or less evil conduct is compared with others, *his refraining from willful resistance*, or anything else whereby man’s conversion and salvation is taken out of the gracious hands of God and made to depend on what man does or leaves undone....” (Article VII, Par. 12). This calls the error by name and refutes it, which we feel is demanded by the history of past controversy on this doctrine.

The Common Confession has been defended by statements to the effect that “the distinction between natural and willful resistance is not the point at issue in the Common Confession” (Minutes of the Meeting of the Presidents, May 12, 1954, p. 16). We say that it most certainly is when we are concerned with a document which claims to be a settlement of past differences. If it was a burning issue in 1929, one which required a direct, antithetical statement in the *Brief Statement* of 1932, why is it no longer a point at issue today? Simply to state “that there is no evidence that the American Lutheran Church today teaches the old distinction between willful and natural resistance” (Minutes of the Meeting of the Presidents, May 12, 1954, p. 17) is avoiding the issue. How can we know this, we ask, unless the American Lutheran Church is willing to rule out this error in

plain language? There are times when it becomes necessary to call a thing by name, to point the finger directly at the issue involved.

We close with a statement of our Review Committee, which calls attention to the ignoring of this issue and says, "... Since this is precisely the issue that was in controversy between the synods of the American Lutheran Church and the Synodical Conference, it must, as a confession, be rejected." (*Proceedings*, 31st Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1951, p. 130).

C. Election

False teachings concerning the Scriptural doctrine of Election were very much in evidence before the drawing up of the Formula of Concord. Melancthon, the father of synergism in conversion, was also the father of synergistic predestination. In order to harmonize the universal grace of God with the fact that only some are elected unto eternal life, he spoke of a cause of election residing in man, an "ability to apply himself to grace." One of his followers later expressed it this way: "We are elected and received *because* we believe in the Son." The Synergists argued: Since man's contempt of God's Word is the cause of his reprobation, man's acceptance of God's grace must be regarded as a cause of his election. While Synergists thus denied the *sola gratia* in an effort to explain the mystery, Calvin and his adherents taught a double predestination, as set forth in the Westminster Confession: "By the decree of God... some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death." Thereby, of course, the universal grace of God was denied.

Article XI of the Formula of Concord defends the doctrine of the Bible over against these heresies. On the basis of Ephesians 1:4-5 and Acts 13:48, the Formula declares that the 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 our salvation.*" On the basis of Ezek. 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9, and 2 Tim. 2:21, an election of wrath or a predestination to sin and damnation were plainly rejected. "Man's own fault" is declared as the sole reason of his perdition (Matt. 23:37). Since the doctrine of Election is so closely related to Conversion, even the most subtle form of synergism in conversion was again positively excluded in Article XI. No attempt was made to harmonize or modify the doctrines of *sola gratia* or *universalis gratia* in a manner satisfactory to the demands of human reason. In spite of this divine mystery, however, the doctrine was upheld as a comforting article, if properly treated, i.e. if viewed in the light of the Gospel, and particularly if *sola gratia* as well as *gratia universalis* were kept inviolate, since it afforded the glorious comfort that no one could pluck us out of the almighty hands of Christ, and that the Church of God would exist and abide in opposition to all the gates of hell.

We mention this early historical background merely to refresh our memories on some of the basic principles involved in this doctrine. A careful reading of the Formula of Concord will show how tenaciously these fathers remained with those truths only which were clearly revealed in Scripture, and how vigorously they repudiated every type of heretical view which had arisen in connection with this doctrine, so that the clearly revealed *sola gratia* and *gratia universalis* of Scripture might stand side by side over against all the attempts of human reason to investigate or inquire curiously about a mystery which God had reserved for His wisdom and knowledge alone.

Approaching the more recent period of Lutheranism in America we find that serious aberrations from the truth of this doctrine again became apparent. Surely we are all acquainted with the "*Gnadenwahlstreit*" of past decades. Without even attempting to give a detailed presentation of all the arguments, we merely wish to present in brief the erroneous views which again cropped out. The Ohio Synod taught in 1881 that "*the elect were predestinated into eternal life in view of faith (intuitu fidei)*" (*Synodical Proceedings*, 1881, p. 39). Faith was thereby introduced as a cause of man's election rather than as a result. Election was made dependent in the last analysis on the conduct of natural man which God had foreseen from eternity. The old Iowa conception of Predestination as defined by Dr. S. Fritchel differed somewhat from this, to the extent that he discarded the "*intuitu fidei*" theory and defined election as the *universal gracious will of God as far as it was realized in them that were saved*. In the end it was also nothing more than an election in view of the different conduct of natural

man. The fact that one could speak of a “different conduct on the part of man” presented no problem, as we have seen in the distinction between natural and willful resistance in our treatment of the article on Conversion. Both Iowa and Ohio maintained that to describe faith as a result rather than a cause of election was a Calvinistic conception. They also took violent exception to the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions that God elected or ordained a specific number of persons unto faith and eternal life. (*Personenwahl – Form. Conc. XI, #23*), calling Dr. Walther’s statements in support of this doctrine a horrible doctrine (Allwardt, *Die jetzige Lehre der Synode von Mo. von der Gnadenwahl Gottes*, 1909, p. 36). They could not understand how God should have elected a number of human beings without seeing something in them to cause this decree. Not that they went so far as to say that man’s refraining from willful resistance could be considered a cause in man or an act of cooperation on the part of man. God’s universal will of grace extended to all men. This will of God’s grace, they firmly maintained, is carried out by the Holy Ghost alone, who without cooperation on the part of natural man overcomes natural resistance, but never willful resistance. “The eternal saving will of God is universal,” Dr. Reu states in his *Dogmatics*, “but in its enactment it becomes particular by the willful and persistent resistance of man.” (*Lutheran Dogmatics*, 1945 ed., p. 310). Predestination according to American Lutheran doctrine today is nothing more or less than the universal will of God’s grace in its enactment, or as it is realized in time. Recently their position was defined in the *Lutheran Standard* in the following words, “Divine Election or Predestination is that act of God by which He chose for Himself, from eternity, all those in whom His saving grace would accomplish its blessed purpose.”

The fact that this definition bears great similarity to the wording of the Common Confession is evident when we hear it again: “*God from eternity, solely because of His grace in Christ and without any cause whatever in man, elected as his own all those whom He makes and keeps members of His kingdom and heirs of eternal life. The Holy Spirit by the Gospel has called us and assured us of our status before God, testifying to us that He has chosen us for Himself in Christ from the foundation of the world, and by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness has given us the assurance that He will present us faultless before the throne of His glory.*”

“Solely because of His grace in Christ and without any cause whatever in man,” as exclusive as it may sound in its heaping up of particles, does not necessarily rule out the distinction made between natural and willful resistance in man. “Elected as His own all those whom He makes and keeps members of His kingdom and heirs of eternal life” is not the same as saying that this election was *unto faith* and that it was a cause of man’s salvation, since it can just as well be interpreted to mean an election in view of faith, the enactment of the universal will of God’s grace as it is realized in time.

We therefore feel that the critique of our Wisconsin Synod’s Union Committee is perfectly justified when it asks for the inclusion of the following points for a correct presentation of this doctrine:

- a) a clear and unmistakable statement that this election is an election *unto faith* (Acts 13:48; Eph. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13);
- b) the positive assurance that this election is a cause of our salvation and what pertains thereto (*Trgl. 1065, #8; cf. also Mt. 24:24, Jn. 10:27-29; cf. Jn. 6:65*),

and when it states: “The article also falls short of confessional clarity by failing to state that God’s eternal decree of election did not merely set up a description of those who will be saved, but means that He has chosen ‘each and every person’, a specific number, unto faith and eternal life. (*Personenwahl – Form. Conc. XI, #23, Brief Statement, Art. 39*).”

We are of the conviction that the confessional clarity set forth in the *Brief Statement* is necessary for the preservation of truth over against the unscriptural presentations of this doctrine which have appeared in American Lutheran circles. The *Brief Statement* plainly sets forth the fact that all those who are brought to faith here in time “have already from eternity been endowed by God with faith.” It furthermore clearly rejects anything in man as a cause of God’s election, specifically calling attention to errors such as man’s “refraining from willful resistance” or an election “in view of faith.” With our Confessions it reemphasizes the election of

God in Christ as a “*cause* of our salvation and what pertains thereto.” Calvinistic predestination to *damnation* is ruled out. The distinction between the election of grace and the universal will of grace is pointedly observed, particularly the fact that election “does not embrace all, but only a definite number,” without placing the two doctrines in opposition to each other. Finally, the *Brief Statement* devotes about five hundred words to a presentation of the great comfort which a Christian can derive from this doctrine, with liberal quotations from Scripture and the Confessions.

A great deal can be said, of course, in favor of the quality of brevity in a confessional statement. Confessions, however, are somewhat lengthy at times not as a matter of choice, but of necessity. Great danger lies in omitting specific reference to past error. Our objections to the Common Confession lie in the fact that “vital and indispensable statements are not found in this article”; that “it fails to say what is required in a Scriptural presentation of the doctrine of Election.” (Wisconsin Synod Review of Union Committee, *Proceedings*, 31st Convention, 1951).

D. Inspiration

In a consideration of the subject of Inspiration in connection with the Common Confession one is not confronted with a history of controversy over this article as with some of the others already treated. At the time of the formulation of the Chicago Theses in 1929, the verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures was seemingly upheld and defended by representatives of the American Lutheran Church. There seemed to be little reason for considering this article a particularly controversial one at the time.

It seems, however, as though this position was being shaken to some extent, in the Iowa Synod at least, by the close contact which it maintained with German theology of the nineteenth century. Dr. Reu, for example, in an article on the “Peculiarity of the American Lutheran Church and Theology” (*Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1926) wishes to restrict the inerrancy of the Bible to matters of Christian faith and life, leaving open the question or its inerrancy in so-called minor or non-fundamental matters, particularly when the matter of church fellowship is involved.

This view is for all practical purposes the official stand of the American Lutheran Church today. Fellowship is tolerated with such who openly regard Scripture as merely “the history of revelation” (Prof. A. A. Jagnow, *What Lutherans Are Thinking*, p. 74 f.). This liberal view does not admit the thought that biblical references to geography, chronology, astronomy, geology, or physics are necessarily considered to be inspired in the strict sense of the word. Dr. Mattes of the American Lutheran Church approvingly quotes Dr. H. E. Jacobs of the United Lutheran Church when he says, “Writers were not inspired so as to speak with scientific precision when they employed their human knowledge of geographical or chronological details.... The Holy Spirit, in making the sacred writers infallible recorders of the hitherto unknown will of God towards men, in no way inspired them to be teachers of astronomy, or geology, or physics. These spheres do not belong to revelation.” (*The Authority of Scripture*, 1945). On the basis of such statements we ask, “What really constitutes the term ‘*Holy Scriptures*’? All the Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, in all their parts and in every single Word? Or merely those parts wherein we feel that God revealed his infallible will to man?” We become even more concerned about this question when we find that only last year a writer in an official magazine of the American Lutheran Church declared that the prayers of David in Psalms 59, 69, and 109 were “out of line with the spirit of Christ.” (*Lutheran Standard*, Feb. 21, 1953, p. 15). Does that mean that these Psalms were not inspired?

The *Brief Statement* clearly rejects such distinctions when it declares: “We teach (also) that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called ‘theological deduction’, but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16, John 10:35, Rom. 3: 2, 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.” And again, “We reject the doctrine which under the name of science has gained wide popularity in the Church of our day, that the Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God, but in part the word of

man and hence does, or at least might, contain error. We reject this erroneous doctrine as horrible and blasphemous, since it flatly contradicts Christ and His holy apostles, sets up men as judges over the Word of God, and thus overthrows the foundation of the Christian Church and its faith.”

Does the Common Confession provide similar safeguards? We quote its entire statement on the doctrine of Inspiration: “*Through the Holy Scriptures, which God caused to be written by men chosen and inspired by Him, God instructs and assures us regarding His will for us. The Holy Scriptures constitute His Word to men, centering in the revelation of Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. Through the Holy Scriptures God continues to speak to men in all ages until the end of time. He speaks as the infallible and unchanging God, Whose message to mankind never changes. Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures in their entirety as the inspired Word of God. His Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that his Word is true, that He will keep all His promises to us, and that our faith in Him is not in vain.... We therefore recognize the Holy Scriptures as God’s inerrant Word and this Word of God alone shall establish articles of faith (cf. Smalcald Articles, Part II Art. II). We pledge ourselves to teach all things taught in the Holy Scriptures, and nothing but that which is taught us by God in the Holy Scriptures.*”

The crux of the above presentation lies in the sentence, “Since the Holy Spirit by divine inspiration supplied to the holy writers *content and fitting word*, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures *in their entirety* as the inspired Word of God.”

The expression “contents and fitting word” first occurred in the Declaration of the American Lutheran Church of 1938. It was used again in the Pittsburgh Agreement of 1940, a joint confessional statement of the American Lutheran Church and the United Lutheran Church. It has been publicly declared at various occasions by representatives of the United Lutheran Church that the expression “content and fitting word” does NOT mean Verbal Inspiration as taught by the Synodical Conference.

The expression “the Holy Scriptures in their entirety” is also subject to faulty interpretation, since it has been used by liberal Lutherans to mean that the Bible “on the whole” contains the inerrant Word of God, but not in all its words and parts. This liberal view is also referred to as the inspiration of the so-called. “totality of Scripture,” a denial of the truth that each particular statement of the Bible is inerrant.

In *Another Fraternal Endeavor*, issued recently by the Missouri Synod, exception is taken to the fact that we make such an issue of the liberal interpretations of these expressions of the Common Confession. It is maintained that we cannot hold the American Lutheran Church responsible for liberal interpretations made by individuals, especially since the same expressions have been used in the past to uphold the correct view on Inspiration. “How can an expression which is good and adequate in itself be rejected because it *reminds* one of expressions that are not good and adequate in themselves?” is the question raised (*Another Fraternal Endeavor*, 1954, p. 20).

We certainly do not imply that the authors of the Common Confession have for their own part given up the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. Neither do we wish to pass judgment upon their motives in using these expressions. We must still maintain, however, that the use of them in formulating this Confession is unfortunate, to say the least, since the simple fact remains that these terms have left and still leave room for two contradictory views to stand side by side. The faulty interpretations placed upon them are not isolated cases. They have been repeatedly expressed, in official church periodicals, even since the adoption of the Common Confession by the American Lutheran Church. Our Union Committee was justified in emphasizing their danger when it called attention to the fact that a presentation of the doctrine of Inspiration “for our times and conditions” should “speak clearly and unmistakably on two points:

- “a) that all that was written in the Holy Scriptures was given by the Holy Ghost;
- “b) that as a result of this inspiration, and as an article of faith, inerrancy be claimed not merely for the Scriptures as a whole, but for each particular statement that they contain.”

They were also correct in their conviction that under present-day circumstances we should not even yield the term “verbal inspiration” in Part I. (*Proceedings*, 31st Convention, 1951, p. 131).

E. The Antichrist

The articles treated thus far – Justification, Conversion, Election, and Inspiration – might be considered the chief centers of criticism by those who consider the Common Confession ambiguous and inadequate as a settlement of past controversy. Other objections have been raised by our Synod’s Union Committee, as well as by brethren of the Norwegian Synod and of the Missouri Synod itself. It will be impossible in the time allotted us to present each of these with the same detail as in the case of the articles previously discussed. We do, however, wish to call attention briefly to one remaining objection.

Under *Article III, “The Last Things,”* we find it regrettable that the Common Confession does not use the same language of our Lutheran Confessions (*Trgl.*, p. 475,10) and reemphasized in the *Brief Statement* (Par. 43) that the Pope is “the very Antichrist,” and that the “prophecies of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Antichrist, 2 Thess 2:3-12, 1 John 2:18, *have been fulfilled* in the Pope of Rome and his dominion.” The statement of the Common Confession is without question a qualified one when it declares, “Among the signs of His (Christ’s) approaching return for judgment the distinguishing features of the Antichrist, as portrayed in the Holy Scriptures, are *still clearly discernable* in the Roman papacy, the climax of all human usurpations to Christ’s authority in the Church.” It has been maintained that this IS an unqualified statement, that the wording of the Common Confession completely rules out the false view that the time may come when the features of the Antichrist will be no longer discernable in the papacy, but, perhaps, in some other anti-Christian power. Defenders of the Common Confession state that one must have a correct understanding of the word “still,” and of the word “climax,” which stands as an apposition to the word Papacy and defines this institution once and for all as the apex of human usurpation, placing all other developments of a similar nature, whether before or after, on a lower level. But if this is what is meant, why doesn’t the Common Confession say so in words that cover the matter simply and clearly as in the *Brief Statement*? If simplicity and brevity were the goals, why not use a simple statement, if it suits the purpose, rather than a rather belabored one which can certainly be interpreted in a different light? When we are aware of the fact that the Iowa members of the American Lutheran Church have always placed this so-called “non-fundamental” doctrine into the sphere of “open questions,” i.e. questions which cannot be clearly and definitely decided upon the basis of Scripture, when we realize that an entire District of the American Lutheran Church has gone on record with the words, “We reject the statement that the Pope is THE Antichrist,” we are more convinced than ever that our misgivings are not without foundation, and that a true settlement must admit of but one interpretation.

We wish that time would permit a presentation of all our objections to Common Confession, Part I, and also some words concerning the fact that certain doctrines which have been in controversy in the past between the contracting church bodies have been completely omitted from consideration. We feel, however, that what we have already presented should offer sufficient explanation for the resolution adopted by our Synod at New Ulm, in which we have declared the Common Confession inadequate as a settlement of past differences.

Part III

The Further Inadequacy of Part II of the Common Confession

In our presentation thus far it will have been noticed that very little reference has been made to Part II of the Common Confession. Part II is the official answer given by the Missouri Synod to those who have raised the charge that Part I is an inadequate settlement and who have protested against it. The Houston Convention of the Missouri Synod defines Part II as a supplement and expansion of Part I. “*For purposes of study*” both parts are to be “*treated as one document,*” with the hope expressed that such study “*may clarify possible*

misunderstandings encountered in Part I.” (Quotations from Resolution 8 of *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1953, p. 532). Since Part II has been submitted to us with the request that we are “for purposes of study to treat Part I and Part II of the Common Confession as one document” (Resolution 19, of *Missouri Synod Proceedings*, 1953, p. 538), and since this is the only official answer to all our specific objections to Part I, we would certainly be faulted if we ignored it completely.

From the very outset let us remember, however, that only Part I has been adopted by the Missouri Synod. Let us remember that the resolutions of 1950, which declare Part I to be a “statement of agreement” between the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, have in no way been set aside. Let us remember that the official interpretation on resolutions pertaining to the adoption of Part I as “a settlement of the doctrinal differences” which have hitherto divided the two church bodies has in no way been changed. Part II proceeds from the assumption, as it states in a preamble, that a “common conviction and testimony regarding the Christian faith” has been adequately expressed in the first section. Because this common conviction “must express itself in the life and corporate activity of the Church,” additional statements are submitted under the title “The Church in the World.”

It might be construed as poor taste on our part to take exception to the general arrangement of Part II, with its title and subtitles (The Church’s Mission, The Church’s Resources, The Church and Its Ministrations, The Church and the Home, etc.). This arrangement may lend itself very well to the purpose the committee had in mind. But one can hardly agree that this arrangement lends itself very well to a satisfactory answer on misgivings that have been pointedly expressed on the formulation of doctrine. The statements on doctrine which do self-evidently occur, are found in an entirely different setting. Our objection to a statement in Part I under “Justification” is considered answered by a statement from Part II under the title “The Church and Its Ministrations” (cf. *A Fraternal Word*). Our objection to a statement in Part I under the title “Conversion” is considered taken care of by a statement from Part II under the title “The Church’s Mission.” And so on. To this method we say that if an objection is to be answered, we would certainly wish to find the answer under the title, progression of thought, and direct context of the subject in question. There also remains the serious question as to the advisability of considering our objections to specific doctrinal points to be satisfactorily answered in a “twin-document” of this kind, as our brethren of the Norwegian Synod have pointed out. Assuming that both Synods will adopt Part II, “it will be a real problem whether to read Part I in the light of Part II or to read Part II in the light of Part I wherever they may seem to differ” (*Our Relations with the Lutheran Church—“Missouri Synod*, Union Committee of the Norwegian Synod, p. 15).

It still remains, however, to consider some of the answers set forth in Part II as a complete answer to our objections. On the subject of *Justification* one additional statement is offered by the writers of *A Fraternal Word*, a statement which speaks of the “forgiveness SPOKEN by God to the world in the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ,” from which no one is excluded (*A Fraternal Word*, p. 4). We still maintain that this does not express the truth of Objective Justification, that God has already declared all sinners righteous in His sight. “Spoken” can still mean nothing more than “offered,” which is what the American Lutheran Church has always taught. On the subject of *Conversion* an additional statement is supplied which speaks of a mankind which “willfully resists every endeavor of God to save it from destruction.” Our attention is called to the fact that the Common Confession “nowhere indicates a distinction between natural and willful resistance, but speaks of willful resistance only” (*A Fraternal Word*, p. 5). This is, however, simply an evasion of the point in question. The fact remains that such a distinction has been made and openly taught by the American Lutheran Church. That was the controversy which the Common Confession is said to have settled. We asked for a rejection of this untenable distinction, but none is given. On the subject of *Election* the same evasiveness is encountered. Additional statements from Part II can be accepted by anyone who holds to the views held by men like Fritschel, Reu, and Stelhorn without conceding any point mentioned in our criticism of Part I. It is again a matter of making one’s language so specific that errors which are known to have been in existence cannot hide behind it.

On the subject of *Inspiration* we are happy to see Part II provide a statement with the use of the term “God’s verbally inspired Word.” It reads: “The Holy Scriptures are God’s verbally inspired Word, that is, God

moved men to write what He wanted recorded in the words He wanted employed. They alone constitute God's inerrant Word to men." Our Norwegian brethren have pointed out that the phrase we desired is used "in a setting which makes it possible still to limit inspiration to the doctrinal, spiritual portions of the Bible." (*Our Relations with Missouri*, p. 16). Others have raised the question: Did God want *everything* recorded that is in the Bible, or did men add things to what "He wanted recorded"? We would be willing to grant that an obvious attempt has been made to meet one of our objections. But it hasn't been adopted as yet, and in the meantime statements continue to appeal in American Lutheran writings which speak of a "limited revelation" (*Lutheran Standard*, Feb. 21, 1953, p. 15). Additional statements of the subject of the Antichrist are considered unnecessary in Part II, as well as any reference to the doctrine of Sunday, omitted from both parts.

Because of the unsatisfactory nature and content of Part II of the Common Confession, offered as the only official reply to our objections raised against Part I, our Synod could come to but one conclusion at its last convention. In effect the Missouri Synod at Houston had simply reaffirmed "its acceptance of the common Confession as a 'settlement of past differences which are in fact not settled.'" (*Proceedings*, 32nd Convention, Wisconsin Synod, 1953, p. 104).

Part IV

Our Charge of "Creating a Basically Untruthful Situation"

Up to this point we have spoken primarily of the "inadequacy" and "ambiguity" of the Common Confession. Our charge has been that the Common Confession is subject to various interpretations. It lacks antitheses which call attention to specific errors which are known to have existed in the past. We say that past differences of doctrine are left unsettled. But we cannot ignore the implication which follows. Our resolution at New Ulm also took this next step when it declared that the adoption of the Common Confession as a settlement of past differences "involves an untruth and creates a basically untruthful situation." Our next resolution asked that the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod should "repudiate its stand that the Common Confession is a settlement of the doctrines treated by the two committees" (*Proceedings*, 31st Convention, Wisconsin Synod, p. 147).

Missouri's answer to this last resolution has been "that the Common Confession need not be repudiated since Wisconsin does not show that it contains false doctrine." In a meeting of Presidents of the respective synods, held in January of this year, this answer was given. It was based upon the premise "that there has been no accusation by Wisconsin of false doctrine in the Common Confession" and "that Wisconsin is at best making the accusation of false judgment regarding the adequacy of the Common Confession." (Meeting of Presidents, Official Minutes, Jan. 13, 1954, p. 4). A study of the minutes of these meetings shows that this answer was repeatedly given. (cf. Minutes, p. 6). At the conclusion of the discussion of the Common Confession in these meetings joy was expressed by the honorable President of the Missouri Synod over the fact that it was not said "that it contains false doctrine." (Minutes, May 12, 1954, p. 19). The analysis of our charges set forth in Missouri's second *Fraternal Endeavor* states: "Only if the Common Confession itself should contain false doctrine, could its rescission be made a matter of conscience and compulsion" (*Another Fraternal Endeavor*, p. 28).

While it is true that we have not accused the Common Confession of false doctrine in that which it says, we cannot agree with the above conclusions. "The correctness of a confessional document," as a recent article in our *Quartalschrift* states, "must be measured by the manner in which it serves the purpose for which it was written" ("What Constitutes False Doctrine," E. Reim, *Quartalschrift*, April, 1954, p. 86). From the same treatise we quote, "A confessional document may set forth nothing but Biblical truths in its various individual parts, and yet fail to meet the issue, to serve the very purpose for which it was designed." (Ibid. p. 87).

A confession, in other words, may not contain false doctrine, but *if it permits false doctrine to stand, if it claims to settle doctrinal issues which are in fact not settled*, it becomes guilty of something which is equally

serious. “A basically untruthful situation” is created. Truth and error are permitted to stand side by side. Orthodox confessionalism deteriorates. The spirit of unionism and liberalism are permitted to work with ever-increasing effect. Our Synod considers this untruthful situation dangerous. It does not wish to share in its responsibility. It does not wish the confessional stand of the Synodical Conference to be undermined, both in its own midst and over against those who are outside its fellowship. Wherefore it asks that the untruthful situation created by the adoption of the Common Confession be corrected by a repudiation of this stand.

In closing we wish to say that the mere thought of a disruption of the Synodical Conference is something which fills us all with gravest concern, particularly when we think of some of the heart-rending implications involved. We are most thankful for having been granted the opportunity to present our Synod’s position at these sessions. It has been done in the hope that we all might better appreciate the extreme seriousness of the situation with which we are faced, and that the “present break in relations that is now threatening the existence of the Synodical Conference” (cf. *Proceedings*, 32nd Convention, Wisconsin Synod, p. 104) might be repaired. We are deeply indebted to the strong, confessional voice of Missouri, which once showed our Synod the way. That voice has been adequately set forth in the words of the *Brief Statement*. May that be our **COMMON CONFESSION!**