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Vol. XL

November 1969

No. 10



ARCHIVES

# THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

## THE CHURCH AND HER TASK

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The following statement was adopted by the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, in session at Iligan City, Philippines, in October 1968. We print it to keep our readers informed of important developments in world Christianity.*

**RESOLVED**, That we adopt the following statement, The Church and Her Task, together with the list of implications, as the general presuppositions behind our work and as a guide for further planning.

### THE CHURCH AND HER TASK

God's purpose for His fallen creation is to bring all things back to their original state of harmony and unity with Him in Jesus Christ.

The church is that one, holy, catholic, and apostolic fellowship of believers that God has established upon earth to fulfill His purpose for all of creation.

Through the Word and sacraments the Holy Spirit enables the church to accomplish His purpose through:

- the proclamation of God's message to sinful man;
- the strengthening and training of those whom God has called to serve Him;
- the demonstration, in acts of love, of God's own love for all men.

As members of the church, Lutherans in the Philippines share in the responsibility of fulfilling God's purpose, through witness, fellowship, and service.

#### *Witness*

By witness we mean the proclamation of God's message to sinful man, who has separated himself from his loving Father. Through the Gospel, God establishes fallen man in a new relationship with Himself. In word and action the church and the indi-

vidual Christian are to proclaim to all men everywhere that light and life have come in Jesus Christ.

1. The church witnesses to the world because God Himself first sent His Son into the world.
2. The church finds the example for her own witness in the preaching of her Lord Jesus Christ to the people of His day.
3. The church has received a commission from her Lord to witness to the world in His stead and with His authority.
4. The church fulfills this commission in the power of the Holy Spirit, sent to the church by Christ Himself.

#### *Fellowship*

By fellowship we mean the joyful sharing and strengthening of the new relationship with God established among those who have responded to His call.

1. Fellowship among Christians exists because God first established fellowship with man by sending His Son to become one with man and so to make man one with Him.
2. Through a continuing close relationship with God, the members of the church also enjoy a new relationship with one another, thus strengthening the fellowship of the church. At the same time, strengthening the fellowship within the church results in a closer relationship with God.
3. Christian fellowship is demonstrated and is also strengthened through worship, instruction, and mutual edification.
  - a. In worship, Christians respond to all that God has done and continues

- to do for them. Members of the church come together for public worship in order to pray, praise, and give thanks to God. Through Word and sacraments, they also receive from Him forgiveness of sins, increased faith and power for Christian living. When the members of the church thus participate in public worship, they are better prepared to worship God in their daily lives.
- b. In instruction, the church both formally and informally provides opportunities for the individual Christian to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the Word and will of God. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to develop in the Christian the desire to live according to his Christian understanding, as well as to provide him with the necessary guidance to direct him in his life.
  - c. In mutual edification, the members of the church build one another up in Christian faith and life as they are in contact with one another. That is, they help one another become more Christ-like as they encourage one another, admonish one another, and share one another's burdens.

#### *Service*

By service we mean all the ministries of mercy in which Christians engage as a response to the mercy shown them in Christ Jesus and as an expression of their new relationship with God.

1. Christian service flows out of the love of God in the hearts of Christians and is thus a living demonstration before all men of God's love for His creation. The church, therefore, directs its acts of Christian service towards God's world, but in so doing it gives glory to God Himself.
  2. The compassion of the church and of individual Christians is awakened by the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian witness and fellowship, and expresses itself in spontaneous acts of service to people in need.
  3. As the church's example in Christian service is found in her Lord's own ministry of healing and love, so the gifts the church needs to carry on Christian service also come from the Lord of the church.
  4. The Lord Himself provides the church and the individual Christian with opportunities for Christian service, both within the church and in the world outside.
  5. In performing these spontaneous acts of Christian service, the church is itself strengthened, as is also the individual member of the church.
- Having accepted the above definition of the church and her task, the members of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines agree also on the following implications for her own work in the Philippines:
1. We agree that the following factors make it necessary for the Lutheran Church in the Philippines to reappraise her present approach to fulfilling her tasks:
    - the changing appraisal of ourselves and of our task in the Philippines;
    - the new spirit of renewal and reform within the dominant church in this country;
    - the continuing limitation of resources available to us; and
    - our increasing recognition of a variety of possible ways our work can be done.
  2. We agree that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines has an important role to play in the Philippines today as a

- distinct denomination with her own congregations. The Lutheran Church in the Philippines has a responsibility to perpetuate the Gospel heritage of the Reformation and to seek to help bridge the gap between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. We also agree, however, that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines must regularly reevaluate its unique role and need for separate identity in the light of future developments.
3. We agree that the primary purpose of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines is to witness to the saving power of God in Jesus Christ. Her responsibility to the unbaptized is to witness to them so that they may be brought into the fellowship of the church; to the baptized it is to nurture and strengthen them in the Christian fellowship. The Lutheran Church in the Philippines' responsibility both to the baptized and to the unbaptized should not be understood primarily to mean making them members of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines.
  4. We agree that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines may carry out her task without necessarily trying to establish congregations throughout the country.
  5. We agree that, in carrying out her task, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and her individual congregations and agencies should remain alert to what other churches are doing and seek opportunities to cooperate with them.
  6. We agree that, in ministering to people, the members of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines are to be concerned, both in the church and in society, with the whole man. This means ministering to the physical and mental needs of people, as well as to their spiritual needs.
  7. We agree that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines should remain alert to possibilities for service within the context of Philippine society and culture, in order to find ways to demonstrate her concern.
  8. We agree that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines should be alert to opportunities for service to other churches in Asia and beyond, and ways to demonstrate her concern for them.
  9. We agree that it is the responsibility of every Christian, not only of those with special training, to equip other Christians for a more effective ministry to one another and to the world. The Lutheran Church in the Philippines, however, should be ready to provide special training to selected Christians, including members of other churches. Such training should enable them better to equip other Christians to fulfill their own ministry more effectively as members of the church.
  10. We agree that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines should give due recognition to Philippine thought patterns in the formulation and implementation of her plans.
  11. We agree that although mutual benefit is derived when churches share their resources with one another, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines should continue to work for independence in the area of money and manpower.
  12. We agree that, for the foreseeable future, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines will continue to need foreign missionaries to help carry out her task and will continue to request the Lutheran Philippine Mission's cooperation and assistance in providing for the

spiritual, mental, and physical welfare of the missionaries.

13. We agree that the organizational structure set up for the Lutheran Church in the Philippines in her constitution will continue to be adequate for the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, unless and until a radical change in the conditions that now obtain within the church should require substantial changes in the Lutheran Church in the Philippines' organization.

#### ARTICLE THREE: OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines shall be:

##### A. *In Terms of Witness:*

1. Christians who actively demonstrate their faith in God and their concern for fellowmen by testifying to that faith in word and deed.
2. Christians who pray and work for the extension and coming of God's kingdom throughout the world.
3. People confronted with the demands

of God's law and His gracious offer of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

##### B. *In Terms of Fellowship:*

1. Christians who worship and serve God both individually and corporately.
2. Christians who continue in the study of God's Word, are engaged in the training of the young, and promote growth in Christian knowledge.
3. Christians who recognize the bond of faith that unites all believers in Christ, and express that unity in cooperation with one another.

##### C. *In Terms of Service:*

1. Individual Christians who recognize and respond to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of others.
2. Congregations whose members serve their society and nation by active participation in community affairs and specific acts of mercy and love.
3. A church group that both by itself and through united action with others endeavors to fulfill its obligation to the suffering and needy of this world.