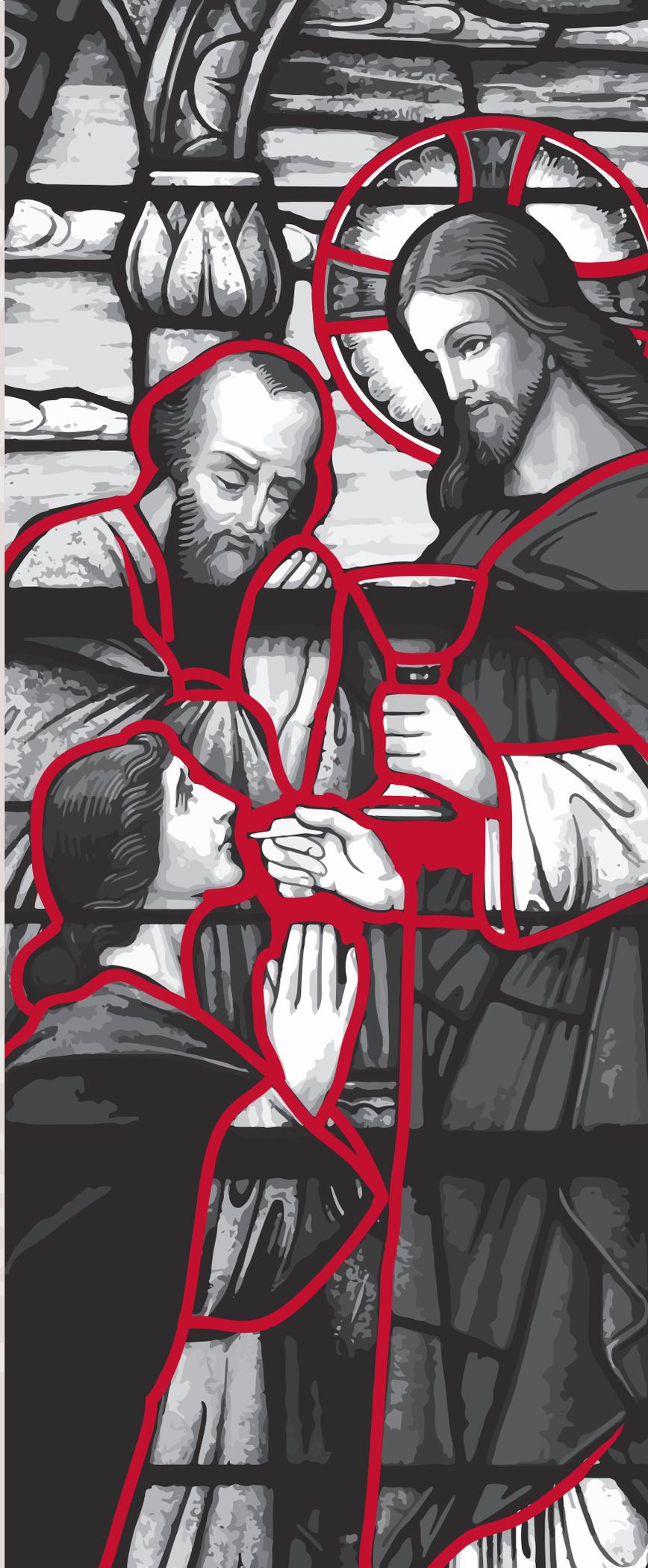


JOURNAL OF LUTHERAN
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THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

Witness Always

Foreword

GERMAN PASTOR, THEOLOGIAN AND MISSION LEADER Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982) is perhaps the most significant confessional Lutheran missiologist of the second half of the 20th century. He studied theology at Erlangen in Bavaria with Otto Procksch, Werner Elert and Hans Preuss. Ordained in 1933 in the Bavarian Lutheran state church, he immediately joined the church struggle against Hitler and was, along with men like Hermann Sasse (1895–1976), a strong and ringing voice for a clear Lutheran confession of the faith over against those more or less aligned with Karl Barth, who advocated the diminution of the doctrinal and confessional nature of the Lutheran Church. After the war, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) was formed as a union of Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches. Hopf rightly recognized this as incompatible with the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions. The basic questions that have divided the Lutheran and Reformed churches since the Reformation, questions that go to the very heart of the Gospel (eternal election, Baptism, Lord's Supper, Christ's divine and human natures, Law and Gospel), were deemed non-church dividing by the EKD (and the LWF soon after). While Christ Himself ("But you, who do you say that I am?" Mark 8:29) and Luther's catechism call for a clear "yes or no" to these questions, the union church requires no such confession. In fact, as history demonstrates, it finally forbids such confession. But Lutheranism dies where it can no longer confess the truth and reject error. The church—as we behold today before our very eyes in liberal Lutheranism—can no longer confess the very heart of the faith: "There is no other name given among when by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In the New Testament, "witness" and "confession" are not only inseparable but are synonymous (John 1:15, 19ff.; 2:20ff.; 4:1ff.; 14; 5:4ff.; I Tim. 6:12–14; Heb. 12:1–3).

Hopf (and Sasse) were dismayed as the LCMS at the time failed to give a clear answer to the formation of the EKD and even had well-known theologians praising its formation. He was removed from his Bavarian pastorate in 1949 and joined the free church,

which became the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany (SELK), Missouri's partner church to this day and the remnant confessional conscience of German Lutheranism. In 1950, Hopf became the director of the Bleckmar Mission of SELK and remained in that position until 1978. He was instrumental in the organization, theology and advancement of the Lutheran Church in South Africa as a continued mission of SELK. The church struggle under Hitler had rendered him a decided opponent of racism and of Apartheid. Hopf passed from time to eternity in 1981.

In the following essay, Hopf elaborates on the basic confessional principles of missiology, which were re-discovered in the confessional revival in Germany in the 19th century. The men whom he notes were in many cases specifically involved in and well aware of the work that formed the Missouri Synod. The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther shared the fundamental conviction that Lutheran missions must lead to Lutheran churches. Walther, too, as he regularly noted, rejoiced wherever and whenever there was faith in Christ's cross, confessing that the church is well beyond the boundary of faithful Lutheranism. However, he, like Hopf, emphatically insisted that the mission of the Missouri Synod found only Lutheran churches, clearly recognized as such in doctrine and practice. The Synod separated from churches and societies, which could not do this. There is no other option for us if we take the Scriptures and our Lutheran Confessions seriously.

Today we know and confess the clear Gospel of Christ because of the German Lutherans who insisted on Lutheran missions planting Lutheran churches. We in the Missouri Synod today have the sacred vocation of continuing this fidelity, precisely so that future generations will be blessed no less than we have been blessed. The clear confession of the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus — and its delivery in the Word, Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar — demand it.

May the Lord strengthen us for the task of being both "witnesses" and "confessors," come what may.

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison

Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, A.D. 2012

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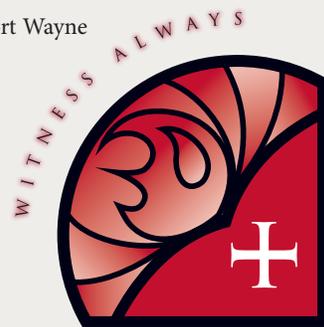
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Abbreviations

Mbl. = *Missionsblatt der Hannov. ev.-luth. Freikirche*

UdK = *Unter dem Kreuze* 14, no. 29 (July 7, 1889): 227 (hereafter *UdK*)

AC = Augsburg Confession

Ap = Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Tr = Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

Kolb-Wengert = *Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000)

BSLK = *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 11th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992)

AE = *Luther's Works*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955–1986)

WA = *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften] (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993)

This essay was translated from “Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission” in *Lutherische Kirche treibt lutherische Mission: Festschrift zum 75jähr. Jubiläum d. Bleckmarer Mission, 1892, 14. Juni, 1967*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (Bleckmar über Soltau [Hannover]: Mission Evangelisch–Lutherischer Freikirchen, 1967).

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THE LUTHERAN CHURCH PLANTS LUTHERAN MISSIONS

by Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf

translated by Rachel Mumme with Matthew C. Harrison

Two programmatic sentences stand at the outset of the path embarked upon by the fathers of the Bleckmar Mission when they separated from the Hermannsburg Mission. Already on June 18, 1889, at the synod convention of the Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Pastor Heinrich Wilhelm Gerhold from Verden an der Aller formulated the following sentences, which had the general assent of the assembly, as the outcome of the proceedings: “[The] Lutheran church can do only Lutheran mission, and Lutheran mission can be done only by a Lutheran church.”¹ The later decisions were

¹ *UdK* 14, no. 29 (July 7, 1889):227, in the report about the synod convention of the Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church on June 18, 1889, in Hermannsburg. Two other sentences were agreed upon at the same time as the programmatic sentences cited above: “The Hermannsburg Mission is in danger of falling away from the Lutheran confession” and “It is our responsibility to do everything so that the institution founded for the Lutheran mission is preserved for the Lutheran church.” Friedrich Wolff and E. Bingmann, eds., *Geschichte der Hannov. ev.-luth. Freikirche* (Celle: Romberger, 1924), 34. The occasion and background of these sentences are shown by a synod convention resolution of the Hannover Free Church from the following year: “The of the Hannover State Church as a Lutheran church deplores the separation from the same. However, the officially released agreement reached by the Hermannsburg Mission with the regional consistory [*Landeskonsistorium*] still recognition acknowledges the Hannover State Church as a Lutheran church. Thus recognition of this connection and a participation in the same would itself include a renunciation of our free church” Synod convention in Wriedel on June 5, 1890; *UdK* 15, no. 24 (June 15, 1890):189; cf. Wolff and Bingmann, *Geschichte*, 34. At the same time as this resolution of the synod convention, the missive “An die Hermannsbürger Missionare” was published, which the Pastor’s Convention of the Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church addressed to the missionaries and which the synod convention in Wriedel on June 5, 1890, “unanimously approved” so that those who were assembled there “also made reply and gave greeting to their own.” *UdK* 15:185–188. The president of the synod and of the Hannover Free Church at that time was Pastor Friedrich Wolff in Bleckmar. The text of the missive can be found along with all other important documents from those early days in a series of articles in Conrad Dreves, “Wie unsere freikirchliche Mission entstand,” *Mbl* 1, no. 2 (1899) through 2, no. 10 (1900).

More information about the pastors H. W. Gerhold (1838–1899) and F. Wolff (1841–1920), both of whom belonged to the 43 obstinate pastors who were deposed in 1873–1874 in Kurhessen, can be found in Rudolf Schlunk, *Die 43 renitenten Pfarrern* (Marburg: Elwert, 1923), 110–112; 147–150. Further in the obituaries: *UdK* 24, no. 45 (1889):388–389; 45, no. 41–42 (1920):243–245, 250–252; *Mbl* 22, no. 12 (1920):82–84; *Hessische Blätter* 28, no. 260 (1899); 49, no. 4389 (1920):335–336.

only consequent steps on the path determined by these two sentences.² This is also true for a third sentence, first added to the program of the fathers in 1953: “Lutheran mission must lead to [a] Lutheran church.” The 75th anniversary of the mission³ founded on June 14, 1892, by a synod ruling of the Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, calls for a fundamental reflection on the starting point and on the goal of the particular path of our free church Lutheran mission.

The Lutheran Doctrine of the Church

We begin with the Lutheran doctrine of the church and of her true unity. The Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession is not speaking of the Lutheran church; it is

² After the synod convention of the Hannover Free Church (Nettelkamp, May 26, 1891) had postponed the decision about the future relationship to the Hermannsburg Mission, primarily because they still wanted to wait for the echo of the missive to the missionaries, the decisive step was taken on June 14, 1892, on the occasion of the synod convention in the *Kleinen Kreuzgemeinde* in Hermannsburg through the unanimous confession of the synod to both sentences: “We recognize it as our responsibility to continue the old Lutheran mission of Louis Harms, first of all in Africa. We want to conduct this mission work as churchly, that means, as the mission work of our Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church.” *UdK* 17, no. 27 (July 3, 1892) 211; Wolff and Bingmann, *Geschichte*, 35; *Mbl* 12, no. 12 (1910):90. The mission of the Hannover Evangelical Lutheran Free Church founded by this synod resolution became a cooperative mission work of Lutheran free churches through the “transition order for the mission of Evangelical Lutheran free churches” resolved by the synod of the Hannoverian diocese of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church on May 22, 1951 in Sottdorf. Officially the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church and the Evangelical Lutheran (Old Lutheran) Church are participating in this mission work along with the Hannoverian, the Hessian and the Lower Hessian dioceses of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church.

³ *Mbl* 45 (1953):116–118. An explanation “Zur Frage nach der Zusammenarbeit lutherischer Missionen in Südafrika” was decided in Bleckmar on July 8, 1953, by the mission council and the mission administration and in Itshelejuba on Aug. 4, 1953, by the conference of the missionaries of the mission of Evangelical Lutheran free churches and the pastors of the Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa. Cf. Johannes Schnakkenberg, *Wo liegt der Unterschied?: Eine Antwort aus der ev.-luth. Synode in Südafrika auf die Frage nach dem Unterschied ihres kirchlichen Handelns von dem der Hermannsbürger deutschen ev.-luth. Synode Südafrikas* (Uelzen: Lutheraner Verlag, 1957), 46–47.

not as if it is speaking of some part of worldwide Christianity. Rather this article, just as all other statements of the Lutheran Confessions about the church, is exclusively about the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.⁴ As the faith of the confessors of Augsburg regards the church, it in no way is contemplating a particular church, but rather expressly and exclusively the one church. Speaking with a host of images, the whole witness of Scripture says of this one church, that she is the body of Jesus Christ, the people of God, the one flock of the one Shepherd, the Temple of God assembled of living stones and growing toward its completion.⁵ The Lutheran confession responds to God's revealed Word about His church and says:

It is also taught at all times that there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is purely preached and the holy Sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.

For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the Gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding and the Sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed elsewhere. As Paul says in Eph. 4[:4–5]: “There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call — one Lord, one faith, one Baptism.”⁶

We now find ourselves confronted with the question about the confessional consequences, which we are compelled to address on account of the doctrine about the true unity of the church, as attested in AC VII. Nor will the young churches on the mission fields be spared from having to deal with these confessional consequences.⁷

⁴ Cf. Ernst Kinder, *Der evangelische Glaube und die Kirche, Grundzüge des evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchenverständnisses* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958); Hermann Sasse, “Der Siebente Artikel der Augustana in der gegenwärtigen Krisis des Luthertums,” in *In statu confessionis: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1961), 50–69; trans. by Norman Nagel as “Article VII of the Augsburg Confession in the Present Crisis of Lutheranism,” in *We Confess the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 17–39.

⁵ 1 Cor. 12:13–27; Rom. 12:5; Eph. 5:23. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:16–17; 1 Pet. 5:9–10; Rom. 9:25; Gal. 5:26–31; John 10:16; 1 Pet. 2:2; Acts 20:28; Eph. 2:19–21; 1 Pet. 2:5; 2 Cor. 6:16.

⁶ AC VIII; Kolb-Wengert, 42; BSLK, 61.

⁷ Cf. Hermann Sasse, “Die Frage nach der Einheit der Kirche auf dem Missionsfeld,” in *Jahrbuch des Martin-Luther-Bundes*, ed. Christian Stoll (Berlin: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1947), 103–115; the same in *Jahrbuch für Mission 1947–1948*, ed. Friedrich W. Hopf (Rothenburg

All of these consequences depend upon the fact that we staunchly and unequivocally maintain this: it is always and only about the one holy church and not about specifics having to do with some part of the church (*Teilkirche*).

The perspective of faith (*Glaubensblick*), from which our confession speaks of the divine wonder of the church on earth, casts its gaze on all people, all times and all the world. All doubts and nagging vexations are overcome in trusting God's sure promise in His Word. Certainly, the impression always arises that “no church” exists. Indeed, it often really looks as though the church “has completely ceased to exist.” In contrast, “the article regarding the catholic or common church, which joins together from every nation under the sun” proves itself as “completely comforting and highly necessary.” In order that we might not despair (Latin: *ne desperemus*), this comforting article can be found in our creed: “I believe in one catholic, common, Christian church.” The church is something different than a political community. Today we say that she is something fundamentally different than some sociological factor. She is not “bound to this or that land, kingdom, or estate (*Stand*), as the Pope from Rome likes to say.” Rather it remains “certainly true, that that mass (*Haufe*) and those people are the proper church, who everywhere in the world, from the rising of the sun to its setting, truly believe in Christ, who then have *one* Gospel, *one* Christianity, *the same* Baptism and Sacraments, are ruled by *one* Holy Spirit, even if they have diverse ceremonies.” So we read in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the German translation of which by Justus Jonas accurately interprets the original Latin text from Philipp Melancthon.⁸

He who has ears to hear also gleans the decisive Lutheran doctrine regarding mission in the article on the church.⁹ For so surely as the mission, since the holy apostle Peter's Pentecost sermon, has been about the conversion of people separated from Christ, whom the Lord Himself adds to His fold,¹⁰ so surely does the gathering of God's holy people in the whole world, the building of the holy church of God, take place in, with and under the mission's ministry of preaching (*Verkündigungsdienst*)

o.d.T: Peter, 1949), 28–44, trans. by Matthew Harrison as “The Question of the Church's Unity on the Mission Field,” in *The Lonely Way*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 2:179–95.

⁸ Ap. VII 9–11; Kolb-Wengert, 175; BSLK, 235, 43–236, 27.

⁹ Cf. Frank Wiebe, “Missionsgedanken in den lutherischen Bekenntnisschriften,” *Lutherisches Missionsjahrbuch* (1955): 15–71.

¹⁰ Acts 2:47; 5:14; 10:44–45; 11:21; 14:1; 16:14–15.

and the distribution of the Holy Sacraments that are connected to it. Wilhelm Löhe said it in a beautiful way that cannot be forgotten:

The church of the New Testament is no longer a territorial church but a church of all people, a church that has its children in all lands and gathers them from every nation. It is the one flock of the one shepherd, called out of many folds (John 10:16), the universal — the truly catholic — church that flows through all time and into which all people pour. This is the great concept that is still being fulfilled, the work of God in the final hour of the world, the dearest thought of all the saints in life and in death, the thought for which they lived and still live, died and still die. This is the thought that must permeate the mission of the church, or it will not know what it is or what it should do. For mission is nothing but the one church of God in motion, the actualization of the one universal, catholic church. Wherever mission enters in, the barriers that separate nation from nation fall down. Wherever it comes it brings together what previously was far off and widely separated. Wherever it takes root it produces that wonderful unity that makes “the people of every tongue” able to understand one another in all things. Mission is the life of the catholic church. Where it stops, blood and breath stop; where it dies, the love that unites heaven and earth also dies. The catholic church and mission — these two no one can separate without killing both, and that is impossible.¹¹

How the Lutheran Church Understands Itself

The confession of our faith in the one holy Christian church leads to a clear self-understanding of the Lutheran Church. Luther’s aversion to the church being named after him is familiar:

In the first place, I ask that men make no reference to my name; let them call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. After all, the teaching is not mine (John 7:16). Neither was I crucified for anyone (I Cor. 1:13). St. Paul, in I Corinthians 3, would not allow the Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I — poor stinking maggot-fodder that I am — come to have men call

the children of Christ by my wretched name? Not so, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names and call ourselves Christians, after Him whose teaching we hold.¹²

Less familiar, but just as meaningful, is another word from Luther, in which the Reformer shows that under certain circumstances the avoidance of his name amounts to a denial of the Gospel. Here he draws on the example of the apostle Paul, writing to his student Timothy: “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (2 Tim. 1:8).

Finally, I see that I must add a good word of admonition to those whom Satan has now begun to persecute. For there are some among them who think that when they are attacked they can escape the danger by saying: I do not hold with Luther or with anyone else, but only with the holy Gospel and the holy church, or with the Roman church. For saying so they think they will be left in peace. Yet in their hearts they regard my teaching as the teaching of the Gospel and stand by it. In reality this kind of statement does not help them, and it is in effect a denial of Christ. Therefore, I beg such people to be very careful.

True, by any consideration of body or soul, you should never say: I am Lutheran or Papist.

For neither of them died for you or is your master. Christ alone died for you; He alone is your master, and you should confess yourself a Christian. But if you are convinced that Luther’s teaching is in accord with the Gospel and that the pope’s is not, then you should not discard Luther so completely, lest with him you discard also his teaching, which you nevertheless recognize as Christ’s teaching. You should rather say: Whether Luther is a rascal or a saint I do not care; his teaching is not his, but Christ’s.

For you will observe that the tyrants are not out merely to destroy Luther, but to wipe out the teaching. It is on account of the teaching that they attack you and ask whether you are Lutheran. Here you must be sure not to speak with slippery or evasive words but frankly to confess Christ, no matter who did the preaching — Luther or Tom, Dick or Harry. The person you can forget, but the teaching you must confess. Paul also writes thus to Timothy in 2 Tim.

¹¹ Wilhelm Löhe, “The Church Is One, Gathered from All Nations,” in *Three Books about the Church*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 59; also published in Wilhelm Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1954), 5/1:96.

¹² Martin Luther, “A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion” (1522), AE 45:70–71; WA 8:685, 4–11.

1:8: “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share in suffering for the Gospel by the power of God.” If it had been enough here for Timothy to confess the Gospel, Paul would not have commanded him not to be ashamed also of Paul, not of Paul as a person but of Paul as a prisoner for the sake of the Gospel. Now if Timothy had said, “I do not hold with Paul or with Peter, but with Christ,” when he knew that Peter and Paul were teaching Christ, then he would actually thereby have denied Christ Himself. For Christ says in Matthew 10 concerning those who preach him: “Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” Why this? Because holding thus with His messengers, those who bring His Word, is the same as holding with Christ Himself and His Word.¹³

It is only in this sense that Luther could bear to have his name made into a badge for those who recognized and confessed the rediscovered, pure Gospel in connection with Luther’s testimony.¹⁴ “They call this same blessed doctrine, the dear, holy Gospel ‘Lutheran,’”¹⁵ we read in the German text of the Apology to the Augsburg Confession. Thus this designation, as used in the name of a church or congregation, can and may not be misused as a demarcation of a particular church (*Partikular-Kirche*) alongside others within the whole of Christendom on earth. As certainly as “the dear, blessed Gospel” pertains to the *whole* world and is therefore the true treasure of the whole of Christendom, so clearly is Luther also concerned about the gathering of the “children of God”, as he, on the one hand, resists naming them after himself and, on the other hand, indeed sees a confessional responsibility not to forbid that this contested and abused human name be uttered in testifying to the Gospel.

Hidden and Yet Visible

Here we come to a decisive point in our reflection. The one holy Christian Church as the body of the living Lord Christ is just as hidden as her heavenly head. In the time between Christ’s ascension and His visible return on Judgment Day in the clouds of heaven, the Lord, who has

been raised to the right hand of the Father, is hidden for us. He is truly present; He is bodily near to us by virtue of the divine omnipresence of His transfigured body. He is at work in His church. But He is hidden from our eyes and ears, hidden from our hands, hidden from our human recognition and understanding. During this time of Christ’s hiddenness, we are only able to grab hold of Him through faith, which holds on to the invisible present Lord, “as seeing him” (Heb. 11:27). The same is true about the holy Christian church. The body of Christ has full participation in the hiddenness of the head. The church of God lives as reality in this world according to God’s power. But her real life, her connection with the head, Christ, her actual breadth and the measure of faith of her members eludes not only every statistic, but also all other modes of inquiry. And yet this hidden church is not somehow “invisible” in the sense of an image that only exists as a thought or an illusion, though not actually existing in reality. No, the body of Christ hidden from our eyes and ears actually lives not only in heaven, but also on this earth. And just as certainly as the hidden Lord Christ, according to His sure promise, now lets Himself be found and grasped by us “in the Lord’s Supper, Baptism and the Word,” so certainly can we also find and grasp His holy church already now on earth, despite her hiddenness.

And we are not speaking about a fictitious church that is nowhere to be found, rather we say and know in truth that this church, in which the saints live, truly is and remains on earth, namely that scores of God’s children are everywhere in the world, in every kingdom, on all islands, in all countries, [and] cities, from the rising of the sun to its setting, who have come to know Christ and the Gospel rightly; and [we] say, this same church has these outer marks: the preaching office or Gospel and the Sacraments.¹⁶

This sentence of the Apology to the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession deals with the one church of Jesus Christ, which, on the one hand, is hidden and yet, on the other hand, is discernable. She is hidden, “because Christ’s kingdom has not yet been revealed.” She exists as surely as the Holy Spirit “has enlightened” people, “strengthened and governed” them. But she is “not yet revealed to the world, rather is hidden under the cross. Just as there is and remains for all time one Christ, who was crucified at that time and now reigns and gov-

¹³ Martin Luther, “Receiving Both Kinds in the Sacrament” (1522), in AE 36:265–266; WA 10/2:39, 26–40, 29.

¹⁴ Regarding this entire section, see A. F. C. Vilmar, *Kirche und Welt: Gesammelte pastoraltheol. Aufsätze* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1873), 2:145–57.

¹⁵ Ap XV 43–44; Kolb-Wengert, 229; BSLK, 305, 51–52.

¹⁶ Ap VII 20; Kolb-Wengert, 177; BSLK, 238, 40–52. Cf. Kinder, *Der evangelische Glaube*, 93–94.

erns in heaven in eternal glory.”¹⁷ The hidden church is always discernable for us to find and to grasp, only there where the hidden Christ Himself lets Himself be found and grasped by us according to His promise. Therefore, the deeds of this very Christ in the preached and spoken Word of God, in Baptism carried out as mandated and in the Sacrament of the Altar given out according to its institution, are the only but also absolutely certain marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).¹⁸ Luther’s battle — with all its ramifications: difficult and painful yet also beautiful and comforting — is the battle for the marks of the church in their purity according to Scripture, in their God-given unambiguousness. The true self-understanding of the Lutheran church stands and falls with the certainty that in, with and under the poor, earthly form of the church of this confession (*Konfessionskirche*), the one holy, Christian and apostolic church can truly be found and grasped in faith. It is the certainty that the deeds of Christ take place here, through which the hidden Lord of the church in this age deals with us, in which He lets Himself be found by us. It is the certainty of Luther: “He’s by our side upon the plain / With His good gifts and Spirit.”¹⁹

Thus the Lutheran church, according to the way she understands herself, is nothing other than the one, holy church of Jesus Christ in that form of hers, in which she is clearly discernable for us on earth. On the one hand, this certainty is bound up with the penitent confession that “in this life,” even in the congregation gathered through Word and Sacrament, “many false Christians and hypocrites remain among the righteous.”²⁰ On the other hand, bound up with this certainty is the confidence of faith, that truly believing Christians can be found in every part of Christianity rent asunder, who despite many heresies and reductions of the truth of salvation that place the soul in peril, nevertheless come to saving faith through the deeds of Christ done to them, and will be kept by the Holy Spirit “in Christ in the one true faith.”²¹ Out of the belief

in the hidden reality of the church of Jesus Christ proceeds the certainty that the assembly of God’s redeemed people exists far beyond the borders of the orthodox church as we can recognize it.²² We know of no way of salvation outside of the deeds of Christ in Word and Sacrament. And we can only be certain of and happy in these deeds of Christ where the purity of the means of grace is intact. For us a participation in the leaven of false teaching would amount to a denial of Christ and contempt for his means of grace.

The Purity of the Means of Grace

The fact that the deeds of Christ are bound to Word and Sacrament defines the ministry of the church for the saving of the lost. It all depends on and comes down not to whether just anything happens in the battle against sin, death and the devil, even if it is done with the best of intentions. The issue is rather that what is being done is done as it is mandated, according to the command and promise of Christ. Christ’s deeds done through Word and Sacrament need no addition on the part of zealous, enthusiastic people. Their effect is neither due to people undertaking all kinds of other things, nor does it depend on “signs and wonders” taking place. Only one single condition must be fulfilled under all circumstances and in every case: the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments may not be adulterated; their purity and integrity must be safeguarded. We find this requirement in all its stridency and unambiguousness already in the New Testament.²³ The clear distinction between proper and false doctrine was already required in the Early Church as was the definite separation between the proper shepherds of

who walk in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the matter correctly” and “take no pleasure” in the battle against the truth. Preface to the Book of Concord, 20; Kolb-Wengert, 13; *BSLK*, 756, 9–28.

²² As an especially impressive testimony for this certainty we make reference here to the positive evaluation of the Jesuit Mission by the polemical Lutheran Philipp Nicolai (cited in Löhle, *Three Books about the Church*, 96–99; *Gesammelte Werke*, 5/1:122–24). Cf. Werner Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1958), 1:341–344, trans. by Walter A. Hansen, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), 1:385–386, 391–392; Gerhard Rosenkranz, *Weltmission und Weltende* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1951), 59–60; Willy Hess, *Das Missionsdenken bei Philipp Nicolai*, *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte Hamburgs 5* (Hamburg: Wittig, 1962), especially “Der Beitrag Spaniens zur Weltmission,” 131–32 and “Nicolais ökumenischer Missionsbegriff,” 135–136.

²³ Cf. Leonhard Goppelt, “Kirche und Häresie nach Paulus,” in *Koinonia: Arbeiten des Ökumenischen Ausschusses der VELKD zur Frage der Kirchen- und Abendmahlsgemeinschaft* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1957), 42–56; earlier also in: Friedrich Hübner, ed., *Gedenkschrift für Werner Elert* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1955), 9–23.

¹⁷ Ap VII 17–19; Kolb-Wengert, 176–177; *BSLK*, 237, 48–238, 4.

¹⁸ Kinder, *Der Evangelische Glaube*, 103–104.

¹⁹ “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” in *Lutheran Service Book*, prepared by The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), no. 656, stanza 4.

²⁰ AC VIII 1; Kolb-Wengert, 42; *BSLK*, 62, 5–7.

²¹ Cf. Hermann Sasse, “Die lutherische Kirche und die Una Sancta” in *Was heißt lutherisch?*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1936), 162–169, especially 164–169; trans. by Theodore G. Tappert as *Here We Stand: Nature and Character of the Lutheran Faith*, (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1979), 179–188. Compare also the distinction between the representatives of the false teaching, who are “stiff-necked teachers and blasphemers,” and the “many pious, innocent people ...

Christ's flock and those who would corrupt them, which happened according to this clear distinction. Clear words of the Lord and admonitions of the holy apostles, which are just as unambiguous as the Lord's own words, can never be ignored. Building the background for this distinction and separation in the New Testament is the battle between true and false prophecy in the Old Testament, which prefigures it.²⁴ There is no obedience to the mandate that Jesus Christ gives without the willingness to let the Word of Christ be effective even in this way, and therefore not to tolerate or even to recognize "another Gospel." Since the mission is nothing other than the one holy church of God in her forward motion in the world among the nations, it will never be freed — not even for a moment — from the difficult battle against the corruption of the Word of God and the Holy Sacraments. However, where this battle is fought, there will ultimately be painful divisions in the midst of baptized Christendom. No one has more accurately described the pain and poignancy of this situation (*anfechtungsreiche Lage*) in the church than Phillip Melancthon in this sentence, which has become a confessional declaration of the Lutheran church: "The prospect of separating oneself from so many countries and peoples and of practicing a different doctrine is troublesome. But here stands God's command, that everyone should guard himself and not be united with those who practice false doctrine."²⁵ Here it is clearly stated: By no means is it only the false doctrine itself that makes the battle so difficult and the division so painful. Rather, it is the fact that battle and division become necessary within the church itself, as St. Paul foretold to the elders in Ephesus, that "out of you will arise people who pronounce false doctrine among you, to draw the disciples to themselves." They are those "ravenous wolves who will not spare the flock."²⁶ He who bows to the terrible truth of these words gets a clear and sober perspective for the great sorrow of Christendom, now so variously divided. As certainly as every effort toward truly overcoming the present separations is in accordance with the will of the Lord of the church, as much as the struggle for unification in the truth may claim God's unmistakable promises, it is just as clear on the other side that divisions for the sake of

the truth belong to the cruciform figure of the church and remain something laid upon the congregation of the Lord through the hiddenness of Christ between Ascension and Judgment Day.

The battle for the purity of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments will accompany the church and must be fought by the church until her Lord visibly returns. As long as God's own Word must be preached, interpreted and applied through people capable of error, the devil will not rest in causing these preachers to corrupt the message.²⁷ The struggle to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments as Christ mandated is truly not limited to the necessary demarcations over against other parts of Christendom that are bound by false teaching. Each preacher of God's Word and every listening congregation are always standing in deadly danger of somehow adapting the Word of their Lord to themselves and of changing and corrupting it in exactly in this way. The battle against false teaching and false teachers can therefore only be fought by those who know from their own experiences that dangerous corruptions of the truth of salvation, which can truly destroy souls, we are all exposed to over and over again.

The Formulated Confession

For exactly this reason we must now go one step further and assert that the battle for the purity of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments necessarily leads us to define exactly what the true Gospel is in terms of its content and wherein this or that corruption of the message of salvation consists, and not only to speak of the battle itself. In the same way, it will have to be distinctly stated wherein the purity and genuineness of the mandated administration of the Sacraments consists and why contrary teachings regarding Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not to be tolerated as pious opinions, rather are to be rejected as false teachings. That must all be formulated in binding sentences. It cannot be left up to every preacher of the Word of God to decide according to the best of his knowledge what he holds to be true or false according to the measure of his current insight. Which

²⁴ Matt. 7:15; 24:4–5, 24; Acts 20:29–30; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Cor. 11:13; Gal. 1:6–7; 5:7–8; 1 Tim. 4:1–2; 6:3–4; Titus 3:10; 2 Pet. 2:1–2; 1 John 2:18–19; 4:1–2; 2 John 7–8; Heb. 13:9; Rev. 2:2, 9, 14–15, 20; 3:9; Jer. 23:21–22; 29:8–9; Ezek. 13.

²⁵ Tr 42; Kolb-Wengert, 337–38; BSLK, 485, 39–44.

²⁶ Acts 20:29–30; see note 24.

²⁷ Compare Luther's words regarding the "more than twenty blasts and rabbles," to which God's merciful storm lamp was exposed in Luther's time, and the expectation of blasts from the devil that continually came. "There was no letup or end to it, nor will there be until the Last Day." "You and I have to die, but after our death he still remains the same as he always has been, unable to desist from his raging." Martin Luther, "Against the Antinomians" (1539), in AE 47:115–117; WA 50:475,14–476,18.

testimony of the truth of salvation the given congregation holds to be reliable and why they reject another interpretation as misleading may not be left up to the given congregation.

Indeed, every congregation in joint responsibility for the preaching of its pastor must watch to see that it is being served according to Christ's mandate. In the battle for the truth, every servant of the Word must break through to the personal conviction: the message that I preach is certainly true because it is God's own Word! But both congregation and pastor consistently need clear formulations of the valid doctrine. In other words: they need the formulated confession of the church. Here is not the place to show that the New Testament research has fully and convincingly established the following two points: first, how already at the time of the holy apostles the message of salvation could very much be passed on in fixed, formulated sentences as valid doctrine; and second, how precisely in being passed on in fixed, formulated sentences as valid doctrine, it could remain intact beyond the individual congregation and beyond the generation of those living at that moment.²⁸ Thus the responsibility for purity in Word and Sacrament in the church actually leads to a formulated confession.

From here the next step unfolds just as necessarily: the formulated confession of the church, the validity of which is based on its agreement with Holy Scripture, bears in itself the claim to validity and recognition in all of Christendom. When the formulation of the right doctrine forged in the battle against false doctrine accords with Scripture, when it is thus in accordance with the truth of God's Word, then its validity is not confined to one place, not limited to one generation, nor to people who share the same experiences. Rather the divine truth testified to in the confession is valid wherever the name of the Lord is called upon, where the fold of His redeemed live. The rightly understood confession is for this reason something fundamentally different than some "theological declaration" pertaining to some questions of a particular time and a particular controversy, which break out in a certain situation, and which must be answered from the Word of God. Such declarations are absolutely necessary. It is also possible that they retain a strong testimonial force even after the time of their formulation and finally are recognized as valid confession by the church.

²⁸ Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. "παράδοσις."

However, they can never replace the confession given to the church in her history up to this point, for example, by denying the validity and necessity of the old confessional statements and holding an up-to-date word to be sufficient. The unavoidable result of such a false modesty would then be that the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments would be broadly given over to corruption even where certain views have been rejected long ago as unscriptural and dangerous for the soul, but now are no longer being perceived as a threat.

The Confessional Status (*Bekennnisstand*)

When, however, the formulated confession must be recognized and held fast as valid interpretation of Scripture — not for the sake of some tradition, rather for the sake of God's truth — then the battle for the purity of Word and Sacrament ultimately passes from formulated confession to the valid confessional status. What does this mean? We cannot go into the aspect of the problem here that pertains to ecclesiastical law. This problem exists in that not only individual congregations, but rather entire church bodies have bound themselves to certain confessions also in a legally binding form. Thus the churchly books they use must be in accordance with these confessions, but above all, pastors and congregations are pledged to this confession. So it is impossible that they be permitted to recognize yet another confession (alongside their own confession) with contrary doctrinal statements as another interpretation of Scripture that is at least possible. Everyone will recognize right away that the confessional status with regard to this legal validity offers absolutely no guarantee that the congregations will actually receive pastors who are truly bound to the confession. It is always so that the confessional status can only become effective in its legal function when it pleases the Lord of the church to send men as workers into His harvest, whose hearts through grace have become firm in the confession of the church. The exalted Lord desires to be asked persistently for such gifts.

It is not the legal validity of the doctrine in the confessional status that gives the preaching and the administration of the Sacraments their ecclesiastical authority. It is much more the other way around: since this doctrine has proven itself to be in accordance with Scripture and thus shares in the dynamic of the living and powerful Word of God, therefore, its claim of validity even influences the necessary legal order of the church. The confessional status of a congregation — the catechism

in the instruction of the youth, the order of the Divine Service, of the liturgy and of the worship of the church (*Gottesdienstordnung*) according to the Agenda, the hymnal, the ordination vow and the promise of the pastor at his installation — all that receives its spiritual power through God's efficacious Word of salvation at work in it. But this status also has validity at the same time and creates for itself in legal church orders appropriate earthly vessels for its divine content.

The confessional status should have an effect on the broad realm of legal church orders, but especially regarding the vow pertaining to the office of the ministry (*Amtsgelübde*) that the called servants of Jesus Christ take. The requirement for this is the consensus of a smaller or larger number of congregations, who are bound with their pastors as a "church body" (*Kirchenkörper*) to the same formulated confession. Whether the confessional status is valid in doctrine and practice, and not just legally sound, depends on whether pastors and congregations are actually bound to the confession. Here the question is raised: how does that happen?

Church Administration Bound to the Confessions (*Bekennnisgebundene Kirchenregiment*)

We already touched upon one requirement of binding confession that is actually effective. This requirement is beyond all human control or even influence. Only the Lord of the church can, through His Holy Spirit, enable the Word of truth to become an asset of faith for the shepherds and flocks. Without this miracle, even the best confessional status becomes ossified. But also in the human domain there is a factor that is crucial in order for the legally valid confessional status to take effect. This factor is the church administration bound to the confession, not understood as some agency, but rather from the perspective of its episcopal functions, according to Article 28 of the Augsburg Confession.²⁹ One hundred years ago the matter of a church administration bound to the confession became a position for the fighting and suffering Lutheran church in her deadly threats from the Prussian Union. It was from this position that she as a confessing church could defy the death sentence that should have been enforced upon her.³⁰ Similarly the church admin-

istration bound to the confession proved itself to be a bastion in the Lutheran state churches in their battle for freedom against the unionistic national unity church (*Einheitskirche*), which threatened in the time of Hitler.³¹ The church administration bound to the confession will also, in the present struggle for the validity of the biblical Gospel, either have to prove its spiritual authority or inwardly break apart in agreeing with heresy. The same is true for the leadership of the young churches becoming independent. It is not so much the extent of their "self-governance" that is decisive for them, but rather if God gives to and prepares for them men who are able to carry out a church administration bound to the confession. When we speak of the church administration bound to the confession, we do not have a specific form of church administration in mind, rather we have in mind the service of a particular church body to pastors and congregations (*Gemeinden*), of which our confession says:

Consequently, according to divine right it is the office of the bishop to preach the gospel, to forgive sin, to judge doctrine and reject doctrine that is contrary to the gospel, and to exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose ungodly life is manifest — not with human power but with God's Word alone. That is why parishioners and churches owe obedience to bishops, according to this saying of Christ (Luke 10[:16]): "Whoever listens to you listens to me." But whenever they teach, institute, or introduce something contrary to the gospel, we have God's command in such a case not to be obedient.³²

We now look back, summarize and can indeed to

²⁹ Compare to this especially the manifestations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria from the years of the great church struggle [*Kirchenkampf*]: Christian Stoll, *Lutherische Kirche bekennt!* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1934); Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, *Die Bekenntnisse und grundsätzlichen Äußerungen zur Kirchenfrage des Jahres 1933, 1934, 1935*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: 1934–1936); Thomas Breit, *Bekennnisgebundenes Kirchenregiment*, *Bekennende Kirche* 45 (Munich: Kaiser, 1936). In the Lutheran battle for the confession of those years, they specifically fell back on the resolution of the first general Lutheran conference in Hannover (July 1, 1868), which, following the seminal lecture by Theodor Kliefoth and in defense against the acute danger of the Union following the Prussian annexations of 1866 declared: "The requirement is also valid for the church administration, as an important member of the churches, to agree in the right doctrine and administration of the Sacraments with the church, which this church administration is to govern. Therefore it is unallowable to unify churches through a common church administration without agreement in the doctrine and administration of the Sacraments." Conference Report of Die allgem. luth. *Konferenz in Hannover am 1. und 2. Juli 1868*, 60–61, quoted in Paul Fleisch, *Für Kirche und Bekenntnis: Geschichte der Allgem. Ev.-luth. Konferenz* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1956), 6.

³² AC XXVIII 21–23; Kolb-Wengert, 94; *BSLK*, 123, 22–124, 12.

²⁹ AC XXVIII 20–21; Kolb-Wengert, 94; *BSLK*, 123, 22–23.

³⁰ Cf. Julius Nagel, *Die evangelisch-lutherische Kirche in Preußen und der Staat* (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1869). Johannes Nagel, *Die Errettung der Evang.-lutherischen Kirche in Preußen von 1817–1845*, 4th ed. (Elberfeld: Luth Bücherverein, 1905). Walter Geppert, *Das Wesen der preußischen Union* (Berlin: Furche Verlag, 1939).

some extent confidently recognize the sense in which we are speaking of the Lutheran church. With that we mean a church body that is not only legally but rather also actually bound to the Lutheran confession. The fact that precisely this Lutheran confession in its doctrine of the church does not mean a particular church (*Teilkirche*), rather always — in every place, in every country, at every time, in every generation — speaks of the one holy church is in no way at odds with our being able to speak of the Lutheran church as a church body bound to the Lutheran confession. Taken just as seriously is the fact that this one church of Jesus Christ has full participation in the hiddenness of Christ and that she nevertheless will be discernable where Christ's deeds take place on earth through Word and Sacrament for the salvation of lost sinners, for the gathering and building up of the congregation (*Gemeinde*). Because we take seriously this discernable side of the one church of Jesus Christ, what matters to us is purity and truth of the preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments. For only these unique marks of the church authenticate for us the powerful acts of the Lord, who is present. In a world of lies and error, Word and Sacrament constantly face the threat of obfuscation through satanic corruptions. The battle for the purity of the means of grace leads to clear distinctions between correct and false doctrine and further to bindingly formulated confessional statements. This battle leads to the constant claim of validity of confessional decisions that are in accordance with Scripture, but therewith, at the same time, to the historically legally valid confessional status, and finally to that church authority that is bound to the confession and to its functions that have no other foundation than the care of souls. "Lutheran churches" are for us congregations (*Gemeinden*), and church bodies who are ordered and are being governed in this sense, whose lives are exclusively oriented to the real marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. This we know: in, with and under a poor earthly form of the church (*Kirchengestalt*), that is where this form is, and within its purview the one holy church is certainly to be found. For the body of Christ is to be found and grasped where the head of the body on earth lets himself be "found:" "in the Supper, Baptism and the Word."

The Confessional Bond of the Mission

It is from this understanding of the "Lutheran church" that we substantiate the first programmatic sentence: "[A] Lutheran church can do only Lutheran mission." The

Lutheran church's deep conviction of the truth of salvation as revealed in God's Word, as well as of the necessity of the doctrinal decisions (*Lehrentscheidungen*) brought about by the confession that is in accordance with Scripture, makes it impossible from the outset to somehow dispense with the full and exclusive confessional bond of the church in her mission. Neither a reduction nor a weakening of the Lutheran doctrine can or may be considered. Nor is a mitigation of the lines drawn between the doctrines of our church and those of other churches tolerable — somehow in the sense that contradictory doctrines would no longer be rejected, but rather recognized as "testimony of the brothers." As soon as this happens in any way, the Lutheran church abandons not just this or that individual article, along with its consequences; rather, she completely loses her self-understanding. She then becomes a trend, a group or a "family" among many others standing closer or further from her within worldwide Christianity. The universal claim to validity, which requires recognition of the Lutheran confession as a testimony of truth in accordance with Scripture in all of Christianity on earth, cannot then be upheld. The decision for a Lutheran mission work bound to the confession is thus not to be separated from the fundamental ecumenical outlook of the Lutheran church. If she is only a particular church (*Teilkirche*), intent on protecting a valuable inheritance in her special doctrines and desiring to make them useable for others as much as possible, it cannot be understood why this particular church (*Teilkirche*) cannot also be involved in joint mission work with many other particular churches (*Teilkirchen*), completely independent of whether, in doing so, a few of her special doctrines or dissenting interpretations of Scripture take hold, or whether it ultimately results in formulating doctrines from scratch. If the Lutheran church, on the other hand, is to be recognized by the unmistakable marks of the one holy church, then an uncrossable line is drawn around her cooperation in the mission. These marks become falsified through contrary teaching, behind which the Lutheran church sees an obscuring of Christ's deeds themselves.

The decision to form a mission bound to the confession is fundamentally in contradiction to the beginnings of the life of the evangelical mission in the first third of the 19th century. This decision led to the overcoming of an understanding of mission, neither oriented to nor interested in the confession of the church. This resulted in difficult battles, behind the lines of which stood the

decisive breakthrough of an entire generation toward the confession of the Lutheran church.³³

Instead of presenting a full exposition of this momentous development here, a few characteristic testimonies of Lutheran fathers from that era will have to suffice.³⁴ What it was about then and must still be about today *Louis Harms* (1808–1865) stated in a way that every simple Christian can understand:

We want to bring the Lutheran church to the nations. For one cannot bring anything else than what he has, and since we are members of the Lutheran church, then naturally we cannot and do not want to bring any other church to the nations than the Lutheran one, of which we are members. And we also want to do this because we have the Word of God in pure, unadulterated doctrine in the Lutheran church, and in our church Baptism and the Lord's Supper are administered purely and without adulteration according to the institution of our Lord Jesus.³⁵

Even Louis Harms, who at first cooperated with the North German mission, grew gradually into a conscientiously confessional stance. Precisely in this area he came to call for the work of the mission to be strictly bound to the confession.

The Testimony of the Silesians

Here we offer an example from a much earlier time. In the battle against the Union and in the middle of the time of the persecution by the Prussian State, the Silesian Lutherans already decided at their general synod in 1835, which had to be conducted illegally, that “nearly all Lutheran congregations (*Gemeinden*) should convene into an ecclesiastical mission establishment.”³⁶ This synod resolution,

which is so very characteristic for the agenda of a free church Lutheran mission (*freikirchlich-lutherische Kirchenmission*), is thus already there at the very beginning of the path that the German Lutheran free churches took. In order rightly to appreciate this resolution, we must truly remind the reader that in those years, the Breslau Lutherans separated themselves from the Berlin Mission and established ties to the Dresden Mission Society, out of which arose the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Dresden (later in Leipzig) in 1836. Before it came to that, the Leipzig society could, for example, still write the following to Dresden in 1836: “In our feverishly agitated times it is not advisable to mix the zeal for Lutheranism in the mission association.”³⁷ Already in 1833, the friends of the Leipzig Mission had said: “We certainly are not in error when we consider the main purpose of the mission efforts to be making known to the nations the pure Christianity of the Bible; on the other hand we consider interlacing the differences in this instruction which, for example, separate the Reformed confession from the Lutheran one, to be inferior.”³⁸ Professor *Eduard Huschke* (1801–1886) gave the answer from Breslau:

In this matter, our standard is, as in all other matters, the Word and only this Word of the Lord. He says, however: “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” [Matthew 28:19]. With this he does not give us the right to preach only certain doctrines to the nations, rather he desires that everything that we have received from his Word we should also impart in turn to the nations; therefore specifically also this word: beware of false prophets [Matthew 7:15]. Now, however, the Holy Scripture has been misinterpreted in many ways from the very beginning, partly because of weakness, partly because of evil intent. Because of this misinterpretation many sects and different confessions have developed, all of whom call themselves Christian and among whom, for example, you are spearheading the Reformed confession. In view of such misinterpretation and false teaching arose the practice of obligating teachers not just to teach what is true, but also to warn about

³³ Only a few characteristic testimonies are named here: Gottfried Thomasius, *Das Wiedererwachen des evangelischen Lebens in der lutherischen Kirche Bayerns* (Erlangen: Deichert, 1867), especially 224–225; Adolf Harless, *Bruchstücke aus dem Leben eines süddeutschen Theologen* (Bielefeld, 1872), especially 175–176, 181–182, 185; Friedrich Brunn, “Wie ich Lutheraner wurde,” in *Mitteilungen aus meinem Leben* (Zwickau, 1893), especially 39–40; Wilhelm Hopf, *August Vilmar: ein Lebens- und Zeitbild* (Marburg: Elwert, 1913), 1:167–168.

³⁴ Cf. W. Maurer, “Sendende Kirche” in *Lutherisches Missionsjahrbuch* (1951–52): 56–57.

³⁵ *Hermannsbürger Missionsblatt* (1857): 92. Cf. Wilhelm Wendebourg, Louis Harms als Missionsmann (Hermannsburg: Verlag der Missionshandlung, 1910), 81f.; Rudolf Schmidt, “Louis Harms’ Hineinwachsen in die Lutherische Kirche,” in *Die Hermannsbürger Mission: im Jahre 1965* (1965), 56–62; Georg Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte* (Hermannsburg: Verlag und Druckerei der Missionshandlung, 1910), 2:26–27, 147–148, 216–217.

³⁶ Theodor Wangemann, *Sieben Bücher preußischer Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: Schultze, 1859), 2: 123. It is about the synod’s resolution numbers XXVI and XXVII. For the whole and what follows, see the

report in *Kirchenblatt für die evangelisch-lutherischen Gemeinden in Preußen* (Breslau), no. 2 (1901). See also *Mbl.* 3 (1901): 27–28.

³⁷ Richard Handmann, *Die Ev.-Luth. Tamulnmission in der Zeit ihrer Neubegründung* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1903), 48, quoted in Ernst Ziemer, *Die Missionstätigkeit der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Preußen von 1830–1890* (Elberfeld: Luth. Bücherverein, 1904), 24.

³⁸ Ziemer, *Die Missionstätigkeit*, 24.

what is false, as was already practiced by the Lord and his apostles. According to the Lord's instruction as indicated above we may not, in regard to the entity doing the mission work, deem this obligation to be less important than the preaching of the divine truth itself. However, one might argue (as the unbelievers have often done, to whom missionaries of different religious parties came): Which of the different churches actually has the pure truth of the divine Word? In order to sidestep such a situation the opinion has become popular among many Christians that certain sentences common to every confession should be selected and the rest abandoned. But just how abrasively this opinion is opposed to the Word of the Lord, to which we have made reference, and just how untenable it is in practice, is clear to anyone who gives thought to the matter. For who gives us the right to throw away something that has been entrusted to us and not to impart it? And if one wanted to take all Christian sects into account, it would become difficult to bring something united out of the confessions of the Greeks and Roman Catholics, the Reformed, Socinians, Anabaptists, and Lutherans (just to name a few), which would be able to let hearts be born again. However if one only was willing to take into account certain parties in the selection, who would entitle whom to do that and what would be the measure for drawing the lines toward this end? Thus [the mission of the church] must certainly remain with the Lord's precept, that each imparts everything that the Lord has commanded us according to the best of his knowledge and will, and when there is fighting about it, that each church party teach her knowledge honestly, and warn honestly about those who hold her teachings to be wayward. Only subtle spiritual pride or indifference might underlie the notion that we could exalt ourselves above all church parties.³⁹

The response from Breslau to this principle, that "the pure biblical Christianity" should simply be brought to the nations, was this: "Introducing the nations to biblical Christianity does not suffice, rather they must also be received into the church of Christ through the pastorate (*Hirtenamt*)."⁴⁰ In the name of those in Breslau, Huschke

³⁹ Ibid., 25–26.

⁴⁰ Martin Kiunke, *Johann Gottfried Scheibel und sein Ringen um die Kirche der lutherischen Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985), 392. The designation of the location with Kiunke (see

expressed the consequences resulting from this position:

Since we now avow ourselves to the Lutheran evangelical church, thus we believe that the confessions of our church must be laid as the foundation for the effectiveness of our association to convert the nations. We also believe that our missionaries must be instructed also to preach the truth, for example, in regard to predestination, the Lord's Supper, and so on over against the Reformed church; just as in regard to justification, the worship of the saints, and the like over against the Catholic church; and in regard to the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit over against the Socinians. That in doing this the greatest possible simplicity is to be observed not to give the children adult food and not to undertake the battle against false teaching until it presents itself as a danger, is simply understood according to the true judiciousness of the shepherd and the example of the apostles.⁴¹

For that reason the separation from the main Berlin mission society became inevitable, because "all their members were devoted to the Union church (*unierten Kirche*)" and "they let their messengers be ordained as missionaries in the Union church (*unierten Kirche*)."⁴² In contrast, the Breslau Lutherans also applied their tenets regarding church fellowship (*Kirchengemeinschaft*), for which they were embattled against the Union, to the realm of ecclesiastical mission work. In addition, they stated:

that a mission association of the evangelical Lutheran church, for whom its unconditional holding to the Word of the Lord (so much as he gives it grace) is the sole standard in all its conduct, can cooperate in the mission work neither with the Reformed nor with

page 454, note 35) does not apply. It is perhaps a matter of a sentence from the letter cited by Ziemer, *Die Missionstätigkeit*, 24–25, from Eduard Huschke to the Leipzig Society (reference from Pastor Jobst Schöne, Berlin).

⁴¹ Ziemer, *Die Missionstätigkeit*, 26.

⁴² Ibid., 27. On the confessional position of the Berlin Mission, cf. Julius Richter, *Geschichte der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft 1824–1924* (Berlin: Buchhandlung der Berliner evangelischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1924), 67–68. According to this portrayal, it is characteristic for the Berlin Mission that, from the get-go, at home it wants to have its feet planted in the Union, but recognizes the Lutheran Confessions as authoritative both in the training of its missionaries and for its service on the foreign fronts. Already in the founding statute from 1824, it says "that the brotherly cooperation of evangelical Christians from all confessions, who have preached the Word of the truth according to Scripture without human addition and without dispute about insignificant differences of opinion, has gained for Christianity much fruitful soil among non-Christian peoples."

another misbelieving church, which it itself must combat. And whoever would want to find here a lack of love certainly has no notion of true evangelical love (1 Cor. 13:6).⁴³

The Dresden Mission

The crucial contribution of the Breslau Lutherans and their great champion, Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783–1843), who by this time had moved from Prussia to Saxony as an exile, at the formation of the Dresden Mission cannot be recounted here. The words at the end of the Dresden Mission's charter (*Stiftungsurkunde*) are sufficient to retain what this struggle yielded: "That we feel compelled to hold to this, that through our efforts the full biblical truth according to the confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church will be dispersed among the nations."⁴⁴

Accordingly, the new mission founded on Aug. 17, 1836, conveyed to all Lutherans in an appeal already on Sept. 30 of that year, that the mission association longed for by many was now in existence,

which, without casting suspicion on the mission efforts of other confessions (*Konfessionen*), joins itself strictly to the confession of the evangelical Lutheran church, binds its missionaries to this confession, and lets them be instructed to assemble their congregations (*Gemeinden*) out of the nations on the basis of the foundation of this confession. ... We are members of the evangelical Lutheran church.⁴⁵

Ten years later, the great framer of the work begun in Dresden, mission director Karl Graul (1814–1864) could write the following:

More and more it has become obvious to the friends of the mission that the mission must become churchly. This means that it is borne and permeated by the church's confession. Mission activity is nothing more than an impulse from the life of the church. Because she believes, she speaks. She can give the messengers to the nations no other confession to take with them than what she herself has, unless she were to regard it also at home as a burden borne against her will.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ziemer, *Die Missionstätigkeit*, 31.

⁴⁴ Kiunke, *Johann Gottfried Scheibel*, 393. Cf. Resolutions of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia, held in September and October of 1841 in Breslau (1842), 104ff. See below, note 65.

⁴⁵ Otto Hardeland, *Geschichte der lutherischen Mission nach den Vorträgen des Prof. D. Plitt* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1895), 2:10.

⁴⁶ *Evangelisch-Lutherisches Missionsblatt* (Dresden) 1 (1846): 300.

Ludwig Adolf Petri

Here we must now speak of the man, who like no other in those years, led the battle to bind the mission to the Lutheran confession: Ludwig Adolf Petri (1803–1873), pastor of the Cross Church (*Kreuzkirche*) in Hannover.⁴⁷ His programmatic writing "The Mission and the Church" (*Die Mission und die Kirche*, 1841) was prompted by the struggle about the confessional question that was playing out in the back country of the North German Mission Association.⁴⁸ It decisively contributed to the clarification of the disputed questions, also with respect to unity and separation. Whereas originally in the North German mission it was thought that Lutherans and Reformed could work together in the sense that the Augsburg Confession would be "adopted as a guide" for the work of the messengers (*Sendboten*), a change of the decisive paragraph was later agreed upon, which now read:

The North German Mission Association, made up of fellow believers from the Lutheran and the Reformed [churches], does not in any way wish to militate against the affairs of both Evangelical sister churches as they now stand between us, but clings to the Word of Christ in Matthew 28:18–20 concerning the spread of the Kingdom of God among the nations. It is convinced that the confessional difference that has arisen between us in the course of history should not be transplanted into the non-Christian world, but rather that through the preaching of the Gospel under the direction of the Lord and his Spirit the church will organize herself in her own way among the nations.⁴⁹

Regarding Karl Graul, see Siegfried Krügel, *Hundert Jahre Graul-Interpretation* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1965), and the literature indicated there.

⁴⁷ Emil Petri, *D. Ludwig Adolf Petri, weiland Pastor zu St. Crucis in Hannover: ein Lebensbild, auf Grund seines schriftlichen Nachlasses*, 2 vols. (Hannover: Feesche, n.d.); Henry Holze, *Kirche und Mission bei Ludwig Adolf Petri, Ein Beitrag zum Missionsgespräch des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966); Henry Holze, "Das Fortwirken von L. A. Petris Missionsprogramm im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in *Festschrift für Karl-Heinrich Rengstorff zum 60. Geburtstag am 1.10.1963* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1963), 71–84.

⁴⁸ Extensive reports with citations can be found about Petri's writing both in Emil Petri, *D. Ludwig Adolf Petri*, 1:306–36, as well as in Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte*, 1:398–404; cf. also *Festschrift für Karl-Heinrich Rengstorff*, 85–106. Regarding the disagreements concerning the question of the confession in the North German Mission, see Diddo Wiarda, "Mission und Konfession," in *Bausteine zur Geschichte der Norddeutschen Missions-Gesellschaft*, ed. August W. Schreiber (Bremen: Verlag des Norddeutschen Missionsgesellschaft, 1936), 135–149.

⁴⁹ Petri, *D. Ludwif Adolf Petri*, 1:313–314. Schreiber, *Bausteine*,

Some thought that the confessional question could be answered and solved through a new minimal confession.⁵⁰ In contrast, Petri asserted in 1839:

The Lutheran church, which is certain that it possesses the truth of the Gospel in its confession, can and may—as all other [churches]—only do mission work on the basis of that confession, or she must forfeit herself. . . . Unless they want to quit the church entirely and hold unauthorized services and spurious worship, no single person and no single group has the right to forsake the position of the church while doing the work of the church. . . . If one laments that the confessional differences shall also enter into the non-Christian world, I can only answer that we cannot give anything other than what we ourselves have, and may not give anything other than what we know to be grounded in the Word of the Lord.⁵¹

Among other things, Petri shows the following document from 1841, already referenced:

It is first neither kind nor wise nor just that the more mature Christianity of Europe should withhold from the non-Christian world the prize, which it has realized by way of the most painful experiences,

through the hottest battles, amidst the gravest dangers, with the most bitter losses, in order that the people of those nations themselves should attain this prize by traveling the same dangerous path, which might in their case even prove ruinous. One cannot possibly desire that the people of the non-Christian world should for their part have to go through all of the conflicts in which we have bled, nor Christendom again with them. Second, it is absolutely impossible. No missionary can as it were, commit only the Scripture to memory and speak in words of Scripture without any interpretation, analysis, or use of a particular way of grasping its teaching. Rather in the non-Christian world he will always preach and teach as with that particularity that he has so to speak nursed from the milk of his own mother church. The Catholic will preach, teach, and speak one way, the Reformed another, the Lutheran another. And indeed one would not demand that the missionary should speak from the Scripture with deliberate indecisiveness, when on the contrary the truth should be presented as clearly, as exactly, as specifically as possible. In the same way an image of the form and constitution of the domestic church will present itself as the form and constitution of the church among the nations is being constructed. Admittedly it would not be advisable to deliver to the nations the terminologies of the Formula of Concord or of the Canons of Dort, nor to impart to them our exasperating conflicts, but that is not the point. It is not necessary that the antithesis, but indeed that the ecclesiastical thesis be presented, and this as simply as possible to those who are not mature in their understanding.

It is not possible for the church to relinquish the Gospel to its individual members, so that they can manipulate it as pleases them, here observing this, there ignoring that, modifying, correcting, and mixing it as seems best to them according to their own subjective points of view. The dogma is the church's source of life, which she cannot relinquish. Thus, where the ecclesiastical difference exists it must be respected and maintained in all that is done ecclesiastically, so long as this difference legitimately exists. And least of all may those members, who are the most lively and influential in the ecclesiastical body, disconnect themselves from the organism. How long the painful division will exist and how it will someday be resolved is incidentally a matter that we have to commend

138–139. Compare the sentences from the statute of the Berlin Mission in 1824 (see above, note 42) and the corresponding rules in Basel and Barmen. As “a classic explanation of the Union’s standpoint from Basel,” Wilhelm Schlatter, *Geschichte der Baseler Mission, 1815–1915* (Basel: Verlag der Basler Missionsbuchhandlung, 1916), 1:195–196, cites the leaflet from Wilhelm Hoffmann (*Die evangelische Missionsgesellschaft*, 1842) and quotes from it the same sentences with which Löhe contrasted his opinion (*Gesammelte Werke*, 4:35; see the literal account below, note 54). Two newer analyses elucidate the conflicts inside the *Rheinish* Mission association: Theo Sundermeier, *Mission, Bekenntnis und Kirche. Missionstheologische Probleme des 19. Jahrhunderts bei C. H. Hahn* (Wuppertal: Verlag der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1962); Wolfgang R. Schmidt, *Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes bei Friedrich Fabri* (Wuppertal-Barmen: Verlag der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft, 1965). At the beginning is the instruction from 1829; the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg [Catechism] and Luther’s Catechism are named alongside one another as the “most excellent confessions” and the messengers are instructed, not “to promote a particular confession or to bring to bear its distinguishing doctrines, rather to win souls for Christ.” Schmidt, *Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes*, 24–25. In 1833, it reads: “Regarding the collective battle of the believers against the bastions of darkness . . . we are not of a mind to wave the little flag of the individual confession when the Lord raises the banner of his kingdom.” Sundermeier, *Mission, Bekenntnis und Kirche*, 30–31. In 1860, Fabri recognized that the consortium of those from Lutheran, Reformed and Union churches was in no way based upon the foundation of a consensus union, as he thought earlier, but rather only portrayed a federative union, which, “indeed is no union and yet is a union.” Schmidt, *Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes*, 27.

⁵⁰ Petri, *D. Ludwig Adolf Petri*, 1:314–315; Schreiber, *Bausteine*, 319–320; Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte*, 1:369–370.

⁵¹ Petri, *D. Ludwig Adolf Petri*, 1:317–318.

to the Lord.⁵²

Wilhelm Löhe

Wilhelm Löhe (1808–1872) in Neuendettelsau⁵³ also stands with Petri both in the church's works of mercy (*kirchlichen Liebesarbeit*) and in the battle for the churchly character of the mission to the diaspora. His fundamental contributions to answering the question about the confession in mission work have not, even today, lost any of the original strength of their testimony. Only a few such sentences are conveyed at this juncture, which can be found in Löhe's work, "*Die Mission unter den Heiden. Zwei Gespräche zur Belehrung des Volkes geschrieben*" (*The Mission Among the Nations. Two Conversations Written for the Instruction of the People*, 1843).

This work is, among other things, about the question of whether the confessional bond is necessary and possible for the mission. In the form of a conversation between two friends, Löhe offers a debate on the opinion of the Basel Mission, which until that point was also supported by Bavaria, "that it must be the intention of an evangelical missionary to bring to the nations the pure doctrine of the Gospel, not its particular stripe according to the formulation of some church, whether Lutheran or Calvinistic or some other." "On this broad basis of clear perception, evangelical truth, and evangelical love," one subscribes to the following:

to what is common to every evangelical protestant confession. ... For this reason the evangelical mission society does not let their missionaries going into the field sign any symbol, because the association has a higher pledge than the fragile pledge to some symbol, namely that their missionaries would teach according to Scripture. [The mission society] certainly knows that no one can withdraw himself from the formulation of the particular church in which he was taught since his youth, but it also knows that preachers with child-like faith can stand peacefully in non-Christian nations despite these differences, and truly stand, that no confusion whatsoever might come among the Christians of these lands

through the slight differences that might still remain. [The mission society] values those things that are particular to the given church, but it considers them meaningless for the non-Christian nations. It happily allows others to have their own opinion.⁵⁴

Löhe lays down this basic tenet over against this way of thinking about mission:

An evangelical Lutheran Christian is responsible to adhere to the mission establishment that belongs to his church. ... It should not be held against someone who already recognizes the doctrine of his church to be the purest under the sun when he wishes and prays that all mission establishments, yes that every land might fall to this teaching. If he wishes differently and prays differently, he should be blamed for that.⁵⁵

Löhe disputes the opinion that even Lutheran missionaries cannot preach anything other than the message of sin and salvation, that they must do this just as missionaries from other churches do and that for this reason they can be "united with other missionaries." To this opinion he says:

To your objection I will only reply that you would have been somewhat correct if the missions had no further purpose than to bring unbelievers to the very beginning of Christianity. But they want to and indeed should do more than awaken a few or many. Souls should be led on to more. Congregations (*Gemeinden*) should be gathered and led. And then it is decisively important for the newly converted Christians and congregations (*Gemeinden*) in these places to give them pastors of the purest doctrine and wisest practice to care for their souls. Why? Because otherwise the nations, as long as they remain in the infant stages of Christianity or are intentionally kept there, will eventually have to struggle through every dispute that we have behind us, and through every sin which arose out of such disputes. For human nature remains the same in every place and in every age. The same mistakes, errors, and sins are always popping up everywhere so that the complete truth is not made known to people. The correct satisfactory answer to every question that arises is ready, so that every need be met with food that sustains. Why should the congregations that we hope for in the non-Christian world not get to enjoy the fruits of

⁵² Ibid., 1:323–324, 328.

⁵³ Löhe's writings on mission can be found in vol. 4 (1962) of his *Gesammelte Werke* with extensive comments from Curt Schadewitz and references to further material in the other volumes. Cf. Siegfried Hebart, *Wilhelm Löhes Lehre von der Kirche, ihrem Amt und Regiment* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1939); Matthias Simon, *Mission und Bekenntnis in der Entwicklung des Evang.-Luth. Zentralmissionsvereins für Bayern* (Neuendettelsau: Freimund Verlag, 1953).

⁵⁴ Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke*, 4:35.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4:48–49.

church history? Why should these fruits be withheld from them? Why should eighteen centuries have elapsed for them without blessing, or indeed without the full blessing that can be imparted to them? Why should they themselves undergo all of the misery that was borne by our fathers and by us among so many tears and so much sighing?⁵⁶

The Lutheran missionaries would therefore also “bring the distinguishing doctrines (*Unterscheidungslehren*) of their church” to the newly arisen congregations made up of former non-Christians “not right at the beginning, but rather after the respective questions, doubts, and needs are awakened ... , and not as points of contention, not in order to put them at odds with each other, but rather as truths that guard against controversy, do not allow controversy to emerge and abate it. Our distinguishing doctrines will enter as words of peace in all possible individual circumstances of the newly won, believing souls.” Löhe is convinced “that those questions, which our distinguishing doctrines answer, must at some point turn up everywhere that strides are made in spiritual life.” As to the question of whether or not the newly won Christians of those nations “could remain in a child-like state of blissful ignorance about this,” Löhe had this to say:

[It] is in my eyes an impossible thing especially regarding the most well-known and most mentioned distinguishing doctrines of our church. The child-like state, which can harmlessly skip over these doctrines, cannot possibly last long. ... These distinguishing doctrines, the doctrines of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in which all Reformed confessions, stripes, and sects differ from our doctrine, cannot remain hidden to the nations... The unbeliever will be awakened and wish to become a part of Christendom. That happens through Baptism. As soon as he hears that, he must ask: What is Baptism? What does it give or profit? And so on... The distinguishing doctrines of the church are of the sort that a Christian, though he might think of these doctrines as he will, must always stand on the side of a certain confession and church. Separate interpretations do not help here. With each one falls to the one side or the other, and if he doesn’t want to admit it, he just shuts his eyes, which makes that happen all the more certainly. As soon as someone answers the question: What does the Scripture teach about this or that article of faith?

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4:50.

he is making a case for a confession of the Scriptural doctrine and for his understanding of the Scripture—he becomes confessional. The assertion that one can belong to absolutely no confession, that one takes his point of view outside of and above the confessions, is for that reason either an expression of ignorance, or one must be blinded by pride, which believes that it can soar on wings above the entire historical formation of the church and her doctrine.”⁵⁷

Friedrich Theodor Horning

Out of the wealth of similar voices at that time, most of whom explicitly committed themselves to the Lutheran mission work that began in 1836 in Dresden, only one more is offered here: Friedrich Theodor Horning (1809–1882), the Lutheran confessor from Strassburg. With him, too, cooperation with the Basel Mission came before the later confessional decisions. Then, however, he also decidedly turned away from the mission of the unionists (*unierten*) and just as clearly to mission work bound to the confession. His biographer gives an account of this:

It became ever more clear to [Horning] in Strassburg that a Lutheran Christian should serve the mission of his church and should through his church help to bring about building the kingdom of God and spreading it throughout the world. He could no longer imagine how a Christian could, for example, be a Lutheran here, and Reformed out there among the nations. It was for him an inner contradiction when someone as a member of the Lutheran church wanted to dedicate himself or his gifts to the Reformed or Union mission societies. He was convinced that one must be the same out there among the nations as here in the fatherland. Thus one must there, as here, build the Lutheran church; there as here glorify God and his Redeemer in the way assigned to him by the Lord, in the way of his church. One must love the unbeliever as a neighbor “as one loves oneself” [Matthew 22:39].⁵⁸

Horning contrasted the “mission mixed with the Reformed” in Basel with “the true evangelical Lutheran mission,” of which he said:

[The true evangelical Lutheran mission] works toward true propagation of the church of the pure

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4:51–52.

⁵⁸ Wilhelm Horning, *Friedrich Theodor Horning, Lebensbild eines Strassburger evangelisch-lutherischen Bekenntners im 19. Jahrhundert*, 3rd ed. (Würzburg: Stuber, 1884), 181.

Word and Sacrament in complete agreement with the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession. In times of decline or Laodicean tepidity [Rev. 3:14ff.], in times of the tangled admixture of churches and the work of mission, the rise of this mission is a visible return in our church to the first love, a godly fruit of repentance, an act of faith belonging to its first works (Revelation 2:4–5). Through this mission we bring the pure confession of Jesus Christ and with it the glorious treasures of our church to poor unbelievers, be they Gentiles or Jews. The church of God and her mission abide in the entire Word (John 8:31; 12:48). The Sacraments are not outward signs of grace for the mission, rather are essential means of grace. Should the associations and missions of the Reformed and of the Union deny that Baptism is the rebirth of water and Spirit (John 3:5), that it is the washing of water with the Word, that it is the washing of the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, that it cleanses from sins, “makes holy” (Titus 3:5) and gives the Holy Spirit; should Reformed mission deny, [should] mixed mission (that of the Union) more or less renounce, veil, that a true, essential, bodily presence of the transfigured body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, that they are orally received and enjoyed; should one revere the Reformed view against God’s Word (1 Cor 11), that the unworthy, the unbelieving are not given the body and blood of the Lord, should one pretend that the Lord’s divinity has no bearing on his body and his soul, does not thus affect his humanity, that the Lord’s divinity does not impart its divine attributes of omnipotence and omnipresence; should many lift up [their] souls to a Christ only enclosed in heaven and not know the full Christ administered for enjoyment, for awakening, for strengthening, and transfiguration; should many even maintain that they believe this when they indeed do not confess it as far as the church goes, and therefore also do not want to vow their allegiance to the Evangelical Lutheran church; with holy justice the Evangelical Lutheran church and her mission declare these to be obfuscations, colorations, limitations of the Word and unfaithfulness against the Lord and the church of God. Should awakenings and revivals of the dry bones be happening in Roman, Union, and Reformed lands, so the church praises the Lord for such kindnesses; but she does not forget that the blessing must still be that much greater when

the pure Christian church is spread through the testimony of faith, when Christ in pure Word and Sacrament streams out into every part of humanity, to all the ends of the earth. Even “a little leaven” is unbearable for her; to work for this purpose and in this sense, that is the character of the evangelical Lutheran mission.⁵⁹

Friedrich Horning always understood the connection of the battle for the validity of the Lutheran confession at home to the full commitment to Lutheran mission work decidedly bound to the confession. For “it is clear,” says his biographer in view of the strong impact that Horning had on other pastors and congregations (*Gemeinden*) in Alsace, “that whoever is and wants to be Lutheran will also do Lutheran mission and may not commit ecclesiastical adultery to support Reformed and the Union entities in the mission, which he condemns and disclaims both fundamentally and in his home church.”⁶⁰

Our Decision Today

We now ask the question whether these clear decisions that our Lutheran fathers made in the 19th century for a Lutheran mission work, which is unambiguously bound to the confession, are still valid for us today, whether these decisions must remain authoritative and whether they can be “reproduced” by us. The answer to this question results from the self-understanding of the Lutheran church, just as it did 100 ago. We actually have to say that we are compelled to formulate this self-understanding even more clearly and strongly than did many of our fathers. Even for them, the Lutheran church to which they are completely committed is largely still one church among many others.⁶¹ This notion is quite obvious and can be illustrated through many conclusions of studies of various churches (*Kirchenkundliche Feststellungen*), but these do not suffice for the rationale of the Lutheran church’s confessional stance and her mission. This notion will not do justice

⁵⁹ Horning, *Friedrich Theodor Horning*, 182–183.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶¹ Cf. Löhe, *Three Books about the Church*, book 2, sec. 2, pp. 99–104: The visible church “is divided into many denominations, one of which must have precedence over the others” (Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5/1:124–128). Cf. also Claus Harms, who can, at the end of his 95 theses from 1817, call the Reformed and the Roman Catholic Church “glorious” churches. Claus Harms, *Ausgewählte Schriften und Predigten*, ed. Peter Meinhold (Flensburg: C. Wolff, 1955), 1:225, theses 92–95; and Hans Preuss, who can apply the Word of the Lord about the many dwellings in the Father’s house (John 14) to the churches of various confessions. Hans Preuss, *Von den Katakomben bis zu den Zeichen der Zeit: der Weg der Kirche durch zwei Jahrtausende* (Erlangen: Martin Luther Verlag, 1936), 331.

to the deadly seriousness of the church's division and to the rejection of errors, which place the soul in peril. And yet for the Lutheran fathers it was exactly about taking seriously the contrary doctrine! Therefore, we may not get stuck with this notion, but rather must forge ahead as did the fathers until we get to the heart of the Lutheran confession of the one holy church and her marks. However, it is precisely here that our decision for the Lutheran mission bound to the confession is made. When, even in mission, we hold fast to the Lutheran doctrine of Law and Gospel, of Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Absolution, of the church and her unity as well as to the various rejections of contrary doctrines that are divisive for the church, then ultimately for us it is not about a precious patrimony, it is not about a characteristic feature. It is solely about the marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. That means, however, it is about the intact purity of the deeds of Christ themselves, guaranteed for us in Word and Sacrament.⁶²

The responsibility for Lutheran mission work consciously bound to the confession was and is approved by all those whose consciences are bound through the Word of God to this confession. The fathers of Lutheran mission in the 19th century bear witness to us through word and deed about this correlation between the bond to the particular confession and the necessity of confessional consequences in the work of mission. Since the Lutheran church's interpretation of Scripture had become for them the foundation of their personal Christian existence, and so became the valid guide for their life in the church of Jesus Christ, they were free to do, and in fact could do, only Lutheran mission.

⁶² This does not exclude but rather includes going beyond the borders of the church of our confession to follow with joyful and thankful sympathies that which takes place in those sections of Christendom that are separated from us. In this regard, compare a statement from Löhe that he addressed to those in Basel on Nov. 22, 1842, after the separation from Basel had taken place: "But for this reason my love has no end for those who with me believe in a Savior and who seek a fatherland. I support only the Lutheran mission; but it is spoken from the depths of my soul [when I say] that in my grief pure doctrine did not visit the nations with full blessing, my only comfort is that there is a Basel, a Barmen and the like, and that there are friends who, to the best of their knowledge, do that which our church has unfortunately left undone and bring the Gospel of the great God to the nations, which makes them receptive to all truth." Löhe, *Gesammelte Werke*, 4:622. Recognizing them similarly, Petri says: "We leave the Reformed Church her reputation and everything that is hers in peace. We acknowledge with thanks to God that they have done great things among the nations to the glory of God. May she also accept us; may she also not chastise us when we preserve our heritage and not share it with everyone!" *D. Ludwig Adolf Petri*, 1:318.

Lutheran Mission through Lutheran Church

Is the second programmatic sentence, "Lutheran mission can only be done by a Lutheran church," also just as valid today? Is it not conceivable for individual Lutheran Christians, isolated Lutheran pastors or groups of Lutherans faithful to the confession to band together into mission work, even though the church as it exists (*Kirchentum*) around them is in no way clearly bound to the confession? Is it not possible that something of that will be achieved where mission work is being done, for which one constantly strives and calls for in his own domain of the church at home, but never achieves? Could it be possible that Lutherans are finally growing weary in the battle for the actual implementation of the confessional bond in their church and that precisely for that reason they hope to achieve at least a few of their own ecclesiastical goals by "fleeing into the mission" on the new frontier to form young Lutheran churches? Was it not actually the case in 19th-century Germany that for decades confessionally conscious Lutherans spent their strength in the battle for the church's freedom from being raped by the state and devastated by the union, but finally lost the battle, at least according to outward appearances? And were not these same Lutherans able to set the world on fire through sacrificial service in their mission work for the building up of young Lutheran churches bound to the confession? Is it really so that Lutheran mission work can be borne and done only by a Lutheran church that is completely free of ties that are foreign to the confession or even at odds with its confessional status, in the matter of church administration, and in the church's entire practice? Or is this thesis perhaps warranted (in view of the battles and divisions of the church at home) because of the view that "the mission is neutral territory,"⁶³ because its constructive work takes place in an area not affected by these battles and divisions? Could not confessionally conscious Lutherans perhaps work together in the mission for building up young churches bound to the confession, even though they themselves go their separate ecclesiastical ways back home? Must every churchly separation on the soil of "old" Lutheran Christianity necessarily lead to breaking up cooperative work that already exists in the mission? Or is it possible to work together in the mission even beyond the deep trenches of severed church fellowship? Here we cannot point out the distressing deliberations and efforts behind these questions, which have taken place ever since

⁶³ Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte*, 3/1:77–101.

Pastor Theodor Harms' dismissal from his office and the consequent formation of the Lutheran Free Church around Hannover, caused by Harms' dismissal. The Hermannsburg Mission kept its options open for cooperation between free church and state church Lutherans on the mission field — despite the separation of the church that existed among them. Nor is it necessary to examine in detail what the role of the free church in this cooperation meant over the course of the decades or to what extent the contribution of the state church Lutherans increased and eventually became decisive for this work. The issue here is only the principle question: Can the Lutheran mission be carried out and accomplished only by a Lutheran church? That means: Is cooperative mission work for Lutherans who are faithful to the confession only possible by virtue of confessional unity that actually exists and thus for that reason also subject to the condition of real church fellowship? In other words, will Lutheran mission work be impossible or at least perilously threatened if those who share in this work are no longer bound to one another through the church fellowship actually practiced at the altar and in the pulpit?

Clear Tenets — Difficult Individual Questions

In thinking through and answering these questions we must admit from the outset that our fathers indeed proceeded from the clear tenets of their unambiguous confessional bond. Yet they certainly did not have valid solutions for all individual questions and every conceivable situation. The genesis of all Lutheran free churches shows that the bold, decisive step, in each case in a certain historical situation, could always be taken only by those who had already striven toward the renewal and relief of their church for years, often for decades, and by those who in this time of wrestling and suffering indeed protested against many burdens and shackles contrary to the confession. But they continued to believe that they could bear the present hardships in the hope that they would eventually overcome them. The same is true about many tensions, hardships, and questionable relationships, which arose in cooperative, ecclesiastical work, and will probably continue to arise again and again. But finally the moment came in which the decisive step was carried out, and it required a sharp severing. Perhaps only someone who has suffered and carried out something similar can judge such a matter. Even then one will still respect and esteem the contrary decision of conscience. One may not summarily allow his own perception to become the

law for the action of others. However, one must certainly bring it to bear as testimony that warns and seeks to convince.

Now that this has been made clear, it is essential to consider this second programmatic sentence: “Lutheran mission can be carried out only by a Lutheran church!” In regard to this sentence, it must first of all be very clearly stated what is certainly not meant here. Only then will an understanding be possible, about whether and in what sense this sentence actually remains valid today. It would be misunderstood were it simply conceived as a requirement in terms of the external organization. Lutheran mission work can indeed be put under direct control of the church administration and be bound by it to certain agencies of the home church, if this is advisable for the service and the work of the mission.⁶⁴ This form of the “mission of the church” is in no way necessary. It can even be dangerous both for the missionary service itself and for the binding of such work according to the confession. It becomes dangerous if church leadership and agencies of the sending church are themselves crippled by some circumstances, if they are inhibited from acting truly spiritually and from making decisions according to the confession. In fact all of the fathers of German Lutheran mission work in the nineteenth century understood their work as a matter of the Lutheran church. However, under the circumstances they could and might never have handed over the Lutheran mission to the state church agencies, even if they wanted to do so. For these agencies were not only crippled by their bondage to the state, but also could never really overcome the rationalism and the unionism in their own churches, fight them as they did. In the same way, the structure of the state and territorial church congregations (*staats und volksskirchlicher Gemeinden*) makes it either impossible from the beginning, or only partially permits that certain biblically-founded requirements are fulfilled. Therefore, neither can congregations with this structure be directly and immediately made bearers (*Trägern*) of Lutheran mission work. We are now saying nothing about whether, how long and under which conditions these historically established circumstances can be borne or in which way

⁶⁴ Compare to this the opinion from Karl Graul (1814–1864) regarding the ecclesiastical agencies of his time: The churchly character of the mission does not exist in “that the ecclesiastical agencies as such take the leadership of the mission in their hands. For we know well that the mission is a matter of free love in Jesus Christ, to which not every church officer as such feels compelled.” *Evangelisch-lutherisches Missionsblatt* (Dresden) 1 (1846): 144, 301.

they can be overcome. We simply assert that the requirement — Lutheran mission must be borne by a Lutheran church — must under certain circumstances lead to an abdication of an organizational bond to a certain church structure (*Kirchentum*), and through such abdication to save the true churchly bond and the freedom of the mission. It should also be recalled in this connection that precisely those circles and forces gathered around the work of Lutheran mission have in more than one case simultaneously fought the battle for the confession in the church at home. And in doing so, they continually had to become critics of their own church administration.

Thus one may not necessarily and in every case understand the binding of the Lutheran mission to the Lutheran church as organizational integration into a certain church body. Despite this, the circumstances only hinted at here always remain stopgaps and exceptions. Wherever the Lutheran church finds a form that is in accordance with her confession and can shape her specific life free of influences that are foreign to the church and destructive to the confession, she will also be in the position to bear the Lutheran mission directly as her work and her concern. A Lutheran church that has attained true independence can and may not leave the implementation of her mission mandate to the private initiative of individual people, groups, or circles. She must rather fulfill her mandate of outward sending just as she serves her own members through preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments. Pastors and congregations, church administration and synod are directly and immediately responsible for the mission. Thereby it is simply a question of expedience, in which way the offices and organs necessary for the mission work are, for example, directly subordinated to the church leadership, or only attached to the respective church body — irrespective of a certain autonomy.

Mission as Work of the Church

The example of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia shows how a Lutheran church freed of the fetters of the state and the dangers of the union can as such accept and assume responsibility for the mission. That church recognized already shortly after the time of the great persecution, in a solemn resolution of their general synod in 1841:

that the church has the calling and the authority to bring the preaching of the Gospel also to those who are not her members. The fulfillment of this calling

cannot be made dependent on obtaining previous permission from those who are to be the recipients of this preaching. But from the other side, it is earnestly desired that the activity of mission not just be left to the impulses of the individual members of the church. Mission must be the business of the church as such.

At the same time, the general synod decided, “that the entire church as such carry out the business of the work of mission” and that the Evangelical Lutheran mission, which had existed in Dresden since 1836 and convinced its observers of the faithfulness of its actions to the confession, would “become the organ of our ecclesiastical mission activity ... however no restriction shall be thereby imposed on the freedom of our church, to use also another organ for her missionary activity in the future, as circumstances require.”⁶⁵

Much was endeavored in this case to place the mission life of the individual congregations under the direction of the church agency. They very much desired “to reserve the sending out, prior examination, ordination, as well as later supervision” of the missionaries being trained in Dresden “for our church” (a position from which they backed off in 1848 after the mission institute was relocated to Leipzig). But the binding of the mission to the church cannot be ensured through such regulations alone. Here the great Lutheran mission framer *Karl Graul* makes the valid point (by the way, much in agreement with the Prussian Lutherans):

The mission becomes churchly essentially by the missionary being brought up in the confession of the church, going out and gathering members for congregations (*Gemeinden*) by means of that confession, so that the nations become one spirit and one body with us through the one Word that they inherited (Eph. 4:4). For the Word is Spirit and the Spirit is life; so that those who have received the one Spirit by virtue of one and the same Word unite into one visible body, of their own accord. For how do we read Acts 2:42 in regard to those who were bound through the same apostolic Word by one Spirit? It says: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Thus the inner unity of faith also presented itself immediately in outward

⁶⁵ Resolutions of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Prussia, held in September and October of 1841 in Breslau (1842), 104–105.

fellowship of the Divine Service. And whoever saw them thus together must have considered them to be members of one and the same great body. And so the ecclesiastical character of the mission exists therein.⁶⁶

The correlation between Lutheran mission and the Lutheran church that bears it is expressed in the binding of the mission to the confession of the church. This confession, despite its many articles, is something completely different than the collection of paragraphs in a law book. Completely independent of the paramount importance of a legally sound confessional stance, the confession of the church always remains living, powerful and effective as the answer to the revelation of God, an answer effected and sustained by the Holy Spirit and given ever anew to the church. Mission is only possible where the Holy Spirit “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies” people “through the Gospel, and keeps them with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”⁶⁷ Where this happens, these people will be “added” to the church of God and so engrafted in the fellowship of believing and confessing, which already exists. Lutheran missionaries can only carry out their service when they come from this fellowship of believing and confessing, when they persist in it and find enduring, solid ground in it for their service. A crack in the unity of believing and confessing in the sending church becomes something that threatens to kill Lutheran mission. If the strength that the church draws from its confession weakens and disappears, paralyzes of the mission will not fail to appear. Lutheran mission must preach the message of salvation and offer the means of grace bound to its confession, which is in accord with Scripture. The work of the mission is a work that truly founds the church, and cannot be done without clear distinction between right doctrine and false doctrine. Lutheran mission in the sense of this authority and promise must be borne by a church that acts with the same authority and lives under the same promise.

Mandate and Vow of the Messengers

Since the mission of the Lutheran church can only carry out its service bound to the confession, one more point must be especially noted here. Our Lutheran fathers in the last century were most interested in this point. The confessional bond of the missionary is indeed most closely tied to his ordination vow (*Amtsgelübde*), which he either

takes already before being sent out at the commissioning (*Abordnung*), or makes on the day of his ordination before God and the church. However, this solemn promise does not just require that the messenger is ready and able to allow himself to be bound to the confession and to the mission mandate, but that in the midst of the living church here on earth, in the name of Jesus Christ, he is placed under Christ’s mandate and his promise. With this the question arises: From whom and by whom is the messenger sent? It is fully possible and appropriate to distinguish between ordination to the ecclesiastical office and commissioning (sending out) to missionary service. Thus, ordination can either follow the commissioning, precede it or be bound to it. In any case, we must be clear about the fact that the mandate and authority of the one sent cannot rest on a so-called “inner calling.” The mandate and authority of the one sent rest in, with and under a liturgical operation of the church, and that means this mandate and authority are spoken to him in the name of the Lord Christ, who is present. August Vilmar (1800–1868) gives an account of questions that were occasionally posed to him: “Where is the mandate for this person to do mission among the nations at all? Haven’t most of them called themselves? Aren’t we on the way to a vocation in the way of Jeroboam?” Vilmar himself formulates the question in another way:

Is the institute of foreign mission merely an institute that marks and accompanies the awakening of our churchly fellowship from the long and impotent slumber of the previous century? Or is it an institute that belongs to the essence of the church? And when this last question is answered with a yes, the implication unfolds that then even the goal must be considered with the greatest determination to protect this institute for all the coming eras of the church and to assign it a certain position under the organisms of the church.⁶⁸

Here we cannot report on the various attempts of the Lutheran fathers to shore up ecclesiastically the mandate by which the missionary is sent, whether through direct derivation from the spiritual office in the midst of the sending congregation, or whether by legitimization on the

⁶⁶ *Evangelisch-lutherisches Missionsblatt* (Dresden) 1 (1846):144.

⁶⁷ SC II 6; Kolb-Wengert, 355; BSLK, 512.

⁶⁸ Hopf, *August Vilmar*, 2:335; cf., 84: “We must, if we truly want to send missionaries to convert and to found a church, be able to give the messengers not only the pure confession and the living testimony of Christ, but rather also the powerful, sin-forgiving office of Christ to take with them!”

part of ecclesiastical agencies.⁶⁹ The messenger's confessional responsibility, his assignment through the sending church, his commissioning under her charge is decisive in the correlation with the confessional bond of the activity of mission. From here it truly arises as a clear implication with inner necessity, that the missionary bound to the confession can be sent and borne only by a church also bound to the confession, that the mission work bound to the confession can be done only by a church also bound to the confession.

But what should happen if the church fellowship breaks apart among those who have borne and done mission work together? Can cooperative work in the mission nonetheless continue in this case, even though the accusation of decisions contrary to the confession, of the tolerance of false doctrines, and of the fellowship with false teachers is being made against one another? It is completely understandable that in answering these questions a certain insecurity arises at first after the termination of church fellowship, that one is on the lookout for new solutions, waiting and hoping in a time of transition. At last though, sooner or later, an either-or situation will be inevitable. One must either fundamentally and practically call into question the termination of the church fellowship that took place and revise it as a decision made based on the situation, but in the end indeed not justifiable. In this case the continued cooperative work in the mission contributes not only to the convergence of the separated churches, but rather finally leads down the path of mutual recognition to new fellowship. Or on the other hand, the church separation that took place must be recognized and affirmed as a decision required by the Word of God, which then certainly makes common work of the churches impossible (despite all respect for the opposing decisions of conscience). It is not for us to decide whether there can be levels with this either-or, which might be situational or explainable by significant traditions. Even less may we exalt ourselves as judges over the conscience of Lutheran brothers who have reached decisions different from ours and those of our fathers. On our side we can only cling to the original position of the Bleckmar mission: "Lutheran mission can be done only by a Lutheran church." That means, however, that mission can be carried out only on the basis of the true unity of the holy Christian church, which requires and commits to full church

fellowship. We are convinced that this "true unity" exists neither in the "Evangelical Church in Germany" nor in her member churches. Joint mission work with them is impossible for us—despite everything that binds us to them and which we must never deny. We also consider it impossible in the long run to place mission work, as well as the church that arises from this mission work, under a confessional bond, which is denied or breached by the same sending church that bears this mission work. The converse of that programmatic sentence must therefore read: Lutheran mission is threatened with death and finally made impossible where the church that bears it breaches her confessional bond or fundamentally and practically ignores the consequences of this bond.

The Confessional Bond of the Young Church

"Lutheran mission must lead to Lutheran church." In this third programmatic sentence, it is not only about the consequence of the original position presented up to this point, but rather it is about the very goal of Lutheran mission work itself. "We want to bring the Lutheran church to the nations," said Louis Harms.⁷⁰ When he said this he was thinking about the gathering of congregations and the building up of a church, for which the Lutheran confession should be just as authoritative as for the sending church in Germany. With this nothing has yet been said about the shaping of the ecclesiastical orders, which, according to Lutheran doctrine, must by no means be the same as the "ceremonies" of the sending church. On the contrary, the congregation in every place and every time possesses the freedom and the right to take on the human orders proper for it, to change them, or to completely recreate them. These orders must simply be in accordance with the sole purpose of all human church orders, that they cultivate the service of the ecclesiastical office and serve the building up of the congregation. Thus a newly emerging Lutheran church can and must be "down to earth" in her place, in her country and with her people. Right from the beginning, this newly emerging Lutheran church must, in the shaping of her ecclesiastical orders, precisely and strongly oppose the powers outside of the church, which will seek to have a dominating influence in the formation of her inner life. Yet this is only possible if the young Lutheran church takes seriously her confessional bond. She must fight vigilantly and work prayerfully for the pure preservation of the means of

⁶⁹ In regard to L. Harms' attempt to regulate this, see Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte*, 2:217–218.

⁷⁰ *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt* 3 (1857): 92.

grace. With that we stand before the question of the confessional bond of the young church, which forms as fruit of Lutheran mission work.⁷¹

Is it really necessary and is it even possible on an individual basis to bind the young Lutheran churches to the old Lutheran confessions in their entirety? Hermann Sasse (1895–1976) could say in 1952:

Confessional documents as such are not necessary for the unity of the church, but for that which happens in them, namely the distinction between truth and error, pure teaching and heretical teaching. Without this distinction there is, indeed, no pure preaching of the gospel and no correct administration of the sacraments. Nobody can know what the one church of God is, if nobody knows what the one gospel, the one faith, the one baptism, and the one sacrament of the altar are.

However, Sasse added another declaration to this important one:

If a particular historical confession does not actually belong to the essence of the church of Christ, then it does however belong to the essence of the Lutheran Church. By “Lutheran Church” we mean that segment of Christendom which accepts as scriptural the great doctrinal decisions of the Lutheran Reformation, as they are recorded in the Lutheran confessions.

Sasse considers it completely possible that the doctrinal content and the doctrinal decisions of the old confessions must be said “in new form,” in order to communicate them to the people of our age.

Granted, it could be necessary to speak the content of the Book of Concord in a new form to people at the end of the twentieth century. ... But such a necessity of translating the Lutheran confessions may never serve as a pretext for replacing the old confession with a new one. It is the old faith, the faith of the fathers, the faith of the correct church from the very

beginning, which we have to confess anew as our faith. Nothing of this old faith may be lost. ... So the confession, by which the church is recognized as Lutheran, is the understanding of the Holy Scripture, which is clearly witnessed in the confessional documents of the evangelical Lutheran church.⁷²

No Young Lutheran Church Can Do without This.

On the one side, it is about clinging to the old confession in its entirety. We recall once again the truly ecumenical character of all Lutheran confessions and their doctrinal decisions. As proper interpretation of Scripture, these sentences assert their claim to validity and recognition in the whole Christian church on earth. Lutheran mission, which is bound to this confession, can and may not do without handing over the confessions to the young church, whether it is in translations of the entire Book of Concord or individual parts, whether it is through introducing indigenous theologians to the English, German and Latin text of the Book of Concord, whether it is initially and for the time being through the stopgap of a brief doctrinal description which conveys the most important confessional decisions and their scriptural evidence. Even a young Lutheran church needs this binding.

On the other side, there is nothing that argues against an actualization and concretization of the old doctrinal decisions in view of the situation of a young Lutheran church today in her environment. To what degree such a “translation” of the “old confessional formulations” can then become a binding interpretation and application of the Lutheran confessions must be tested and decided in each individual case. However, it is necessary to cling to the tenet that all temptations to curtail and weaken the old confessional statements must be opposed from the beginning. Nothing of that which in the course of church history attained validity as confessional statement and doctrinal decision in our church, under the guidance of her Lord, may be withheld and concealed from the young Lutheran church. The same is therefore true for those who bear the office in the young church, which Karl Graul already in his day required for the formation of Lutheran missionaries. They must “not just be historically *instructed* in the church’s confession, but also faithfully and diligently *brought up* into it.” They must “as they have

⁷¹ Cf. Sasse, “The Question of the Church’s Unity on the Mission Field,” 2:179–195 (see above, note 7); Sasse, “Lutherische Kirche und Weltmission” (*Briefe an luth. Pastoren*, no. 35), in *Lutherische Blätter* 6, no. 38 (1954): 153–170; Sasse, “Die Union von Südindien als Frage an die Lutherische Kirche” (*Briefe an luth. Pastoren*, no. 56), in *Lutherische Blätter* 15, no. 77 (1963): 43–60. See also Hans Heinrich Harms, *Bekennnis und Kircheneinheit bei den Jungen Kirchen* (Berlin: Lettner-Verlag, 1952); Heinrich Meyer, *Bekennnisbindung und Bekennnisbildung in jungen Kirchen* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1953); Vilmos Vajta and Hans Weißenberg, eds., *Das Bekennnis im Leben der Kirche* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1963), especially 170–171, 181–182, 199–200, 224–225; Lothar Schreiner, *Das Bekennnis der Batak-Kirche*, *Theologische Existenz heute* 137 (neue Folge) (Munich: Kaiser, 1966).

⁷² Hermann Sasse, “Über die Einheit der Lutherischen Kirche,” in *Briefe an lutherische Pastoren*, no. 25, 1952, 3–6. English translation by Andrew Smith, “Concerning the Unity of the Lutheran Church,” in *Letters to Lutheran Pastors*, 3 vols., ed. and trans. by Matthew C. Harrison (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 2:120–123.

been brought up into the confession of the church (which remains the main thing) finally be pledged to it (which puts the capstone in place).⁷³

We are aware that the confessional bond of a young Lutheran church, which rests on this foundation, commits to duties that stretch much further. The danger of being a nominally Lutheran church whose confessional status is sound, in whose preaching and practice, however, entirely different factors come to hold sway, is certainly not limited to the “old” Lutheran churches. There is no human guarantee and no earthly assurance for the preservation of the right doctrine in a church. There is, however, a responsibility of the stewards of the mysteries of God. “Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:2).

To stewards of the older and younger Lutheran churches, being trustworthy and faithful belongs also their ecumenical responsibility to the whole Christian church on earth. Woe to every Lutheran church who so misunderstands her confessional bond, as if she should and may introvertedly eke out her own meager existence in seclusion, protect her stock, and leave the parts of Christianity polluted or ruled by false doctrine to their own resources. If Lutheran mission should and must lead to Lutheran church, then this in no way means the isolation of a young Lutheran church that is just emerging. It means, rather, the responsibility of the mission to preserve the unity with all rightly believing Lutheran churches on earth, but just as much its responsibility to the testimony of the biblical truth of salvation and its consequences beyond all borders and boundaries of painful divisions in the church.

⁷³ *Evangelisch-lutherisches Missionsblatt* (Dresden) 1 (1846): 304.