

A Covenant to Promote Biblical Renewal within the Lutheran Church of Australia (Summary)

The unalterable Article II of the Lutheran Church of Australia's (LCA) constitution reads:

We accept without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine, and life. We acknowledge and accept as true expositions of the Word of God and as our own confession all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, namely, the three Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed; the Unaltered Augsburg Confession; the Apology (Defence) of the Augsburg Confession; the Smalcald Articles; the Small Catechism of Luther; the Large Catechism of Luther; and the Formula of Concord.

This confession has been the basis of our unity since the LCA's formation in 1966. However, since then 'the spirit of the world' (1 Corinthians 2:12) and secular values have been allowed to cast doubt on God's clear Word. A critical attitude to Scripture has undermined its authority, resulting in the same loss of confidence in God's Word which has caused many churches to decline. For this reason concerned pastors and laypeople have agreed to pledge themselves to the following statement in order to promote sound biblical teaching in the LCA.

A. Our commitment to the Bible

1. The Scriptures 'as a whole and in all their parts' are trustworthy. Every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13) and is to be accepted 'not as a human word but as what it really is, the Word of God.' (1 Thessalonians 2:13)
2. The Bible is inerrant because God never lies. (Titus 1:2) Martin Luther, in his Large Catechism, writes 'All people may err and deceive, but God's Word cannot err.'
3. The Bible is clear, 'a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.' (Psalm 119:105; 2 Peter 1:19)
4. God's Word alone is sufficient for our salvation. Reason, experience, human traditions or a second in-filling of the Holy Spirit should not be used as additional bases for doctrine.

B. Interpreting the Bible

1. Christ is the centre of the Scriptures. All the Old Testament promises are fulfilled in him. (2 Corinthians 1:20; Luke 24:25-27, 44)
2. The Scriptures form a harmonious whole. The biblical authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit, do not contradict each other.
3. The books of the New Testament were written by the apostles and evangelists and not by anonymous Christian communities.
4. We are to stick to 'the simple, pure and natural sense of the words' (Luther), and avoid strange and obscure interpretations that evade the natural sense of the words.
5. We read the Bible in faith, trusting that every word is true, and do not approach it with a critical spirit that questions its reliability.
6. With Luther, we believe that 'The power of Scripture is this: it will not be changed into the one who studies it; instead, it transforms the one who loves it.' Our personal responses to Scripture may not replace what the text actually says.
7. Both Law and Gospel must be taught. The good news (that 'Christ died for our sins' – 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) does not mean we can disregard God's law. We are to delight in his will and walk in his ways.

C. The Book of Concord and the Theses of Agreement

We pledge ourselves to the Book of Concord because it is based solidly on the divine Scriptures. The Small Catechism should remain the basis of teaching in church and school.

We regard the Theses of Agreement (TA) as a foundational statement of faith thoroughly in accord with the Scriptures and the basis of unity for the LCA.

D. Some Issues facing the church

The erosion of faith in God's Word has allowed false teachings to flourish. We reject:

1. Gospel reductionism's view that the Law may be dismissed and the Bible's authoritative content reduced to the Gospel which makes us 'wise for salvation.' (2 Timothy 3:15)
2. Historical Criticism which elevates our reason above the clear words of Scripture, employing a sceptical, critical approach in explaining the Bible.
3. Mission and Ministry approaches which look to authorities other than God's Word. Jesus left us with his Great Commission:

All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe **all that I have commanded you**. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus charges us to observe **all** he has commanded. The LCA cannot grow in faith and thrive in mission if we disregard our Lord's commands and teach only what is popular. This includes 1 Corinthians 14:37 where Paul says it is the Lord's command that only men are to be pastors. In most churches, women's ordination has been followed by numerical decline.

The public ministry of the Word has been instituted by God and receives its authority from his Word. (John 10:11-16; John 21:15-17 and 1 Peter 5:1-4; see also Acts 14:23; 20:17-35)

Only men were to be priests in Old Testament times (Exodus 28:1), only a man could fill a gap in the ranks of the 12 apostles (Acts 1:21), and a pastor 'must be a man of one woman' (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). This is based on the biblical order of creation set down in Genesis 2:18-25; 3:1-16; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Rejecting God's plan for the pastoral ministry is church divisive and places a roadblock in the way of his blessing.

We endorse the Theses of Agreement VI.11 on the ordination of women:

Though women prophets were used by the Spirit of God in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 prohibit a woman from being called into the office of the public ministry for the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments. This apostolic rule is binding on all Christendom; hereby her rights as a member of the spiritual priesthood are in no wise impaired.

A covenant and an appeal

We have prepared this covenant for our mutual encouragement and as an appeal to LCA members to join us in our endeavour to uphold the authority of God's Word. We invite you to append your name to ours, with the prayer that the Word may grow among us and the LCA may have peace, be built up, and rediscover fullness of joy in Christ and his Word.

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