

THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION

of the Kamen Initiative 1999/2000

I. Why a new Theological Declaration?

Our age is characterized by a great arbitrariness regarding what a person can believe. This arbitrariness has penetrated all areas of the Protestant Church in Germany and is now infiltrating into the evangelical world as well. The Church is losing ground and her God-given foundations are being eroded: confessional statements are consciously toned-down and in their place cooperation in ministry and mutual love are being propagated without respect to a real consensus based on the Word. In response to this doctrinal chaos in which the believing Church finds herself, she must state afresh and in terms that obligate our practice what the Christian Faith is – and what it is not. This is the task of the Theological Declaration.

It has the following goals:

1. Summary

From her earliest days and through differing situations, the Christian Church has summarized what she believes the Bible teaches and formulated that faith in a way that is normative for church practice. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are examples of such formulations from the Early Church. The Catechisms, the Augsburg and the Second Helvetic Confessions are examples of Reformational Confessions from the German-speaking realm.

2. Evidence

Through these, the Church demonstrates her conformity to the Word of God and the legitimacy of her faith. She shows that she shares the one common Christian faith with the Christian Church of past centuries. The mark by which a Christian can be identified is his confession. By means of a confession, the Christian leaves vagueness behind and indicates clearly and understandably what His faith is.

3. Mutual Witness

By means of one *common* confession, Christians give witness to their faith and recognize one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This Theological Declaration attempts once again to bring together the people of God standing in the Tradition of the Reformation in our country, in order that they may praise God with *one* voice (1 Cor. 1:10). This Declaration has a clear evangelical identity. May God grant that it prove to be a mutual witness for the present-day challenges.

4. Response

Confessions respond to problems with which the Christian Faith is confronted in a specific situation. The Early Church and Reformational Confessions responded to the heresies and abuses of their time. Since then, new challenges have arisen: The *Enlightenment* emphasized the historicity of revelation and judged the historical as relative and non-binding. The *critical scientific world view* leaves little to no room for the intervention of God in world events. *Romanticism* established a deep psychological view of man which sees the Divine as located in the human soul. The *Charismatic Movement* confuses experience with the activity of the Holy Spirit and salvation in Christ. *Pluralism and Nihilism* deny both that truth can be expressed in human words and that certainty is at all possible. *Neo-Marxism and Feminism* are concerned with egalitarianism and want to eliminate differences found in the created order. These are challenges that the Church up to now has not addressed. Rather, she has accommodated herself to these successive movements in all their damaging influences upon the Christian way of life. For this reason a contemporary Theological Declaration is needed which puts into biblical perspective both the Christian faith and the Church of Christ with regard to today's challenges.

5. God's Word and Work

The true Church is built when God creates faith through His Word in people who hear it. Through His Word, God alone can turn around the plight of the Church. But He has commissioned the Church to proclaim that Word. Insofar as the Church faithfully does this, it is doing the work of God. She opposes the deplorable contemporary situation with "sound doctrine" and in so doing performs an important and sanctifying function. The following Theological Declaration takes up this task. It summarizes afresh the "sound doctrine," the faith that was received

from Christ and the apostles and to which the confessions of the Church testify. It seeks thereby to proclaim God's immutable Word and to promote the work of God in our time.

6. Call to Repentance

The Theological Declaration does not exist in a vacuum. It finds its place in a situation, in which churches not only reinterpret, but also openly oppose the foundations of Scripture and confession. It is more than a collection of doctrines; it is at the same time a call to repentance. It is concerned with what God Himself has said; with the proper use of His Name, and with the gospel, through which we receive an interest in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This objectification of purpose, i.e. to address the deplorable situation in the church, should help to free all parties concerned from personal ambition, improper considerations, power struggles and strife.

Bernhard Kaiser

II. Text of the Declaration

1. Agreement with the Scriptures and with the Church Fathers in the Faith

In obedience to the triune God, we teach according to the Holy Scriptures and we acknowledge the system of doctrine found in traditional Christian confessions, as they were received and were foundational in the churches of the Reformation: of the Early Church (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian, Chalcedonian¹) and of the Reformation (esp. Luther's Small Catechism, the Schmalkaldic Articles, the Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic and the Westminster Confessions). We take seriously the concerns of the following theological declarations of the 20th century: the Berlin Declaration (1909), the Barmen Declaration (1934), the Düsseldorf Declaration (1967), the Frankfurt Declaration (1970) and the Chicago Declaration (1978). The following statements are not subjective religious views but are genuine determinations describing the reality which faith embraces. The source and ground of our faith is the self-revelation of the Triune God.

2. Of Revelation and the Holy Scriptures

The self-revelation of God, through which He has made himself known to men, encompasses along with the general revelation in creation both the recorded history in the Holy Scriptures as well as its interpretation through the Scripture itself and reaches beyond the multiple statements of the Scriptures about past events into the future and the New Creation. Revelation was completed in the sending of God's Son Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The coming of Jesus Christ was predicted in the Old Testament and declared in the New Testament as having occurred. The self-revelation of God is unique, and is differentiated by Law and Gospel. We confess that the entire Holy Scriptures, consisting of 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament, were both given by God and spoken through the Holy Spirit (down to the words themselves), as well as also written by men; that Scripture is true and reliable in all its assertions because God is a God of truth; that they are completely sufficient to enable man to partake in the salvation accomplished in Christ; that they are clear in all their statements and intentions; that they provide the foundation for faith in Jesus Christ; and that they are the exclusive standard for doctrine and life.

We reject the teaching that there are special revelations of God apart from the history witnessed to and authoritatively interpreted in the Holy Scripture. We reject the teaching that the Holy Scripture does not contain in itself all the conditions necessary for its correct understanding such that it can only be understood correctly through referring to human tradition or through subjecting it to critical scientific investigation. Further, we reject the teaching that the Bible contains errors or that its truth derives from particular intended meanings that cannot be clearly seen from the words or which contradict them.

¹ The Nicene Creed defines the Early Church's doctrine of the Trinity; the Athanasian Creed defines the doctrines of the Trinity and of Christ, and the Chalcedonian defines the doctrine of the two natures of Christ.

3. Of God

We confess the one, triune and eternal God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in three Persons of equal substance, yet one God.

We confess that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, holy, just; that He is loving toward sinners, but that His wrath rests on those who do not believe His Word.

We reject the teaching that God is an impersonal, anonymous, healing, or organizing force, and that God's wrath is not real.

4. Of Creation

We confess that the triune God in the beginning created the world in six days and that He continues to sustain it, and that the creation was originally very good. We confess that God ordained the physical world, as well as the creational differences between the sexes, between man and animal, and the species among animals and plants.

We reject the teaching that the world originated from itself over long periods of time; that the earth is an eco-system that either founded itself or is permeated by an impersonal force in which God-given distinctions can be set aside; or that God let the world evolve through long periods of time.

5. Of Sin

We confess that sin came into the world through the historical act of the first human couple; that sin essentially consists in wanting to be like God and freely to determine what is good and evil in opposition to God's commandment; that sin is dependent on both the temptation of Satan, as well as the disobedience of man; that it entails the previously announced punishment of death and resulting complete distortion of man with respect to his relationship with God; and that it is made known through God's Law.

We reject the teaching that sin is an evil which transcends individual man, but internal evil, which has its root in the free act or the habits of man, or which can be explained through psychological factors or be eliminated through psychological or sociological therapeutic methods.

6. Of Jesus Christ

We confess that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God; that He became a man by being conceived through the Holy Spirit, and was born of the Virgin Mary; and that He is known through His words, works, signs and wonders as the promised Messiah of God of the Old Testament. We confess that God in His grace accomplished salvation through His vicarious suffering and dying in man's place to atone and bear the penalty for his sin; that on the third day following his death and burial, He arose bodily from the dead and after forty days ascended into heaven where He reigns over the Church and the world and will bodily and in visible form return again. We confess that God made the New Covenant with Him and in Him gave men access to the promise of forgiveness and eternal life.

We reject the teaching that there is any other way to God than by Jesus; that Jesus was only a man; that His divinity consists only in His special religiosity and its effects; that He only wanted to be a moral example for people; that His death was not a vicarious punishment and His resurrection did not actually happen, but is to be understood as merely a "The Ongoing cause of Jesus".

7. Of the Holy Spirit

We confess that the Holy Spirit is God as is the Father and the Son; that in His Person God is working in the world not only by sustaining the creation, but also by uniquely working in connection with revelation which occurred in history, as well as effecting the application of Christ's completed work of salvation by illuminating the heart and working faith in the gospel, distributing gifts for ministry, and edifying the Church.

We reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force that overpowers man or that one could possess in a material way, and which manifests itself necessarily in extraordinary events, ecstatic experiences, or an exaltation of natural life.

8. Of the Church

We confess that there is one, holy, Christian Church that was predestined before the foundation of the world in Christ and gathers as the covenant people of God from Israel and the Gentiles in the world; that she is built through the preaching of the gospel; that she makes use of the sacraments according to the will of her Lord and exercises church discipline. We confess that it stands in true faith in Jesus Christ, lives in love and hopes in her consummation at the return of Christ, which will come to expression in visible form at the return of Christ.

We reject the teaching that the church automatically exists wherever it claims to be, merely as the formal, legal institution "Church"; where it is associated with a governing body of the Church; or where the sacraments are administered in a purely outward manner. We reject the view that the Church is a religious based on man's will or that it is a church on the basis of its striving toward ethical perfection. We reject the unification of churches or religions without regard for the question of truth.

9. Of Man

We confess that man, male and female, was created by God in His image (and remain in His image), and that he, in obedience to God, should exercise dominion over the creation; that through the Fall his being and nature were distorted in such a way that he lives in active rebellion against God and can neither find acceptance with Him nor properly interact with creation; and that, as a result of sin, he is lost.

We reject the teaching that man in his dignity is made equal to the rest of creation; that his spirit is derived from matter; that his innermost being is instinct-driven; that his corporeality is inferior; or that he is at his core unaffected by the Fall and can thereby contribute to his own salvation.

10. Of the Means of Grace

We confess that God applies the accomplished salvation of Christ to man through the external Word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, both of which are dependent on the Word; and that these testify to and seal the promise of His covenant of grace. Word and sacrament establish, strengthen, and assure man's faith. We confess the baptism of infant children when at least one parent is a believer; and that a valid baptism performed in the Name of the triune God may not be repeated. We confess that the means of grace are unto judgment for those who do not receive or use them in faith.

We reject the teaching that salvation is given through the direct and immediate working of the Holy Spirit apart from the Word and faith in the heart, whether that working be mediated through a merely external use of the sacraments or is the consequence of external religious practice. We reject the teaching that the sacraments are effectual without faith or that they only have the nature of a subjective confession.

11. Of Faith

We confess that God calls men through his Word to repentance and creates faith which increasingly seeks to know and take hold of Christ in his heart; that faith trusts the promise of God in His Word and has assurance on the basis of the truthfulness of God; that faith contains both the confidence in prayer as well as a new disposition that affirms the commandments of God and denies sin.

We reject the teaching that faith originates in man and that faith is a feeling or merely an act of consciousness.

12. Of Justification

We confess that justification is a gracious forensic act of God by which God imputes the complete righteousness which was effected by the atoning sacrifice of Christ to a sinner, who He has awakened to faith in Christ; that his sins are forgiven and he is received into fellowship with God; and that through faith man has unconditional access to this reality in Christ.

We reject the teaching that justification actually makes one righteous apart from Christ or that God declares anyone righteous on the basis of his ethical merits or his other qualities. We reject the misuse of the doctrine of justification for the regulation of social or political circumstances or for the sanctioning of sin.

13. Of Works

We confess that the works that please God are the fruits of genuine faith that is wrought by the Holy Spirit and that they are sustained by love to God and neighbor; love obeys the commandments of God not only externally, but from the heart. We confess that by faith in Christ the Christian resists sin, but that on the basis of his remaining sin cannot achieve ethical perfection in this life.

We reject the teaching that the works of the believer are an expression of a real, inherent capacity within man or that there can be true faith without works. We reject the view that good works are the condition for a deeper experience of grace.

14. Of the Commandments of God

We confess that the Ten Commandments, as they are explained in Martin Luther's Small Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism, are the foundation of Christian ethics. We confess that the God-given form of cohabitation of a man and woman is a commitment to marriage for a lifetime.

We reject the teaching that man knows for himself and can decide what is good and evil. According to the Holy Scriptures, sexual relationships before and outside of marriage, including homosexual relations, are sins. We reject feminist ideology and deny the right of women to the offices of public teaching and leadership in the Church.

15. Of the Last Things

We confess that believers in Christ after their death will be with Christ in the glory of eternal life and the new creation. We confess that Christ will visibly come again at the end of time to judge the living and the dead; that the believers will be revealed as the legitimate partakers of eternal life in the new creation and unbelievers will be abandoned to eternal judgment.

We reject the teaching that the consummation of the world is to be seen within the scope of an indeterminably long internal process of development and that there is no eternal punishment for unbelievers.

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