

Part I

Context and Content

In 1987 the first Churchwide Assembly adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that the Constituting Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: a. receive the social statements of the existing churches as historical documents of the predecessor bodies; and b. instruct the Commission for Church in Society to set priorities in regard to issues to be studied.¹

The first priority was the statement “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” adopted by more than a two-thirds majority of the Churchwide Assembly, which met August 28–September 4, 1991.² It is a foundational

document that gives guidance to the development of future social statements, messages, and advocacy and serves as a resource for congregations and other expressions of the church in their social mission and ministry. Committing to the development and acceptance of this statement was, in itself, a declaration that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has an obligation to be a public church, engaged in the affairs of society, and that Lutheran theology has a distinct contribution to make to this Christian witness.

In part I we discuss what the statement is saying to the church. Chapter 1 lays out the historical-theological context of its Lutheran legacy and an exposition of how it employs certain fundamental aspects of Lutheran theology. Chapter 2 sets forth key themes of the statement, providing more theological reflection. In part II we will look at the material in part I in terms of its meaning for the church in society today, both for its members and for the church as an institution.