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## The U. L. C. A. and the Doctrine of Inspiration

In the *Lutheran* of October 5 the reader finds the chief sections of the report of the commission of the U. L. C. A. on Lutheran relationships submitted to that church-body at its convention assembled in Baltimore October 5-12. In his opening sermon, printed in the same issue of the *Lutheran*, Dr. Knubel, president of the U. L. C. A., devoted a paragraph to the work this commission has been engaged in. In the report of the commission the paragraph of the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod in which the doctrine of verbal inspiration is espoused is quoted: "We teach also that the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is not a so-called 'theological deduction' but that it is taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:13. Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35."

The reaction of the U. L. C. A. commissioners to this statement is the following: "Our commission was unable to accept the statement of the Missouri Synod that the Scriptures are the infallible truth 'also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters.' We find the words quoted not in accordance with our Lutheran Confessions (see Formula of Concord, Epitome, Introd.) nor with the Scriptures themselves."

In speaking of their conferences with the American Lutheran Church representatives, the commissioners state that both parties agreed in the acceptance of these two paragraphs: 1. "The Bible (that is, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments) is primarily not a code of doctrines, still less a code of morals, but the history of God's revelation for the salvation of mankind and of man's reaction to it. It preserves for all generations and persons, ever anew, this revelation of God, which culminated and centers in Christ, the Crucified and Risen One. It is itself the Word of God, His permanent revelation, aside from which, until Christ returns in glory, no other is to be expected." 2. "The Bible consists of a number of separate books, written at various times, on various occasions, and for various purposes. Their authors were living, thinking personalities, each endowed by the Creator with an individuality of his own and each having his peculiar style, his own manner of presentation, even at times using such sources of information as were at hand."

There was disagreement, however, on the question whether the Bible is inerrant, as is evident from the fact that each one of



the two commissions drew up a statement of its own with respect to this point. That of the American Lutheran Church reads: "Nevertheless, by virtue of a unique operation of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) by which He supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word (2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:12,13), the separate books of the Bible are related to one another and, taken together, constitute *one organic whole without contradiction and error* (John 10:35)." That of the United Lutheran Church reads: "Nevertheless, by virtue of a unique operation of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21) by which He supplied to the holy writers content and fitting word (2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 2:12,13), the separate books of the Bible are related to one another and, taken together, constitute a *complete, perfect, unbreakable whole, of which Christ is the Center* (John 10:35).

The U. L. C. A. commissioners next submit recommendations. They say: "The record of our meetings with the commissions of both the American Lutheran Church and the Missouri Synod serves to indicate the great extent of agreement and the slight extent of disagreement. The disagreement relates, furthermore, to a matter of theological interpretation, which, in addition, applies only to a non-existent original text of the Scriptures. In itself it is not sufficient warrant to keep the various Lutheran bodies apart, especially as Lutheranism faces the conditions which were declared at length in our Savannah convention when the commission was appointed. It is not our judgment that we can regard their views as outside of a Lutheran conception of the Scriptures, much less that they can so regard our views. We therefore recommend to the Lutheran Church in America: 1. That this commission on relationships to American Lutheran church-bodies be continued, to deal with and confer with similar commissions from other Lutheran church-bodies upon all matters that may lead to closer relations and organic union." In the second recommendation the commissioners ask their church-body to adopt a declaration on the Word of God and the Scriptures which they submit. We read in the *Lutheran*: "The *Lutheran* is informed that the paragraphs are the product of repeated conferences to which eminent theologians of the Church have contributed. The convention will receive it from a committee of theologians of which Prof. Henry Offermann, D.D., is chairman." The declaration is somewhat lengthy, but on account of its importance we here print it in full.

### The Word of God and the Scriptures

(In order that all misunderstandings and misconceptions of this declaration, or of any of its parts, may be avoided, the United Lutheran Church in America declares in advance that it does



not regard the statements therein contained as altering or amending the Confessions of the Church in any particular, or as changing the doctrinal basis of the United Lutheran Church, set forth in Article II of the Constitution. On the contrary it considers this declaration to be nothing more than a desirable statement at the present time of beliefs which are in full harmony with the Scriptures and Confessions.)

I. We believe that *"the only rule and standard, according to which all dogmas and teachers are to be esteemed and judged, are nothing else than the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testaments"* (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Intr., I; cf. Sol. Decl.; cp. Summary, 1). We also accept the teaching of the whole Lutheran Church that the Scriptures have this unique authority because they are the Word of God.

II. Both in the Scriptures and in the Confessions of the Church this term *Word of God* is used in more than one sense. For this reason it is important that we should understand what these different senses are and what we mean when we call the Scriptures by this name.

III. We believe that in its most real sense the Word of God is the Gospel, i. e., the message concerning Jesus Christ, His life, His work, His teaching, His sufferings and death, His resurrection and ascension, for our sakes, and the saving love of God thus made manifest in Him.

We believe that in and through this Gospel the Holy Spirit comes to men, awakening and strengthening their faith, and leading them into lives of holiness. (Cf. explanation of the Third Article in Luther's Small Catechism.) For this reason we call the Word of God, or the Gospel, a means of grace. (Augsb. Conf., Arts. V, XX; F. C., Epit., chap. II:4-6, 19.)

IV. We believe that in a wider sense the Word of God is that revelation of Himself which began at the beginning of human history, continued throughout the ages, and reached its fulness and completion in the life and work of Jesus Christ our Lord (Gal. 4:4; Heb. 1:1 ff.).

We believe that this revelation was given to men chosen and inspired by God Himself to interpret the historical events in which God made Himself known, and that this history of His revelation also belongs to the Word of God in this wider sense.

V. We believe that the whole revelation of God to men, which reached completion in Christ, the crucified and risen Savior, is faithfully recorded and preserved in the Holy Scriptures, through which alone it comes to us. We therefore accept the Scriptures as the infallible truth of God in all matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation.

We also believe that the Scriptures are now, and will be for all time to come, God's revelation of Himself. And because He continues to make Himself known through them, we believe that the Scriptures also are the Word of God, and this is the third sense in which that term is used.

VI. We believe that, as God's revelation is one and has its center in Jesus Christ, so the Scriptures also are a unity, centering in the same Lord and Christ. Therefore we believe that the whole body of the Scriptures in all its parts is the Word of God.



This should not be understood to mean that we place all parts of the Scriptures on one plane. They have their more important and their less important parts, and the measure of their importance must always be the closeness of their relation to Christ, our Lord, and to the Gospel, which is the Word of God in the most real sense (see above, No. III).

We believe that there is a difference between the Scriptures of the Old Testament and of the New Testament. The Old Testament is chiefly prophecy; the New Testament, fulfilment of this prophecy. The Scriptures of the Old Testament testify of the Christ who was to come (John 5:39; Luke 4:21; Luke 24:27; 2 Cor. 1:20). The Scriptures of the New Testament are God's testimony to the incarnate Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who by His suffering, death, and resurrection has reconciled us to God, and has committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Nevertheless, every portion of the Scriptures has its own place in God's total revelation of Himself.

We believe that the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament have been sanctioned by the Lord Jesus Himself and His apostles (Matt. 5:17 f.; John 10:35; Rom. 1:2; 1 Cor. 15:3, etc.). We also believe that the Scriptures of the New Testament were accepted as canonical by the Christian Church under the guidance of the same Spirit of Truth of whom the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "He shall guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

VII. We believe that the whole body of the Scriptures is inspired by God.

God's saving truth, which comes to us through the Scriptures, and not otherwise, is God's own revelation of Himself. The writers of the Scriptures have been His agents in its transmission. The power to receive and record it has been bestowed by Him. The act of God by which this power was conferred we call by the Scriptural name of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16).

We do not venture to define the mode or manner of this inspiration, since God's ways of using human instruments are past our finding out. But we accept the inspiration of the Scriptures as a fact of which our faith in God, through Christ, assures us, and this assurance is supported by words of Scripture in which the fact of inspiration is asserted or implied (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

The Scriptures are God's testimony to His Son, who is their center (see above No. V). They are God's Word, the means through which God leads us to faith in Christ (see above, No. III), and in our faith we see their testimony as God's own. Thus we know that they come from Him, are inspired by Him, and are God's Word.

VIII. Holding these things to be true, we believe that the Scriptures are:

1. The spring from which the saving power of God continuously flows into the lives of men;
2. The only source of truly Christian doctrine; and
3. The only rule and norm for Christian faith and life.

In addition to this declaration we ought to submit the paragraph in Dr. Knubel's sermon to which reference was made above.



It reads as follows: "What is to be said at this time also of the unity of all Lutherans, especially in America? I sincerely believe that it actually exists here (and is growing throughout the world), partly because all Lutheran bodies in America hold genuinely to the same Confessions, but chiefly because at heart we are all devoted to the pure Gospel. That unity ought to be openly acknowledged by all. It is a joy to know that a rapidly increasing number in all Lutheran bodies are of the same persuasion. It would seem, however, that at the present moment the United Lutheran Church in America is regarded by some bodies as unworthy of that recognition. The immediate reason would appear to be our approach to the Scriptures, in that we, with Luther and the Confessions, believe that the Gospel is the true approach, believe that the Gospel is the center and key of the Scriptures, believe that the Word of God is primarily the Gospel, believe that the Gospel is our chief assurance of the divine character of the Scriptures and especially their inspiration. The crucial difference, developed in recent discussions, rests in the matter of the verbal inspiration of an original text of the Scriptures (which, of course, does not exist), including every numerical, geographical, historical, or other purely secular statement. What is our responsibility in the face of these conditions? We must with our founders rejoice over the fulfilled promise we possess in our own unity, but recognize longingly greater promises not as yet possessed. We must rid ourselves of any state of mind that finds more pleasure in disagreeing with other Lutherans than in agreeing with them. 'God is not the author of confusion but of peace.' We must patiently free ourselves of faults as God's grace reveals them to us. We must be mindful of the constant threats to the pure Gospel, this treasure of Lutheranism,—threats perhaps more violent and powerful in these days than ever,—and pray for the acknowledged unity of all Lutherans in the Gospel. We must appeal to such bodies as do not recognize us, asking them if their present tendencies will not ultimately place other things before the Gospel and thus destroy the divine power and wisdom of Lutheran testimony."

If the reports of the newspapers can be relied on, the declaration of the U. L. C. A. commissioners as given above was adopted.

Of the many considerations that crowd upon a member of the Missouri Synod as he reads this material, those that appear chief to us are here submitted.

1. We fully share Dr. Knubel's sentiment that "we must rid ourselves of any state of mind that finds more pleasure in disagreeing with other Lutherans than in agreeing with them. 'God is not the author of confusion but of peace.'" Amen! we say



with sincere longing for the day when the U. L. C. A. and the Missouri Synod can establish fellowship.

2. Dr. Knubel, however, misunderstands the situation when he says: "The immediate reason" (for the critical attitude of some other Lutheran bodies toward the U. L. C. A.) "would appear to be our approach to the Scriptures, in that we, with Luther and the Confessions, believe that the Gospel is the true approach, believe that the Gospel is the center and key to the Scriptures, believe the Word of God is primarily the Gospel, believe that the Gospel is our chief assurance of the divine character of the Scriptures and especially their inspiration." It is not this approach which we criticize. That the Gospel is the center and key to the Scriptures is a statement we heartily endorse. The fact that the *Brief Statement* of the Missouri Synod in its paragraphs on Inspiration does not take this approach is not due to antagonism to it, but (so we suppose) to the feeling on the part of the authors that the truth it expresses would be uttered elsewhere in the document.

3. "The crucial difference," as Dr. Knubel correctly states, "rests in the matter of the verbal inspiration of an original text of the Scriptures." He might have added that the question at issue is whether this original text is inerrant or not. When Dr. Knubel, sharing the view of the commissioners expressed in their report, says that the text does not exist, his language is not sufficiently precise. If he had said that the original manuscripts do not exist, we should at once have assented. But that is quite different from the assertion that the original text does not exist. We hope that in the near future we can discuss this point more at length.

4. Thinking now of the report of the commissioners, we see that it contains a definite challenge for all Lutherans who stand on the old foundations when it declares that neither the Confessions of the Church nor the Scriptures themselves are in accord with the teaching that "the Scriptures are the infallible truth also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters." Is this true or not? The issue is clearly stated. Here is where the battle must be fought. The debate is not on the approach to the doctrine of inspiration but on the great question of the infallibility of the Scriptures. For the present we refer our readers to the works of our dogmaticians on this subject, to previous articles in this journal, and to Dr. Kretzmann's monograph *The Foundations Must Stand*.

5. When one reads the declaration on the Word of God and the Scriptures embodied in the report of the commissioners, one



comes upon many sentences which elicit one's hearty approval. Having perused it repeatedly, we say that we find nothing in it which would have to be called a doctrinal error. The terminology employed is somewhat different from that to which we are accustomed, but that is not a serious matter. Sensible men will not haggle over terms. The serious omission which occurs will be referred to in paragraph 7.

6. We are perplexed, we must say, by the fourth proposition of the document, which speaks of God's Word in a wider sense. If the meaning is that, when God, for instance, communicated to Noah divine truths in messages not recorded in the Scriptures, such messages were truly the Word of God, we gladly agree. It was not necessary for such messages to be reduced to writing in order to become divine Word. But the paragraph appears obscure to us. It seems that the authors speak of three things, God's messages communicated to people, divine acts in which God made Himself known, and the history of such messages and such acts. Is it the meaning of the authors that every one of these three things is given the designation "the Word of God"?

7. Our chief complaint, however, has not to do with the lack of clearness just adverted to, but with the failure of the document to confess the infallibility or inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures in every point. The commissioners reject the teaching of the complete infallibility of the Bible, as we have seen; hence they cannot confess it. They, however, do not hold that those who do accept this infallibility are guilty of taking an un-Lutheran position; their declaration does hence not reject such teaching. In other words, they regard acceptance of the teaching which has been current in the Lutheran Church, that the Bible in all respects is inerrant, as a matter on which the Church need not take a definite stand. It is here where the commissioners seriously err.

8. We do not believe that the majority of the pastors and laymen in the U. L. C. A. join the commissioners in rejecting the teaching that the Bible is inerrant. Since the Declaration is silent on this point, its acceptance by the convention in Baltimore cannot be adduced as evidence to show that the whole U. L. C. A. is now opposing the doctrine that the Bible from beginning to end is the infallible Word of God. It is our prayer that renewed study of the character of the Scriptures and the statements which they make about themselves will lead those U. L. C. A. theologians who have departed from the well-known Lutheran position to return to the rock on which the Church has won its victories, the inerrant Word of God.

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