

AN EVALUATION OF THE FACULTY DOCUMENT

"FAITHFUL TO OUR CALLING, FAITHFUL TO OUR LORD. Part I: A Witness to our Faith"

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations is grateful to the faculty of the St. Louis Seminary for the preparation of this document in which they give a corporate expression of their faith and for the insights which it gives the church into certain of their teachings. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations also rejoices with them in the expression of their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, a faith shared by all true Christians.

As the Commission on Theology and Church Relations seeks to respond to the many requests for an evaluation of this document, it will not attempt to deal exhaustively with all the questions raised by the document. Rather, it will address itself principally to two considerations: 1) Does the document reflect a correct understanding of the issues under debate in the Synod? 2) Is the document suited for use in discussion forums throughout the Synod where the issues under debate are to be studied?

This approach is suggested by the document itself. The document has been presented to the church as a "corporate expression of our faith and a discussion on the issues under debate" (p. 3; emphasis added). It is further stated that "the discussions provide us with a responsible set of statements which are suitable for use in discussion forums throughout Synod" (Ibid., p. 4; emphasis added).

The purpose of this evaluation, then, is to determine whether or not the document "Faithful to Our Calling, Faithful to Our Lord. Part I" carries out its stated purpose. It is not the intent of this evaluation to investigate the personal faith of individual faculty members. For that reason it will not concern itself with Part II of the faculty statement, nor with the "Affirmations of Faith" of Part I. Rather, it will address itself primarily to the Preamble and the nine discussions of Part I, since the faculty states that these discussions "are an illustration of how we treat the major subjects under discussion in Synod" (Ibid., p. 4).

I. Does the document reflect a correct understanding of the issues under debate in the Synod?

In the Preamble, the faculty document states that "at the heart of the discussions in our Synod is the question of whether the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the sole source of our personal faith and the center of our public teaching," (p. 3). The faculty document also refers to efforts "to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith" (p. 3) and to a "tendency to make the doctrine of inspiration or the inerrancy of the Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith" (p. 21). In addition, the faculty document speaks against "any approach to the Scriptures which focuses (emphasis added) on the need for historical factuality rather (emphasis added) than on the primary need for Christ" (p. 23).

While it is conceivable that individuals within the Synod may on occasion have given an erroneous impression to the contrary, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod as such has always held to the position that the Gospel is the sole source of our personal faith and the center of all our preaching. The Synod has never taught that the Gospel has to be supplemented with a doctrine about Scripture, or that it is more important to focus on the need for historical factuality rather than on the primary need for Christ. Moreover, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations finds no evidence for such views in the documents produced by responsible representatives of the Synod in the present controversy.

The faculty has made the assertions that these are the issues without any supporting documentation. It is the judgment of the CTCR that to represent the debate in our Synod as centering on these issues is misleading.

The Council of Presidents which initially requested that each faculty member state his position relative to the points in controversy listed the following as the issues: (1) Law and Gospel, (2) Holy Scripture, (3) the relationship between the Gospel and Holy Scripture, (4) the canonical text, (5) Old Testament prophecy, and (6) original sin. In the opinion of the CTCR, this is a correct and comprehensive assessment of the matters in controversy. It also corresponds closely with the areas of disagreement designated in the "Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" published by the President of the Synod.

In view of what has been stated, it is the opinion of the CTCR that the faculty document does not correctly represent the issues under debate in our Synod.

II. Is the faculty document suitable for use in discussion forums throughout the Synod where the issues under debate will be studied?

Two different problems present themselves in answering this question. The first concerns itself with

the misunderstanding displayed in the document concerning the issues under debate in the Synod, while the second deals with those portions of the document which address some of the issues which are under debate.

With regard to the first, the faculty document would be more useful in discussion forums if it had dealt more directly, explicitly and fully with the issues as specified by the Council of Presidents. Instead, the document has a tendency to address itself to issues which are not now, nor ever have been, in controversy within our Synod. Discussion materials which create the erroneous impression that the issues which were previously cited from pages three, twenty-one, and twenty-three of the faculty document are those under debate in our Synod will tend to confuse rather than edify the church.

The answer to the second problem must be determined by examining what the faculty document says when it does address itself to issues which are under debate, for instance, the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible. Following are quotations from the faculty document that pertain to these topics:

1. "Accordingly, the inspiration of the written Word pertains to the effective power (emphasis added) of the Scriptures to bring men and women to salvation through the Gospel. We affirm, therefore, that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God." (p. 36).
2. "The reliability or 'inerrancy' of the Scriptures cannot be determined by twentieth century standards of factuality. Nor do the Scriptures link the work of the Holy Spirit with this kind of 'inerrancy.' The purpose of the Spirit imparted by our Lord is to lead us into the whole truth about what God was doing in Jesus Christ, that we might be redeemed and He may be glorified. In disclosing that Truth God does not err, and in achieving that purpose the Spirit active in the Word does not lead us astray; to that the Spirit within us bears witness" (p. 37; emphasis added).
3. "The Gospel gives the Scriptures their normative character, not vice versa" (p. 21).

Pertaining to the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations has recognized the following statements as representing the Lutheran position:

1. "We believe, teach, and confess that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit and that God is therefore the true author of every word of Scripture. We acknowledge that there is a qualitative difference between the inspired witness of Holy Scripture in all its parts and words and the witness of every other form of human expression, making the Bible a unique book." (A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, Study Edition, p. 18)
2. "With Luther, we confess that 'God's Word cannot err' (LC, IV, 57). We therefore believe, teach, and confess that since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, they contain no errors or contradictions but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth. We hold that the opinion that Scripture contains errors is a violation of the sola scriptura principle, for it rests upon the acceptance of some norm or criterion of truth above the Scriptures. We recognize that there are apparent contradictions or discrepancies and problems which arise because of uncertainty over the original text.

We reject the following views:

- (1) . . .
- (2) That the Scriptures are inerrant only in matters pertaining directly to the Gospel message of salvation.
- (3) That the Scriptures are only functionally inerrant, that is, that the Scriptures are 'inerrant' only in the sense that they accomplish their aim of bringing the Gospel of salvation to men." (Ibid., p. 31).
3. "In asking about the relation of Gospel and Scripture and about the nature of the Bible's authority, Lutherans do not formulate their question thus: Is the Bible God's authoritative Word because it proclaims the Gospel or because it is inspired? This way of putting the question falsely suggests that we must choose between mutually exclusive alternatives. A 'both/and' is turned into an 'either/or'. Lutheran theology has always affirmed the authority of the Bible on a two-fold basis: (1) That as Gospel the Sacred Scriptures are the power of God unto salvation through which the Holy Spirit begets the faith that grasps Christ and sets men free from sin and death; (2) That as God's inspired Word the Sacred Scriptures regulate the faith that is believed, taught, and confessed in the church." Gospel and Scripture, pp. 20 - 21.

The effect of the faculty document's concept of biblical authority, inspiration and inerrancy is reflected in its treatment of the Biblical accounts of creation (pp. 12-14), the fall (pp. 15-17) and miracles (pp. 18-20).

It is for these reasons that we believe that the document is useful only to the extent that it points up the fact that there are substantive differences within our Synod on important doctrinal issues. If the purpose of the discussion forums being held throughout Synod is to promote unity through a truly Lutheran settlement of the issues in debate, then, in light of the foregoing statements, we believe that unless its serious inadequacies are pointed out, this document is not suitable for use in these forums.

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Adopted March 28, 1973 by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (Krentz and Mayer abstaining).