

"A Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies"

1. Does the commission suggest that there are some plain teachings of God's Word for which we need not contend because erroneous opinions regarding them would not be divisive of church fellowship?

No, the commission does not suggest this at all. On the contrary, it states clearly that "the church will never be indifferent to or condone departures from the truth of God's Word" (p. 7). For this reason the commission also reminds the church that our fathers "considered it their duty 'on the basis of God's Word, carefully and accurately to explain and decide the differences that had arisen with reference to all articles in controversy, to expose and reject false doctrine, and clearly to confess the divine truth.'" (P. 6)

2. Does the commission's document regard some Biblical teachings as unimportant because they do not treat of salvation in Christ or are not related to the Gospel as such?

No, the commission's document nowhere proposes such a classification of doctrines. Rather it tries to make clear that the Gospel has a bearing on all Biblical teachings. Furthermore, the document states that "it is clear that the writers of the Lutheran Confessions were totally committed to the Scriptures. They themselves were not indifferent to any departure from God's Word, nor did they approve of such indifference in others." (P. 6)

3. Does the commission exaggerate the importance of the Law-Gospel dialectic as the means for determining what is true or not true in Scripture?

The commission does not suggest that the Law-Gospel dialectic is the means for determining what is true or not true in Scripture. Everything that Scripture teaches is true. The emphasis on the distinction between Law and Gospel is intended to exalt the specifically Christian use of the Scripture in the proclamation of the divine Word. One may lecture on Biblical history, cite texts in the process, and thus be speaking the "truth." A secular historian may speak the "truth" of the Scripture in this way. It is quite another matter, however, to use a Biblical text as a means of confronting the secure sinner with the Law that exposes his guilt and the judgment of wrath that rests upon him, or the despairing sinner with "the truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:5, 14), that is, the Word of comfort, which declares him freely forgiven for Christ's sake and a child and heir of the heavenly Father. To cling to that Word of Promise, and thus to rest in God alone, is Christian faith. To believe the lecture on Biblical history to be "true" in the sense that things really happened as described in Scripture is not yet faith in the Biblical or Lutheran sense. The Christian "faith" appropriates the true meaning of the Scripture and is a work of the Spirit of God through the external Word (cf. L. C. IV, 49; S. A.

III, viii, iii). The other "faith" is a historical assent which by itself falls short of the heart of the Scripture. Therefore we declare, in full agreement with the Lutheran Confessions, "that the right understanding of the Gospel (including the proper distinction of Law and Gospel as grounded in the article on Justification) is the key that finally unlocks the *meaning* of sacred Scripture (Apology IV, 2-5, German; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 1)." (P. 8)

4. The commission appeals to the Gospel as the criterion by which to distinguish necessary controversy from needless contentions. Does the commission thereby set up another norm in opposition to Scripture itself?

No, "We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged . . ." (Formula of Concord, Epitome, The Comprehensive Summary, etc., 1). It is this sole norm of Holy Scripture which leads us, in agreement with the Lutheran Confessions, to recognize and acknowledge the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the criterion by which to distinguish necessary controversy from needless contentions (Gal. 1:8; see also F. C., *ibid.*). For the Gospel is not one doctrine among many in Scripture but is the sum and substance of the whole Scripture (Apology IV, 87, German). Even the Law (without which the Gospel would be meaningless) cannot be rightly or fully comprehended apart from the Gospel (F. C. Epitome V, 5-8).

5. What does the commission mean by "technical questions involved in interpretation"? (P. 8-9)

There are various kinds of technical questions that may arise in the interpretation of a passage of Scripture. There are, for instance, questions of grammar, such as whether the verb "search" in John 5:39 is indicative or imperative; whether the genitive in "righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17) is subjective, objective, qualitative, or of still another sort; whether "by faith" (Rom. 1:17) is adjectival or adverbial. There are also questions of a lexical nature, such as whether "Law" in Rom. 3:31 refers to the Law in the sense of God's holy demands or in the sense of God's Old Testament Word; whether "patience" (Greek: *hypomone*) as used by Paul refers to the virtue of patience in the Stoic sense of endurance, or to the attitude of hope and expectation characteristic of the Old Testament believer (cp. Ps. 71:5). Further, there are questions of a literary kind, such as at what point in John 3:10 ff. the words of Jesus end and the testimony of the evangelist begins. These are just a few of the kinds of "technical questions involved in interpretation" of which the commission declares that if they "neither aid nor impair the right understanding of the Gospel (in its full sense) [they] ought not become a matter of controversy in the church." (P. 9)

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

6. Does the document give unqualified approval to the "historical-critical" method?

No, the document has offered guidelines for the church's proper use of the historical-critical method. (Part II, A, "Our Presuppositions," and C, "Necessary Controls") (Pp. 8 f. and 9 f.)

7. Does the document leave room for a denial of Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament?

No, as the document itself indicates, the commission is fully committed to the Scriptures and the Lutheran

Confessions. As is well known, the Lutheran Confessions strongly affirm Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament (cf., e. g., Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, V, 23).

8. Does the commission's document base the authority of Scripture on extra-Biblical data?

No. Extra-Biblical data are valuable only as aids to the understanding of Holy Scripture. The authority of Scripture is derived from its nature as the Word of God.

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