

An Opinion of the CTCR on the Interpretation of "A Review of the Question 'What Is a Doctrine?'"

The Board of Control of a synodical institution has requested the CTCR for a theological opinion on a matter which is officially before the board. In offering the following response, the CTCR wishes to emphasize that it is giving a theological opinion in response to a theological question; it is not acting as a judicial body to pass judgment on the case before the Board of Control. We understand the basic question of the Board of Control to be: Does the document entitled "A Review of the Question 'What Is a Doctrine?'" maintain that matters pertaining to the authorship of Biblical books and the historicity of certain Biblical accounts are outside the scope of "doctrine," so that it is improper to regard certain opinions on such matters as "false doctrine"? The following considerations are involved in answering this question.

1. The document recognizes that the term "doctrine" is used in various senses in the church. It may be used to refer to the organic whole of Christian teaching centering in Jesus Christ, or to a part of the Biblical teaching on Christian faith and life, or even to the activity of teaching. The term "false doctrine" may legitimately reflect any of these senses of "doctrine."
2. In any of these senses, the term "doctrine" is normally used to refer to basic Biblical teaching on Christian faith and life and not to describe specific details of the Biblical teaching. For example, the Biblical teachings that Nimrod was a hunter, that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, or that the temple was located in Jerusalem are not usually considered "doctrines" in themselves.
3. The document states that "Teachings contrary to or improperly drawn from Holy Scripture must be rejected" (III 4) Whenever Biblical teachings of any kind (whether we call the~ "doctrines" or not) are denied or contradicted, "doctrine" is affected. Whatever the specific subject may be with which they deal, false teachings undermine the authority of Holy Scripture. The authority of Holy Scripture is "a" doctrine, that is, "a part of the whole Biblical teaching on Christian faith and life" III, 2. Moreover, Holy Scripture is also the church's only source for; "the" doctrine, that is, the organic whole of Christian teaching centering in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the denial or contradiction of any teaching of Scripture involves doctrine. The words of Dr. C. F. W. Walther quoted in the document need to be remembered:

If, in a doctrinal controversy, the dispute is about doctrines which do not belong to the articles of faith, everything depends for us on whether those who contradict show that they do so because they do not want to submit to the Word of God, and therefore on whether while appearing to let the basic doctrines of the Word of God stand' they nevertheless overthrow the very foundation upon which all these doctrines rest: the Word of God. (Quoted in note 25 from *Der Lutheraner*, XXVII [May 1, 1871], 131)

4. Just as we do not usually refer to all Biblical teachings as "doctrines," so also we do not ordinarily label Jesus' statements about authorship or the historicity of certain events as "doctrines." However, the denial or contradiction of the intended meaning of such statements affects both the authority of Scripture and the person of Christ and is therefore a doctrinal matter. The CTCR has written:

Differences of opinion exist within The Lutheran Church -Missouri Synod on the import of the words of Christ and other statements of Holy Scripture concerning the human authorship of certain Old Testament books. Much of the concern in this issue is not intrinsically isagogical, but is rather related to the *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus* principles of Lutheranism. Some maintain that Christ and the Biblical authors clearly teach that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, Isaiah and Daniel wrote the entire books that bear their names, and David wrote Psalm 110, while others question these conclusions. This difference of opinion raises a Christological question: Can one question the designations of authorship employed by Jesus without thereby calling into question His sinless manhood, omniscience, and even His deity? It also raises a question with regard to the authority of Scripture: Can one challenge any statement of Holy Scripture on the authorship of Biblical books

without thereby challenging the authority and truthfulness of the Scriptures? (Quoted from p.3 of the CTCR document entitled *The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship*.)

5. The document states that "A mistaken exegesis of a passage or section of Scripture does not constitute false doctrine, provided it does not conflict with any part of the Christian doctrine" (III, 5). Here the words "mistaken exegesis" have reference to interpretations which are not in conflict with other statements of Scripture but are "mistaken" for other reasons. This statement does not say that mistaken exegesis can never involve false doctrine. On the contrary, any exegesis which conflicts with "any part of the Christian doctrine," including the authority of Scripture, is false doctrine.
6. When the document states that "Isagogical judgments, that is, statements dealing with the authorship and background of Biblical books, are not in themselves 'doctrine' or 'doctrines' but aids to the better understanding of Scripture" (III, 6, italics added), it does not imply that the isagogical information provided by the Scriptures is unrelated to doctrine. Such information cannot be contradicted without calling the authority of Scripture into question. Moreover, while "incorrect isagogical judgments are not in themselves false doctrines" (italics added), they are false doctrine if they set aside or call into question what the Scriptures teach. Such isagogical judgments undermine Biblical authority and thereby "endanger not only individual Christian doctrines but the whole Christian doctrine." (III, 6)
7. In our previously published statements, we have noted the following two examples of such incorrect isagogical judgments: (1) that Moses did not write of Jesus in "his writings" (John 5:39-47), and (2) that "David inspired by the Spirit" did not call Jesus "Lord" (Matt. 22:43; Ps.110:1). With regard to the former, the commission has explicitly stated that Jesus in John 5:39-47 attributes authorship to Moses, but without explicitly stating the extent of that authorship (cf. *A Response to Questions on "The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship,"* questions 6 and 9). Concerning the latter, the commission has stated that "David is named by Jesus as the author of Ps. 110" in Matt. 22:43, and has noted that in that passage Jesus "argues from the Davidic authorship of the Psalm." (Cf. *The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship*)
8. On the subject of Biblical authorship, the commission has stated:

The Synod has affirmed that we are to accept whatever the Bible says about itself, including its human authorship, but has also recognized that isagogical matters not conclusively answered by the scriptures are not matters of doctrine and should, therefore not be treated as factors affecting the Christian fellowship. (*An Evaluation of "A Call to Openness and Trust"*, p. 6, point 4 b)

The commission has also discussed the question of authorship in its document *The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship* and in *A Response to Questions on "The Witness of Jesus and Old Testament Authorship."*

9. Holy Scripture is the sole standard for determining what is "doctrine" and whether "doctrine" is true or false. The Lutheran Confessions, because they are "drawn from the Word of God" (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 10) are a secondary norm for the faith and life of the church. But the confessions do not claim to deal with all doctrinal questions. Treatment or nontreatment in the confessions is therefore not a criterion for determining whether a question is doctrinal. Accordingly, questions not treated in the confessions but dealt with in the Scriptures may well be "doctrinal" questions.

Conclusion

The Commission on Theology and Church Relations holds that the document entitled "A Review of the Question 'What Is a Doctrine?'" does not maintain that matters pertaining to the authorship of Biblical books and the historicity of certain Biblical accounts are outside the scope of "doctrine." Teachings and judgments on such matters ordinarily are not considered "doctrine" or "doctrines" in themselves. However, any teaching or judgment *which* denies or contradicts what the Scriptures teach must be considered "false doctrine." For such a denial or contradiction is in conflict with the doctrine of the authority of Holy Scripture,

the only infallible source and norm of all doctrine. Moreover, the doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ is also involved in the consideration of any of His statements, including those which deal with isagogical or historical matters. In short, the commission holds that it is a doctrinal matter to contradict or deny whatever the Bible teaches on any subject.

Adopted by the CTCR on May 24, 1971