

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH - MISSOURI SYNOD

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July 17, 1964

To all Pastors, Teachers, and Congregations
of The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod

My Fellow Christians:

Herewith you receive two items in one document from the busy hands
of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations.

The first item prepared by the commission is a study document on the
issues presented in Memorials 338, 339, 340, and 331 to the Cleveland
convention in 1962. This is a progress report and is therefore not the
final word.

Certain assignments have been made to special committees whose reports
will come to the commission in due time.

Your special attention is directed to two very important portions of this
report:

1. The considerations basic in the use of Bible passages in establishing
a doctrine.
2. The conclusions being submitted by the commission.

The commission welcomes any reactions to this report.

The second item is the answer to the question "What is a doctrine?" It is
an official report and reaffirms the position previously taken by the Synod.
The commission regards this answer adequate.

Part three of the second item is an appendix and suggests points for study.
Please make a careful study of the points suggested. Circuit conferences
for pastors and teachers as well as study groups in congregations will find
this study very stimulating.

God bless you!

In Jesus' name,

Oliver R. Harms

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Report
of the
**Commission on Theology and
Church Relations**

1964

**Progress Report on
Memorials 338, 339, 340, and 331**

**Report on
"What Is a Doctrine?"**

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

**CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS**

Progress Report on Memorials 338, 339, 340 and 331

*Proceedings of the Forty-fifth Regular Convention
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*

Cleveland, Ohio, June 20—29, 1962, pp. 104, 105

Summary of the Issues Presented in these Memorials

I. MEMORIALS 338, 339, 340

These memorials deal with a variety of issues. They have a common denominator, however, in the question: Do modern "historical-critical" theories and conclusions affect "the doctrine of Scripture—the establishment of the canon and of the nature, inspiration, inerrancy, proper interpretation, and clarity of Scripture?" Are these theories and conclusions compatible with express statements of Scripture?

While each of these memorials mentions several aspects of this issue, each also has a focus in a particular concern and asks the question:

Do the "historical-critical" theories and conclusions affect:

- a. The authority of Scripture as the *source and norm of doctrine?* (338)
- b. The *canonicity* of the books of Scripture? (339)
- c. The question of the *authorship* of certain Old Testament books? (340)

II. MEMORIAL 331

A. Like 338, 339, 340, this memorial is concerned with the inspiration, authority, authenticity and inerrancy of Scripture and more specifically with the problem of a conflict between "historical-critical" theories and the statements of Scripture:

1. In the interpretation of historical and "zoological or biological" data in the Old Testament (Propositions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11);

2. In establishing the authorship of the Pentateuch and the Book of Isaiah (Propositions 12, 13);

3. In determining the question whether Moses knew and believed "that there is only one God who is to be worshiped by all men" (Proposition 10).

B. In addition, this memorial is concerned with the doctrine of:

1. Revelation and inspiration (Propositions 7, 6, 9);

2. The soul and the physical resurrection of the flesh (Propositions 14, 15).

Synodical Action on these Memorials

I. In answer to all four memorials Synod passed the following resolutions (Resolution 3-16, Section A):

Resolved, That we reaffirm our belief in the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture, the inerrancy of Scripture, and that Scripture is in all its words and parts the very Word of God, as taught in the Scripture itself (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21) and in the Lutheran Confessions; and be it further

Resolved, That we reaffirm the Scripturally implicit hermeneutical principles that the Bible does not contradict itself and that the clear passages of Scripture must interpret the less clear; and be it finally

Resolved, That we confess unequivocally that all true theological statements and propositions must be in accord with the above stated Biblical principles.

II. In addition Synod acted as follows with respect to:

A. 1. Memorial 331, Questions 1—13 (Resolution 3-16, Section B):

Memorial 331 presents for doctrinal judgment a number of propositions related to the nature of the Word of God and to the inspiration, inerrancy, interpretation, and clarity of Scripture. As they stand without context, these propositions do not express the consensus of our church and should not be taught as truths. However, the effective teaching of theology, especially in the training of ministers of the Word, may well require the frank examination, the critical evaluation, and the firm refutation of some of the views reflected in these propositions. Therefore be it

Resolved, That the questions raised in Memorial 331 be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations, to pastoral conferences, and to congregations for study, and be it further

Resolved, That the commission be directed to prepare a progress report within two years, and if necessary to develop a statement on the doctrine of Scripture, with consideration of its relation to the issues raised in Memorial 331; and be it finally

Resolved, That this progress report be distributed to the church for study and be presented to the next synodical convention for approval.

2. Memorial 331, Questions 14 and 15 (Resolution 3-18):

Resolved, That we remind all pastors, teachers, professors, and writers of the church in their presentation of these doctrines to emphasize the sure truth and comfort as clearly stated in Scripture and in the Lutheran Confessions (e. g., John 11:21-26; Luke 23:43, 46; 1 Cor. 15; Matt. 10:28; Heb. 12:23; Phil. 1:23; Luke 20:37, 38; Rom. 14:7, 8; Luther's explanation of the First and Third Articles of the Apostles' Creed; Luther's explanation of the Seventh Petition; Athanasian Creed, par. 30).

B. Memorials 338, 339, 340 (Resolution 3-16, Section C):

WHEREAS, Memorials 338, 339, and 340 present questions involving historical problems, regarding the canonicity and authorship of sections of the Holy Scripture which are related to the doctrine of Scripture; therefore be it

Resolved, That the questions raised in these memorials be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for inclusion in the study of the doctrine of Scripture indicated in Section B above.

Report of the Commission

I. GENERAL REMARKS

A. The Commission has issued *A Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy* and therein has sought to lay down basic principles within the framework and limits of which the answers requested by these four memorials should be sought.

The doctrine of Scripture, as presented in this report of the Commission, is

receiving further study, particularly in the light of the thoughtful criticisms and suggestions which have come from many brethren, conferences, and sister synods. The Commission is planning a revision of the report.

B. The Commission also is in agreement with the three resolves of Resolution 3-16, Section A (quoted above), as establishing the basic axioms in answering the specific question of these four memorials.

C. In its resolution (3-16) Synod also qualified its judgment that the 15 propositions of Memorial 331 "should not be taught as truths" by the clause "*as they stand without context.*" To establish their "context" is very important and may affect the judgment on the validity of some of these propositions.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON EACH OF THE FOUR MEMORIALS

A. Memorial 331

We quote from Memorial 331, *Reports and Memorials, Forty-fifth Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Cleveland, Ohio, June 20—30, 1962*, pp. 161—163:

Resolved, That we earnestly petition Synod's Cleveland convention to declare, before the close of its session, whether its pastors, teachers, and professors will be permitted to teach the following "propositions":

1. The six days of creation described in Genesis and Exodus were not such normal periods of light and darkness as we call ordinary or calendar days.

2. It is dangerous to insist that the Genesis account of creation and the fall is literal, factual history, for this is a stratagem the Evil One sometimes employs to lead us away from the real truth.

3. The Scriptural statement that more than 600,000 male Israelites left Egypt in the Exodus is an exaggeration, a "beefed-up" account, which is not to be accepted as an actual, statistical figure.

4. The Book of Daniel contains historical inaccuracies.

5. The author of the Book of Judges selected traditional stories about Israel's heroes and embellished them with exaggeration, which was common in that day.

6. It is a mistake to say that the Bible is a book unmarred by human limitations and different from every other book.

7. The Scriptures do not speak of themselves as a revelation.

8. Since the Bible was written by authors who wrote "from where they were as people of their day," many facts they teach us are unacceptable because of the authors' limited knowledge.

9. As the Bible uses the word "truth," it does not mean factual precision.

10. Moses may have been less than a monotheist, that is, may not have known and believed that there is only one God who is to be worshipped by all men.

11. The zoological or biological information in Leviticus is not scientifically accurate.

12. The first five books of the Bible, with the possible exception of Deuteronomy 32—34, were not written by Moses but by a number of authors and editors.

13. The Book of Isaiah was written by two or more authors.

14. The Bible does not teach that man has an immortal soul, which Christ died to save, and that, when a Christian dies, his soul goes to a blessed life with God.

15. The Bible does not teach a physical resurrection of our flesh.

In addressing itself to the specific propositions of Memorial 331, the Commission presents the following report:

Propositions 1—5, 8, 9, and 11 deal with the interpretation of historical and "zoological or biological" data in the Old Testament. In addition to the basic principles given in the report on Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy as guidelines for seeking answers to these questions, the Commission has appointed a special committee which is making a thorough study of the subject of inerrancy. The Commission looks to this study to deal with the above-noted propositions.

In regard to Propositions 1 and 2 the Commission has studied and discussed several essays and documents on this subject by Old Testament scholars of our church. A special committee of the Commission is preparing a statement on creation for presentation to the Commission at one of its next meetings.

In addition, studies of the above subject are in progress by the faculties of the two theological seminaries and also by the College of Presidents.

Propositions 12 and 13 deal with the authorship of the Pentateuch and Isaiah. The study of inerrancy alluded to above will be basic in the study of these propositions.

Proposition 10 deals with the monotheism of Moses. This subject touches one aspect of a larger problem, namely, that of "cumulative revelation." This problem receives attention in *A Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy*, pp. 4, 5, 12.

Propositions 6, 7, and 9 deal with revelation and inspiration. Basic principles for the study of these issues have been enunciated in the report of the Commission, *Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy*.

Propositions 14 and 15 seek an answer to the questions raised regarding the soul and the physical resurrection of the flesh. A special committee is engaged in the study of these subjects and has presented its first report to the Commission.

The results of these studies will be transmitted to the Synod as soon as possible.

B. Memorial 338

This memorial deals with an aspect of the question: What is a doctrine? Does the recognition "that there may be legitimate differences of opinion in purely exegetical matters" give anyone the right to deny that *any* particular passage is properly used as a basis for a specific doctrine? Could one ultimately rule out every passage adduced in support of a specific doctrine on the ground that a "purely exegetical question" is involved? The memorial requests "the Synod to authorize the formulation of a statement setting forth what Scripture states and presupposes concerning its own clarity (epistemology) and concerning its own interpretation (hermeneutics)." (*Reports and Memorials, Forty-fifth Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Cleveland, Ohio, June 20—30, 1962, p. 167*)

1. The Commission calls attention to the following considerations basic in the use of Bible passages in establishing a doctrine:

a. The Scriptures are the authoritative source and the only norm in establishing a doctrine. (Solid Declaration, Summary Formulation, 3: "We pledge our-

selves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." *Book of Concord*, Tappert ed., pp. 503, 504)

- b. What a specific passage teaches must be established from its meaning and intent in its immediate as well as in the larger context (*analogia Scripturae*).
 - c. Every article of faith is set forth in one or more clear passages of Scripture (*sedes doctrinae*).
 - d. Only such passages should be adduced as the basis of a doctrine as in their intent and context demonstrably teach and support the particular doctrine.
 - e. No doctrine should be repudiated or ignored if it has Scriptural support.
2. The Commission submits the following conclusions:
- a. The Scripture, as the only source and norm of doctrine, is clear; therefore the statement in the memorial, "There must be clear passages if there is doctrine," is correct.
 - b. It is an abuse of Scripture to quote a passage in support of a doctrine when the passage does not demonstrably deal with or bear on the doctrine under consideration.
 - c. Since the Confessions themselves direct men to the entire Scripture as the source and norm of doctrine, it is improper to limit our submission to Scripture to an acceptance of only the specific formulations of the Book of Concord.
 - d. The claim that one may subscribe to a doctrine without accepting the Biblical basis of the doctrine is untenable because it disregards Scripture as the sole source of doctrine.
 - e. The expression: "This is a purely exegetical question" may be used only when differing interpretations of a passage are possible which are not in conflict with the teaching of other passages of Scripture.
 - f. The statement: "Synod has no official exegesis" may not be used to imply that Scripture may be interpreted arbitrarily or that any doctrine, based on clear passages, may be rejected. Cf. Resolution 12, *Proceedings of the Forty-first Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 21—30, 1950, pp. 657, 658:

WHEREAS, The question of "official" interpretation, or exegesis, has been raised among us; be it

Resolved, That Synod recognizes that there may be legitimate differences of opinion in purely exegetical matters (cf. Paragraph 48 of *Brief Statement*), but that this liberty does not extend farther * and that no interpretation may be held which is contrary to the analogy of faith; and be it further

Resolved, That all members of Synod should guard against an abuse of this liberty, which would cause confusion and disturbance in Synod.

* "The Committee explained officially, upon being questioned, that 'farther' means 'purely exegetical matters, such as grammar, meaning of words, etc.'" (Daily Minutes.) (Cf. also the Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations on "What Is a Doctrine?" — second part of this 1964 report.)

C. Memorial 339

This memorial claims that the question of the authenticity of New Testament books and the question of their inspiration are inextricably connected and may not be divorced, as according to the memorial they must be if the results of modern historical-critical study are accepted.

The Commission at this time calls attention to the Synodical Conference Statement on Scripture (cf. *Reports and Memorials, Forty-fourth Regular Convention, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, San Francisco, California, June 17—27, 1959*, pp. 483—486, especially p. 485, second full paragraph:

Scripture being the Word of God, it carries its own authority in itself and does not receive it by the approbation of the church. The Canon, that is, that collection of books which is the authority for the church, is not the creation of the church. Rather, the Canon has, by a quiet historical process which took place in the worship life of the church, imposed itself upon the church by virtue of its own divine authority.

The Commission has requested a committee to explore further the issues to which this memorial calls attention and to present its findings to the Commission.

D. Memorial 340

This memorial deals with the question of the authorship of certain Old Testament books in the light of certain New Testament statements regarding them.

These are the same questions raised by Propositions 12 and 13 of Memorial 331 and are being studied in that connection.

Report on "What Is a Doctrine?"

Preface

The forty-fifth regular convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (Cleveland, Ohio, June 20—29, 1962) passed the following resolution:

WHEREAS, Memorial 331 points up the importance of the question: What is a doctrine? and particularly the relationship of doctrine and practice, or application of doctrine; therefore be it

Resolved, That this memorial and the supporting brief be referred to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations for serious study, consideration, and report; and be it further

Resolved, That the results of this study be sent to all pastors and teachers at least one year before the next convention so that conferences can study it before it is acted on by the convention. (*Proceedings*, p. 108)

The Commission acted on the above resolution and found the definitions of doctrine adopted or authorized by the Synod adequate, in harmony with the Scriptures and the Confessions. Pursuant to the above resolution the Commission is submitting this report to the pastors and teachers. It includes the statements adopted or authorized by the Synod and pertinent statements from the Confessions. These statements of the Confessions are simple, they view doctrine as a whole, and they preclude false distinctions between doctrine and application of doctrine.

I. Synodical Statements

A

The one adopted by the Saginaw convention, 1944:

A Scriptural doctrine is a truth contained in, expressed by, or properly drawn from Scripture. (*Proceedings*, p. 250)

B

The other, prepared by the faculties of the two seminaries and accepted by the Committee on Doctrinal Unity in response to instructions from the Synod, Houston convention, 1953 (*Proceedings*, p. 539). The text of the entire statement, combining the definition together with the comment, as published in the *Lutheran Witness* of May 8, 1956 (p. 178), follows:

A doctrine is an article of faith which the church, in obedience to her Lord, and in response to her specific needs, derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching.

Comment on the Definition

I. *A doctrine*. In the Lutheran Church the term "a doctrine" is used to designate the church's formulation of a part of the Scriptural revelation of the will of God.

II. *Is an article of faith*. Every doctrine must be organically related to the intention of the holy and gracious God for the faith and life of man as revealed in His Word.

III. *Which the church, in obedience to her Lord.* Every claim of God upon men is to be received by the church in the full obedience of faith.

IV. *And in response to her specific needs.* The formulation of such doctrines is conditioned by the historical situation in which the church finds itself.

V. *Derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine.* Such formulations are based either on express statements of Scripture, or on direct implications of Scripture statements, or on a synthesis of a number of related statements of Scripture. The procedure in each case must be in accordance with the basic law of interpretation that Scripture is its own interpreter and as divine revelation claims total submission from man.

VI. *And sets forth in a form adapted to teaching.* The purpose of these formulations is that of communication, whether it be for preaching, teaching, refuting error, or defending the truth. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

II. Lutheran Confessions

The following statements are found in the Lutheran Confessions, to which all our pastors, teachers, and laymen subscribe (cited from *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore Tappert):

A

Formula of Concord, Epitome, Comprehensive Summary, Rule, and Norm (*Book of Concord*, pp. 464, 465; cf. *Concordia Triglossa*, pp. 777, 779):

1. (1) 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 {*Lehren; dogmata*} and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed."

(2) Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times.

.....

3. (4) With reference to the schism in matters of faith which has occurred in our times, we regard, as the unanimous consensus and exposition of our Christian faith, particularly against the false worship, idolatry, and superstition of the papacy and against other sects, and as the symbol of our time, the first and unaltered Augsburg Confession, which was delivered to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg during the great Diet in the year 1530, together with the Apology thereof and the Articles drafted at Smalcald in the year 1537, which the leading theologians approved by their subscription at that time.

(5) Since these matters also concern the laity and the salvation of their souls, we subscribe Dr. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms as both of them are contained in his printed works. They are "the layman's Bible" and contain everything which Holy Scripture discusses at greater length and which a Christian must know for his salvation.

.....

(7) In this way the distinction between the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines [*L. dogmata*] should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.

B

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Summary Formulation, Basis, Rule, and Norm (*Book of Concord*, pp. 503—506; cf. *Concordia Triglossa*, pp. 851—855):

1. (3) We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated.

.....

3. (5) . . . This doctrine, *drawn from* [italics ours] and conformed to the Word of God, is summarized in the articles and chapters of the Augsburg Confession against the aberrations of the papacy and of other sects. We therefore declare our adherence to the first, unaltered Augsburg Confession (in the form in which it was set down in writing in the year 1530 and submitted to Emperor Charles V at Augsburg by a number of Christian electors, princes, and estates of the Roman Empire as the common confession of the reformed churches) as our symbol in this epoch, not because this confession was prepared by our theologians but because it is taken from the Word of God and solidly and well grounded therein.

.....

(10) . . . Our intention was only to have a single, universally accepted, certain, and common form of doctrine which all our Evangelical churches subscribe and from which and according to which, because it is *drawn from* [italics ours] the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated.

(11) The reason why we have embodied the writings above listed—the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalcald Articles, and Luther's Large and Small Catechisms—in the cited summary of our Christian doctrine is that they have always and everywhere been accepted as the common and universally accepted belief of our churches, that the chief and most illustrious theologians of that time subscribed them, and that all Evangelical churches and schools receive them. (12) We have included these confessions also because all were prepared and published before the dissensions arose among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession. They are therefore regarded as impartial, none of the parties in the various controversies can or should reject them, nor can anyone who sincerely adheres to the Augsburg Confession object to these documents but will gladly admit and accept them as witnesses to the truth.

(13) No one can blame us if we derive our expositions and decisions in the controverted articles from these writings, for just as we base our posi-

tion on the Word of God as the eternal truth, so we introduce and cite these writings as a witness to the truth and as exhibiting the unanimous and correct understanding of our predecessors who remained steadfastly in the pure doctrine.

C

Augsburg Confession (*Book of Concord*, p. 32; cf. *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 47)

The relationship between doctrine and its practical application is beautifully expressed in Article VII of the Augsburg Confession:

(2) For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. (3) It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.

III. Appendix — Suggestions for Further Study

Individual pastors and teachers, as well as smaller or larger conferences, may wish to pursue this subject further. They are encouraged to study the complete statements in the Formula of Concord (Epitome and Solid Declaration), Comprehensive Summary, Rule, and Norm, and The Summary Formulation, Basis, Rule, and Norm, and compare them with the Scriptures in accordance with the procedures outlined. In addition the following suggestions for further study are offered:

A

Concordance and Lexical Studies

Study the following (and related) terms in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Symbols: doctrine as such, a doctrine, dogma, faith, confession (Greek: *didaskalia*, *didache*, *dogma*, *pistis*, *exhomologesis*).

B

Study Questions

1. Is there only one possible definition of doctrine? Evaluate the definitions above under "I. Synodical Statements." Formulate a definition of your own.
2. What is the distinction between "the doctrine," "the faith," and "doctrines" (*dogmata*)? What is the relationship?
3. Is the concept of doctrine dynamic? static? both? (Compare the German and Latin texts of the Augsburg Confession, Article VII)
4. What is the difference between *fides qua* and *fides quae*? How are they related? How is this matter treated in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Symbols?
5. What is the difference between articles of faith, doctrine, and open questions?
6. What distinction has been made between fundamental and nonfundamental doctrines? Is this distinction in the Symbols?
7. What is meant by "sound principles of interpretation"?
8. What is the relationship of exegesis to doctrine?

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