

# TABLE TALK

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...these words... shall be upon your heart; you shall teach them... and talk of them... Deut. 6:6,7



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## Reformation <math>\diamond</math> Reform or Re-form

On this, the 500th anniversary year of the Protestant Reformation, it is well to think some on what is, or might be, meant by the word reformation. It might be expressed in this way, does reformation mean to reform or to re-form. Webster shares, among others, the following definitions of reform. "To make better by removing faults and defects; correct," and, "to make better by putting a stop to abuses or malpractices, or by introducing better procedures, etc."

It is interesting to turn to 2 Kings chapters 22 and 23. Here we find recorded what we call the reform of King Josiah. In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah sent his secretary to the high priest to have him get money that had been collected from the

people and brought to the temple so the workers who were repairing the temple could be paid. When the secretary got to the temple, the high priest Hilkiah shared with him, that in midst of the repairs being made, workers  
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### Announcing - The LMS 2017 Annual Conference/Convention

Christ Lutheran Church  
Chetek, Wisconsin  
June 10, 11

The Ministerial will meet June 9 at 3:00 p.m.

*The Reformation - 500 Years Later*

had found a copy of the 'Book of the Law.'

If we go to Deuteronomy 31, and beginning with verse 26, we find something interesting in connection with this 'Book of the Law,' *"Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die! Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them. For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made."*

Moses had instructed the Levites that the Book of the Law was to be placed next to the Ark of the Covenant. I understand that each king was also to have his own copy of the Law. However the Law had, over time, been unused and by the time of Josiah, forgotten. We are reminded of how, way back in the days of Joshua, the people had served the Lord throughout his lifetime as well as of *"the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel."* But then we no more read of these things than we turn to the book of Judges and find this, *"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew*

*up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel."* Judges 2:7,10). So it shouldn't surprise us that the forgetfulness and ignorance of the Law was still present in the days of Josiah.

The two understandings of reformation or reforming come into play in all of this. Way back some 900 years, at the time of the chosen people taking over the land of Canaan as their homeland, God had instructed them that they should *"Break down [the altars of the people of the land] smash their sacred stones, cut down their Ashram poles and burn their idols in the fire"* (Deut. 7:5) The people entered into the land and did as God had commanded. But, as we know something of the history of the children of Israel... we know also this sad fact... that the people themselves... but also in following the direction of their leaders... brought idolatrous practices into their worship life. It was a gradual process... but it happened. And that process is one form of reform. We might call it re-form. It was a *re-forming* of their religious practices.

They, from their point of view, worked to make better, by introducing better practices more in keeping with what their neighboring nations were about, and in what would be easier and better liked by the people. The end result is, as Arno Wolfgramm in the People's Bible, 1,2, Kings, has it: *"What one generation burned in the fire the next generation tolerated. What one generation tolerated, the next generation worshiped. Slowly and quietly, the people had turned their backs on the Lord"* (p. 299).

But now, in the case of Josiah, having been made aware of the 'Book of the Law,' what does he

do? He does not simply push it aside. He acts! He calls together the leaders of the people and all the people. He has the book read. He then announces what he (they) are going to do. "We are going to stop doing what we are doing, and we are going to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all our hearts and souls and in this way we will confirm the words of the covenant found in 'The Book'." And "all the people pledged themselves to the covenant" (2 Kings 23:3).

Here we have the other understanding of reformation or reform. "To make better by removing faults and defects; to correct." In other words, to get back to what things were in the beginning. He removed all manner of idolatrous items from the temple and purified his kingdom of Canaanite practices. Temple vessels made for Baal, Asherah and the host of heaven were removed, idolatrous priests were deposed, the Asherah itself was taken from the temple and burned, and much more besides. Then he saw to it that, with regard to the religion of his kingdom, what was done, what was practiced, was in line with the requirements of that book.

The wrong kind of reform... changing what is (doctrines and/or practices)... into something more palatable... more acceptable... more interesting... is something the Bible tells us to be on guard against. One of the best examples of this is what we find Jesus dealing with in the area of divorce (Matthew 19; Mark 10). For this we have to go all the way back to the days of Moses... where the issue of divorce had been; softened, made 'more acceptable' by Moses.

By the time of our Lord the

people were much divided with regard to this issue. Not so few people followed the school of Rabbi *Hillel* which said that it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *any* reason or for *any* dislike he might have for her. [No-fault divorce is not new to our day.] On the other hand there was the school of *Shammai*, more conservative, holding that divorce was unlawful except in the case of adultery.

There was a reason for what Moses did... but what he permitted was not what God had at first intended... i.e., the ideal to which Jesus directed the attention of his inquirers. And as demonstrated in the previous paragraph, we see how from what Moses had set down... succeeding generations of religious leaders (teachers) continued to modify (reform to their own thinking) the issue of divorce, until for many, God's ideal (stated in 'The Book') had been completely set aside.

We might look also to Matthew chapter 16 where we find Jesus being approached by the Pharisees and Sadducees after which he addressed his disciples with these words, "*Be careful, be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*" (v. 6). The yeast or leaven Jesus is referring to is what is used in making bread... and as any baker knows... it is an element that passes secretly and silently... but it does so through the entire mass of dough. The progress cannot be seen... and that is the way it was with the false teachings of the Pharisees. They (the Pharisees) as one commentator puts it, "were insinuating, artful, plausible. They concealed the real tendency of their doctrines; they instilled them secretly in the mind, until they pervaded all the faculties like

leaven." This commentator also comments, "Erroneous doctrines are like leaven in the following respects: 1) They are at first slight and unimportant in appearance, as leaven is small in quantity as compared with the mass that is to be leavened. 2) They are insinuated into the soul unawares and silently, and are difficult of detection. 3) They act gradually. 4) They act most certainly. 5) They will pervade all the soul, and bring all the faculties under their control."

It was interesting to find a quote from the dissenting opinion of Judge Diane Sykes of the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals in *Lively v. Ivy Tech*, a ruling that changes the meaning of the word sex in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include sexual orientation in cases of employment discrimination. Judge Sykes wrote, "When we assume the power to alter the original public meaning of a statute through the process of interpretation, we assume a power that is not ours."

What Judge Sykes states here with regard to the law of the land, certainly also applies to the clear teachings of God's Holy Word... to the teachings of 'The Book.' Our LMS has a brief statement in connection with our understanding of the Word. "We believe the Bible is God's Word and self-revelation to us, and as such, it is without error in all it touches, whenever and however it speaks whether in matters of faith, doctrine, history, geography, or science." This we believe is in line with what we find ought to be believed in so far as what the Bible itself indicates. But think of the subtle changes that have taken place in the minds of many individuals, and in so many circles, with such a view of how

Scripture speaks to absolutely everything. And... in some cases... a little different view may not be such a serious thing. But as mentioned earlier... it is so easy for the next person who comes along, to move just a little further in that direction, and the next a little further yet... until, for example, with regard to the origin of things (see Hebrews 11:3)... there is no longer has any connection with, and multitudes don't think it makes any difference, that it has no connection with biblical and saving faith.

Church body leaders, seminary teachers... but in that such things can easily be overlooked by such... it behooves pastors, congregation church board members, and right on down to individual church members... to always be cautious of what we believe, and to examine what we believe by the Word of God. False teachings and practices are often as much like the truth as possible, for the very purpose of deceiving. "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

We must never begin to think that there is no place or need for reformation/reform in the church. Jesus clearly believed reform was necessary in the Jewish church of his day. Paul complimented those who believed they should be alert to a proper type of reform in his day (see Acts 17:11). And the many warnings in the New Testament Epistles indicate that there was a need in the very first days of the church and that need would continue right down to our day, as well as into the days and years that lie ahead, until the day the Lord returns here to earth for his Church.

Lord, Keep us steadfast in Thy word. Amen.

- Rev. John Erickson

## Reflecting on Five Hundred Years

We think of science as facts and data, as something upon which credibility can be built in this twenty-first Century. *If a matter is credible then it is at least acceptable, right!*

Five Hundred years ago – yes now Five Hundred Years – Martin Luther began the process of making the historic message of the Church of Jesus Christ acceptable to his age based on its credibility. The Church had to agree with itself, speaking with one steady voice so that words such as infallibility could even be considered. That was a daunting task when we take into consideration competing traditions, creeds, writings, Scriptures, in short the nature of human nature itself.

Before we blow the Lutheran horns, ring the Lutheran bells and sing the second or third round of A Mighty Fortress, we need an objective review of the facts. For in the overall view of what became the Lutheran Reformation, Dr Luther was not moving in a sectarian direction - why he even abhorred the very label of Lutheran being attached to the whole project, not because of his modesty but for a universal, objective clarity of purpose about what the Church really is.

Of course, Rome countered especially with one Council (Trent) that seemed to go on forever. But if Brother Martin had not been successful in avoiding the sectarian temptation to a great degree, the past five hundred years would have counted for little. That he did is the great gift of Protestant Reformation and the reason that those years are so significant.

But can we talk of objectivity in matters of Faith? Is Faith itself objective? Does it or can it possess that quality? Many of the world view would not even consider that a possibility.

Recently an article in a archaeology magazine asked, "Do you believe archaeology or the Bible?"



That is basically (but not quite) - do you believe science or faith?

There are two major flaws here. First, archaeology has proven a long and growing laundry list of assertions made or assumed by the Bible and, believing science (archaeology) by its very nature involves at least a modicum of faith.

You know you have become old when you groan at one more attempt to pit science against Faith. These two, although not natural enemies and of a very different nature, are not really enemies at all. Instead, I have found that for the most part, they make excellent partners.

Luther accepted Scripture and other subsequent writings of the Church (such as the Creeds) as they were, finding them to be of a competent, acceptable and believable consistency with an ongoing tradition. This tradition did not cease or die at any time but continued as a living succession of active events in which each age participated, built one upon the other, back to the beginning.

The reason is simple. The whole body of Faith, or Heilsgeschichte (Faith history), is built on facts and data from faithful observers or witnesses at any point of beginning even though for our purposes the New Testament will be our point of origin.

It is inspired because observers were inspired by the events they reported on so that rather than reporting mere facts or dry data they became imbued by Spirit and Truth with a capital "T". Of course, here



is where we lose those who do not share that Belief or believe-ability for without that spark of gestalt reality – it doesn't make sense to the observer. In other words the writers-Evangelists, were caught up in their message so that John the Gospel writer said: 'We tell you this that you may believe and so that our joy may be full.' (1 John 1:4) (2 John 12) (also touched on in John's Gospel 14 - 16)

In other words – in the possibility that you may believe from reading what we write, our purpose in writing it finds its purpose.

We might think that the Apostles were quite different from us living as they did in a far away age. That is – until we read of Thomas acting very much as a twenty-first century person might react to a tale hard to take seriously. He simply concluded that he would have to see for himself and find empirical data on the basis of observation – his own observation. The Thomas story is the perfect blind study of Faith and acceptability in observation which is usually read on the Second Sunday of Easter and is the perfect example of our point.

The point again being that the Apostles and Disciples, several of whom became writers and preachers, were keen *scientific* observers of the ongoing works of God. And that is how they reported on their observations.

There is Peter who wrote; "We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ - - - but we were eye witnesses of His majesty." He is reporting on that highly mystical occasion – some might say – of the Transfiguration. They even had to invent a word used exclusively for that mountaintop experience reported by the three Synoptic Gospels. "We heard this voice.... we were on the mountain" etc.

The observed facts are that a) Jesus' robe shown or was illuminated brightly, b) that two Biblical characters separated by at least six hundred earth years - Moses and Elijah - ap-

peared and were identified right away, c) that they spoke with Jesus in one of the accounts about His death and resurrection some days or months yet in the future, d) that a voice from heaven spoke about the reliability (the Son-ship) of Jesus and that, e) a thick cloud swept in on them. (2 Peter 1:16 ff) Thomas would likely have had a problem with that succession of events.

Peter suggests that his hearers or readers should accept this observation until the Spirit gave them their own experience of the majesty and believe-ability of the incarnation and significance in history of Jesus and the biblical witness of the history of Salvation.

It happens that when such an experience might happen that it is labeled as subjective, and therefore not objective, or as acceptable perhaps as objective data. The Thomas event shows that true even two thousand years ago.

What Martin Luther did in the period of the Reformation was to carefully wrap this precious data in tissue paper – if you will, and preserve, correlate and pass it on to future generations. Each point of the Augsburg Confessions was worthy and true in and of itself. Each was believed by the Apostles and Gospel writers personally and each piece with the other pieces collectively was essential for the telling of the complete Gospel.

Over the years, even the near past - the two points most often attacked have been the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. Trials as late as the 1940s and 50s were held for pastors who said that they could not really accept them into personal belief.

The blessing of Jesus within that same John 21 reading for Second Easter is on those who have not "seen," yet believe, for they "see" through the certain eyes of Faith. Faith sees past the realm of facts and data being itself a solid foundation upon which the Church has been built and is sustained. However Faith

(*Reflecting*, continued on page 16)

**In this year of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and in thinking about reform, it brings to mind the 'reform' that a number of us felt was needed in what resulted in the formation of the Lutheran Ministerium and Synod - USA. The following is one of the papers presented in the initial gathering of concerned pastors and laity in August of 1994, that within the year brought about the LMS.**

*Two Kinds of Authority, One Abiding Purpose*

LUTHERAN BIBLICAL INERRANCY CONFERENCE

St. Matthew Lutheran Church  
2837 East New York Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46201

August 10 - 11, 1994

Rev. Thomas V. Aadland

**"Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."**

-- Jeremiah 6:16

**"the holy scriptures . . . are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."**

-- II Timothy 3:15

Over a century ago, Dr. Ulrik Vilhelm Koren penned his longest essay, "What the Norwegian Synod Has Wanted and Still Wants", 1890.<sup>1</sup> I should like to have entitled this address, "What The AALC Has Wanted and Still Wants." But the conveners of this conference have understandably and rightly purposed to ask whether both tenses of that verb truly apply to every member of our little church body today.

Since this situation is the primary occasion for the present conference, it is this matter that I wish to address today. It is the twofold contention of this paper firstly, that the present controversy is marked by a fundamental confusion regarding two kinds of authority; and that secondly, the documents either approved or endorsed by The AALC are entirely adequate to clarify this confusion and to settle the present controversy if subscription to them be made with integrity. The right foundation has been laid.<sup>2</sup> We must make sure we continue to stand upon it. Therefore, let us review the original foundation of our church body; and do so with the hope that, if there should be any wavering within her, she might be recalled to her confessional identity and evangelical purpose.

TWO PRINCIPLES OR KINDS OF AUTHORITY

In both society and church, the matter of authority is at issue today. The word "authority" may denote different kinds of principle. Accordingly, authority may refer to that which functions as norm regarding conduct or belief, setting limits and even correcting that which deviates from the norm. Authority may also refer to that which functions as cause regarding a certain effect, bringing help and even engendering and nurturing life itself. In a healthy family, a child will come to experience, love and respect both kinds of authority.

For the church, in particular, there are two kinds of authority, which must be continually in operation and held in the highest regard. Where they are confused or denied, the life of the church is placed in jeopardy. What are these kinds of authority and how do they interrelate? They are the Gos-

pel and Scripture; and they relate as summary and source, as causative authority and normative authority, as origin of the church's life and the norm of its doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

The Reformation marked a clear and forthright return to both kinds of authority. Luther's remarkable rediscovery of the Gospel, as he lectured both on the Psalms and on Paul's epistle to the Romans, came as he wrestled with the text and through exegetical insight. He broke with the philosophical tradition of his day when he came to understand Paul's words in Romans 1:17 [*dikaiosune theou/justitia Dei*] to mean not that passive "righteousness of God" by which He justly condemns the sinner but rather that active Righteousness of God [= Christ!], the regnant Power by which He makes us sinners to be accounted righteous. The Gospel is the explosive, dynamic power of God present in a word: the glad tidings that the ungodly are put right with God [justified] by grace alone, through faith alone, and for the sake of Christ alone. This three-part formula, the very heart and substance of our faith, we know to be the material principle of theology: *justificatio impii sola gratia sola fidei propter Christum solum*. The proclamation of the Gospel is that which has power to bring us to faith. The Gospel is the causative authority of the church's life. Nothing else can avail. For "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith." It is then the precious Gospel which brings into being that faith by which we believe [*fides qua credimus*] the promises of Jesus Christ.

But how could Luther and the Reformers of sixteenth-century Saxony stand alone against the prevailing authorities of their day? How could they be sure their faith and doctrine and preaching were true, when the whole world, the church and the state, personified by Leo X and Charles V, stood against them? As over against the onslaught of personal doubt and anxiety, how could they remain steadfast and serviceable instruments in God's hand to confront and to minister to their own generation? The answer is that they found this faith taught in the very Word of God, the Holy Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The demonstration that the Gospel they taught and preached is, in fact, the same as that found taught and proclaimed in Scripture was for the Reformers the objective ground of certainty that their faith was not misplaced. God cannot lie, and His Word cannot err. Since the Gospel runs contrary to human wisdom and carnal desire and our natural expectation, since it alone spells the death of the old Adam, it is a matter of great consequence that our proclamation be continuously and solely based on the Word, on the text of the Bible, lest it be robbed of its depth and power. Thus, there is a second principle bequeathed to us by the Reformation, the *formal principle* of theology: *sola scriptura*; in all matters of faith and life, it is the Bible which is the final source and norm of all that which we believe, teach and confess. The Scripture is the **normative authority** for the church's faith. It establishes and regulates the statement, confession, and proclamation of the Christian faith [*fides quae credimus*] which we believe.

#### THE CONTROVERSY

These two principles, these two kinds of authority, are in fact the self-same "two pillars of truth" about which Koren wrote; and upon these "two fundamental principles" lie all the teachings for which "old Lutheranism" contended and still contends:



The first principle is the truth that "Holy Scripture is the only sure and perfect rule of our faith and life." The second is "the great truth that Jesus Christ is the way to salvation for all believing souls;" in other words, that a man is justified and saved for Christ's sake by faith alone without the works of the Law.

It is our conviction that these two main pillars of Lutheran, i. e. Biblical, truth are the only powerful weapons against the enemies of God's Kingdom both without and within us. All other weapons "he laughs at, the sly old dragon." But if we are to reap any benefit of them, we must grasp them and make use of them against our own flesh and blood as well as against others. It is of no use to put them down on paper as a heading and still act, write and confess contrary to them. It is of no use to pretend that these two fundamental principles are so well-known and so self-evident that we do not need to dwell on them any further. The one who does this shows thereby that he has not even begun to understand and appropriate them.<sup>5</sup>

Hence, in this life we may never take it easy, as though our work were finished. The Enemy knows how to propose disarmament of the church of these "only powerful weapons." As we "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints," we are always fighting along two fronts. Just as it is vital properly to distinguish between Law and Gospel, so it is necessary to distinguish the two kinds of authority represented by Gospel and Scripture. Today, the attack is upon two fronts, by those who have been called, for lack of a better term, "fundamentalistic", and by those whom we may designate "Gospel reductionists" or "neo-orthodox". On the one hand, the normative authority of the Scripture is substituted for the causative authority of the Gospel. On the other hand, the causative authority of the Gospel is substituted for the normative authority of the Scripture. In either case, the one is reduced to the other.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE CAUSATIVE REDUCED TO THE NORMATIVE

On the radical side of Protestantism have always been the "enthusiasts" [*Schwärmergeist*] who differed from Luther not only in their understanding of the means of grace in particular, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, but also in their teaching concerning the Spirit and the Word, and in other areas as well. Today, there are those in the self-styled evangelical camp who, in combatting the attacks made upon the truthfulness and the normative authority of the Bible, want to say that it is our assurance that the Bible is absolutely true that later brings us to the conviction that we may place our confidence in Christ. But this loses sight of the very heart of the Scripture, its causative authority as Gospel in being the power of God unto salvation. Dr. Nafzger, executive director of the Commission for Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, included this issue in his keynote address last summer to the 6th General Convention of The AALC:

In their zeal to firm up the authority of Scripture there are those who claim that "divine revelation is the source of all truth, the truth of Christianity included; reason is the instrument for recognizing it; Scripture is its verifying principle; logical consistency is a negative test for truth and coherence a subordinate test" (Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. I, *Word Books*, 1976, p. 215). No one who is faithful to our Lutheran doctrinal heritage regarding the centrality of the Gospel as the foundation for faith would de-

scribe the authority of Scripture in this way. According to this way of thinking, the Bible functions somewhat like a divinely inspired reference work rather than as the dynamic and living Word of God which condemns its hearers with the full weight of the hammer of God's law for the purpose of comforting them with the promises of the Gospel. An understanding of reason as "the instrument for recognizing" the "truth of Christianity" and the claim that logical consistency is a negative test for truth flies in the face of Luther's explanation of the Third Article.

Such a way of proceeding thinks of a sovereign God's activity toward sinful human beings in categories of reasonable revelation rather than in terms of promise. Holy Scripture is regarded as the form in which God's revelation comes to us, and faith is perceived as the acceptance of this revelation. According to this view, the cause of faith is linked directly to the veracity of Scripture, which becomes the "watershed doctrine" on which the Christian religion stands or falls. Confessional Lutheranism, on the contrary, regards Scripture as the source, rule and norm for the preaching of the Gospel in all its articles and for the administration of the sacraments, the means through which the Holy Spirit works to create faith. Accordingly, Jesus Christ, and not the Bible as God's special revelation is the object of faith.

There are a number of contemporary slogans and emphases which tend to undermine this causative authority of Scripture by attributing, implicitly at least, to human beings themselves rather than to the Gospel, the power to create faith:

1. "If you will surrender your life to Christ, God will forgive your sins."
2. "Put Jesus on the throne of your life."
3. "Make a decision for Christ."

Closely related to such slogans is the tendency in some circles to try to distinguish between "carnal Christians" and "Spirit-filled Christians," or between "believers" and "disciples." Others attempt to find "signs" that confirm a person's commitment to Christ in extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, visions, or healings rather than in the objective promises of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Perhaps the most insidious form of compromising the causative authority of Scripture is the temptation to think that it is concern for the purity of the Word which makes us right with God, rather than solely the merits of Jesus Christ alone. When the causative authority of Scripture is compromised, the Gospel is changed into Law. Sanctification is confused with justification. Sinners are thrown back onto their own resources to get right with God, and the end result is that they are led either to self-righteous pride or to despair.<sup>7</sup>

Now, of course, one is right to defend the Scriptures as truthful in all that they touch. And there is much of apologetic value in what the evangelicals write by way of showing this. But it is quite wrong to imply that one makes this effort rationalistically and thereby comes of oneself to faith.

#### THE NORMATIVE REDUCED TO THE CAUSATIVE

Of much more immediate concern on the occasion of this conference,

concerned as it is for the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, is the second front on which we fight, that front as over against those who would reduce the normative authority of Scripture to the causative authority of the Gospel, or of its message, or to that which is addressed in the Lutheran Confessions. Here we are met by those sometimes broadly designated as "neo-orthodox". The label is sometimes misleading. Following the teachings of Karl Barth and others, the attempt is made to be "orthodox" in testimony to the Lord of the church, perhaps even boldly standing against the Hitlers and other anti-christs of the day. But this attempt is made in a "new" way, and this way involves the assertion that testimony to Christ can be maintained in spite of the conclusion that the biblical text is filled with error and contradiction and outmoded concepts, ideas and traces of legend and myth. It is held that it does not matter if one questions this or that particular teaching or detail of occurrence, so long as the Gospel is retained. Sometimes, reference is made by those styled "neo-Lutheran" at this point to the *satis est* of the Augsburg Confession VII: "For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments."

Clearly, this is a reduction or narrowing of that which pertains to the Gospel and to Christ. As such, we may call this position "Gospel-reductionism".

The manner in which the normative authority of the Scripture has been attacked is sometimes blatant, and easily recognized, and sometimes very subtle, and more difficult to be discerned by all Christian people.

In the last decades of the eighteenth century, during the period of the Enlightenment, the presumptuous use of human reason as adequate to determine any possibility, led some scientists and theologians to hold that nature was a closed system of cause and effect and that the occurrence of the miraculous was by definition impossible. The period of neology challenged the orthodoxy of that time. Following the reaction of pietism, nineteenth century liberalism proclaimed "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," a caricature of Christianity in which "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."<sup>8</sup>

For some, the work of Barth and Rudolf Bultmann could be seen as a breath of fresh air that swept away such milk-toast theology, especially during the aftermath of the First World War. Here, the *kerygma*, or unique proclamation of the New Testament, was held as essential to the faith and life of the church. But for Bultmann, this *kerygma* was hidden away as the kernel of wheat inside the husk. As chaplain in the trenches of Germany during the First World War, he believed the age of the wireless and long-distance communication invalidated the world-view of the Bible, clothed as it was, he maintained, in ancient mythology. The Bible had to be "demythologized", the Gospel shed of its old garb, for it to be believed. In its place, Bultmann put the call to authentic existence as sounded by a Martin Heidegger, who had himself seen his philosophy personified by none other than Adolf Hitler!

What few realize is that this had its own consequence. Professor Fritz Buri of the University of Basel endorsed Bultmann's proposals for existential interpretation and demythologizing of the New Testament, but thought that Bultmann did not go far enough. Why should we stop with the concept of a personal God addressing humanity through the *kerygma*? Buri called for "dekerygmatising" the New Testament and was left with the radical call

to obedience (but obedience to whom?) and human ethics.

So the questioning its normative authority and the imputing of error to Scripture, even when made in the name of the Gospel, has led to the worse perversion of all, the turning of that precious and divinely authored Gospel into a merely human law.

Such are the gross attacks on the inerrancy of Scripture with which we are all too familiar. But others are more subtle. These are made especially by those who speak of inerrancy but who do not apply this in a straightforward manner to the text of Scripture itself.

So the first president of what was formerly The ALC, Dr. Fredrik A. Schiotz, in order to settle doctrinal controversy within the synod, attempted to apply the word "inerrant" in the confessional paragraph of synod's constitution to the "message" contained therein. This made nonsense of what was intended. Similarly, when our Lord affirmed "the Scripture cannot be broken", this refers simply to a particular text, the canon, and not to anything derivative of it.

It raises justifiable concern when anyone should appear to confess "inerrancy" but then qualifies its meaning, so that it no longer has a simple reference to the very words of the Bible "in every passing detail." All such attempts to reduce the normative authority of the Scripture, however subtle, were excluded by The AALC from its position when it unanimously adopted *A Statement of Biblical and Confessional Principles*. For example, the church body, in adopting it, states, "We reject . . . 3. That the historicity or facticity of certain Biblical accounts (such as the Flood or the Fall) may be questioned, provided this does not distort the Gospel" and "We reject . . . 2. That the Scriptures are inerrant only in matters pertaining directly to the Gospel message of salvation."<sup>10</sup>

#### THE OUTER CLARITY OF THE SCRIPTURE

In our struggles today, we may learn from those faithful saints in the past who fought the good fight of the faith. When he stood in heated controversy with Erasmus of Rotterdam, easily the most highly regarded humanist scholar of his day, Luther rested his argument not only upon his private conviction but upon the text of the Bible. In the debate concerning The Bondage of the Will [De servo arbitrio], Luther would not permit Erasmus to complain that the matter was not clearly addressed in Scripture nor that we must remain skeptical about such a vital matter as conversion and God's power exercised in achieving it. "The Holy Spirit is no skeptic," he said, "and God delights in assertions." In considering the testimony of the prophets in the Old Testament scriptures, and that the righteousness of faith is witnessed to therein by the Law and the Prophets [Romans 3:21], Luther asks,

Now, what sort of witness is it if it is obscure: But in all his epistles Paul represents the gospel as a word of light, a gospel of glory, and he does this explicitly and at length in II Corinthians, chapters 3 and 4, where he argues magnificently about the glory of both Moses and Christ. Peter, too, says in II Peter 1[:19]: "We have the very sure word of prophecy, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place." Here Peter makes the Word of God a shining lamp and all else darkness; and do we want to make obscurity and darkness of the Word? Christ so often calls himself the light of the world [John 8:12; 9:5; etc.] and John the Baptist a burning and shining lamp [John 5:35], not because of the holiness of their

lives, but without a doubt because of the Word. So in Thessalonians [Philippians is obviously meant], Paul calls them shining lights in the world because (he says): "You hold fast the word of life" [Phil. 2:16]; for life without the Word is uncertain and obscure.<sup>11</sup>

Luther objects, "those who deny that the Scriptures are quite clear and plain leave us nothing but darkness." Notice his particular care. He remonstrates with Erasmus:

But here you will say, "All this is nothing to me; I do not say that the Scriptures are obscure in all parts (for who would be so crazy?), but only in this and similar parts." I reply: neither do I say these things in opposition to you only, but in opposition to all who think as you do; moreover, in opposition to you I say with respect to the whole Scripture, I will not have any part of it called obscure. What we have cited from Peter holds good here, that the Word of God is for us "a lamp shining in a dark place" [II Peter 1:19]. But if part of this lamp does not shine, it will be a part of the dark place rather than of the lamp itself. Christ has not so enlightened us as deliberately to leave some part of his Word obscure while commanding us to give heed to it, for he commands us in vain to give heed if it does not give light.<sup>12</sup>

This was the same attitude and conviction Luther displayed earlier in his career as he lectured on Paul's epistle to the Romans. In referring to what the Lord says in Matthew 4:4, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," he asks, "But why does Christ say 'every word'? Because if you fail to believe even one word, you no longer are living in the Word of God. For the whole Christ is in every word and wholly in each individual word. When He is denied, therefore, in one word, He is totally denied, for He is in every word." And in concluding the section:

But you ask: If denial is so great that having denied in one point, a person has denied in all, why is not the acceptance of equal force, so that when one believes in one point, he believes in all? The answer is that the good is perfect and simple, and thus it is destroyed by one denial. But it is not established by the confession of one thing, unless it be one complete confession without any denial. For two contrary things cannot stand in regard to the same subject. And God wants to have all things pure and undefiled. But denial is a stain, and so it renders a confession unclean.<sup>13</sup>

#### SCRIPTURE IN ALL ITS FULLNESS IN EVERY PASSING DETAIL

Thus, we stand with Luther, who would not tolerate any impugning of error or darkness to the text of the Bible. It is true there are apparent difficulties, which need not derail us, if we have the proper childlike attitude that its meaning will eventually become clear to us who must labor with our own limited understanding. We are fortunate to have so many examples of faithful exegetes who display such an attitude.<sup>14</sup>

The doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture implies that no teaching derived from the text is insignificant or inconsequential.

It pleases God to make His Word particular. Whenever God speaks, He speaks truly, even in what may appear to our judgment to be passing detail, both in words of command and in words of promise, whether in historical narrative, or praise of His handiwork in creation.



There is no place where we may tolerate error and disagree with the Scriptures.

Consider God's promise, for example, to Abraham [Genesis 18:14]: "this time next spring, Sarah will have a son." Or to Jesse. Why David? Why not the other elder brothers? Or His command to Saul regarding the Amalekites [I Samuel 15]. Why "all"? Why not allow freedom in worship according to our own desire? Yet the spirit of rationalizing and half-hearted repentance is seen in him. Or consider the details of the Old Testament Gospel promises, as in Micah 5:2. Why Bethlehem? Why not Jerusalem?

In short, we must either determine to be captive to the Word of God or permit ourselves to be slaves of human opinion.

When one serves on a church call committee, one looks not merely for a fellow Christian, nor simply for one who subscribes to the Lutheran confessions. One searches diligently for one who will commit himself to holding up the portrait of the living Christ without allowing his own personality to come between, so that not even as much as a little finger is seen. But this portrait is painted in the Scriptures. Such a pastor, therefore, will make it his aim to teach the whole counsel of God without denial of its least detail.

Similarly, when one wishes to call a professor to teach at a theological seminary, one is concerned not simply about those points of doctrine maintained by the candidate, still less that he is simply a Christian or a confessional Lutheran. Rather, one looks to see how aptly this teacher can set forth the whole counsel of God. For doctrine is nothing more nor nothing less than that which Scripture teaches.

To question a candidate's view of biblical authority is not in itself a lack of love for one's neighbor. Rather, it is just here that is displayed the quality of one's own love for God, for it is impossible to love God without loving His Word, just as surely it is impossible to love the neighbor properly without loving God. So Luther:

In their books and writings the sacramentarians have pestered us with "love." They say to us, "You Wittenbergers have no love." But if one asks, "What is love?" we are told that it means to be united in doctrine and to stop religious controversies. Yes, do you hear? There are two tables [of the Decalogue], the first and the second. Love belongs in the second table. It's superior to all other works there. On the other hand, [in the first table] it is commanded: "Fear God. Listen to His Word." The sacramentarians don't bother with this. "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me" [Matt. 10:37], said Christ. You should have love for your parents, for your children. Love, love! Be good to your father and mother! However, "he who loves them more than Me..." When this "Me" comes, love stops. Accordingly I'm glad to be called obstinate, proud, headstrong, uncharitable, and whatever else they call me. Just so I'm not a participant [in their doctrine]. God keep me from that! <sup>15</sup>

#### THE ABIDING PURPOSE

God has undertaken the amazing act of saving us unworthy sinners. He wills to do this through the Gospel, and this Gospel has been entrusted to us through His Scripture. We may undertake this mission of seeking to win the lost for Christ precisely because that Word is sure. The normative and causative authorities must be distinguished, to be sure. But they must also be seen together as God has joined them for His purpose.

During the summer of 1964, my paternal grandfather lay dying of pancreatic cancer at Lutheran Deaconess Hospital in Minneapolis. His hands

held tightly a large-letter edition of the New Testament. On his lips was repeated again and again the name of his Savior. For a thirteen-year-old youth, in the midst of witnessing the ending to an earthly tabernacle, with all the tears of our present sorrow, there could be no better picture of the unity of Gospel and Scripture in the abiding purpose of the heart of God.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the original Norwegian title ["Hvad den norske synode har villet og fremdeles vil"] the verb "villet" has the connotation also of "contended for" or "determined to hold to". Cf. Faith of Our Fathers, 1853-1953 (Lutheran Synod Book Company: Mankato, 1953), p. 5, fn., a copy of which was generously given the author by the president of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, Rev. George Orvick.

<sup>2</sup> In what is written here, the relevant specific documents which lie at the foundation of The AALC are A Statement of Biblical and Confessional Principles [SBCP] -- adopted unanimously by the 4th General Convention of The AALC, June 20-23, 1991, and Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology [GS] -- endorsed unanimously by the Association Council, January 29-30, 1990 [cf. Evangel, No. 20, p. 1].

<sup>3</sup> The apostle Peter speaks of both kinds of authority in his epistles -- the causative authority of the Gospel in I Peter 1:22-25; and the normative authority of the Scripture in II Peter 1:19-20.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Ralph A. Bohlmann has done a fine work of service to the Church in demonstrating how in the Latin and German editions of the Augsburg Confession, the term Gottes Wort was many times translated by sacra scriptura and Heilige Schrift by verbum Dei. There could be no more convincing proof that for the confessors the two terms, Holy Scripture and Word of God, were virtually interchangeable. See his Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1968), p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Koren, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Reference should be made here to the keynote address at the 6th General Convention of The AALC, given by Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger, "Gospel Alone -- Scripture Alone: Can We Say Both?", June 17, 1993. Copies may be available from The AALC National Office, 10800 Lyndale Avenue South, Suite 120, Minneapolis, MN 55420-5614.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (Harper and Row: New York, 1938), p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought: The Frontiers of Philosophy and Theology, 1900-1960 (Harper and Row: New York, 1963), p. 365.

<sup>10</sup> SBCP, IV C, p. 2, and IV F, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Luther's Works, Vol. XXXIII, ed. by Philip S. Watson (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>13</sup> Luther's Works, Vol. XXV, ed. by Hilton C. Oswald (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 1972), pp. 238-239.

<sup>14</sup> We may mention, in passing, the scholarly New Testament commentator R. C. H. Lenski (1864-1936) and the great lexicographer W. F. Arndt (1880-1957).

<sup>15</sup> Luther's Works, Vol. LIV, ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1967), pp. 463-464.

Table Talk  
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To:

The LMS-USA is Lutheran Church body describing itself as *Biblical, Confessional, Evangelical, Liturgical and Congregational*. It is a 'Forum' in which there is an on going discussion of theological issues and concerns among clergy and lay alike. The LMS-USA meets annually for a Theological Conference and this publication, besides carrying news of the Ministerium and Synod, functions also as a vehicle for this continuing dialogue.

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(Reflecting, from page 6)

also produces and is quite compatible with facts and data.

John "saw and believed" on his own, the Resurrection although it is not clear exactly why. Something about the placement of the 'napkin'. The women's testimony was all but discounted at first for they are by nature more subjective, emotional –(without making too many assumptions.) Turns out they both reached the same conclusion. Mary on actual contact, and John on deductive reasoning, but both produced the same facts and data. Our thanks for them being preserved as they were. HE WAS RISEN! HE *IS* RISEN! ALLELUIA ! (Is Alleluia subjective or objective ?)

Rev. Ralph Spears