

DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

VOLUME 1

A. THESES OF AGREEMENT

VIII: Theses on Scripture and Inspiration

On 14 December 1950, the Joint Intersynodical Committees resolved to interrupt the discussion on Eschatological Matters by taking up the doctrine of the Scriptures and Inspiration. The seven joint meetings and many more sub-committee meetings during 1951 busied themselves with this doctrine. On 13 December 1951, the Joint Committees adopted the following ten theses.

Reviewed July 2001, unedited.

1. We solemnly reaffirm the Scriptural principle of Luther and the Lutheran Church that 'the Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel' (Smalc. Art. Pars II, ii, 15; Trigl. p 467) and declare with the Formula of Concord: 'We believe, teach and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament alone' (Epit., *de compend. regula* 1; Trigl. p 777). We therefore accept the Scriptures, i.e., the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the only source and ultimate judge, rule and standard of all doctrine of the Church, also in the doctrines on the Holy Scriptures and on Inspiration. In so doing we reject all attempts which have been made even since the Reformation, or may still be made, to introduce into the Church under whatever name other sources of doctrine besides Holy Scripture. cf Theses on Principles Governing Church Fellowship, 1–3.
2. We teach that the Holy Scripture is the Word of God in writing. As the written Word, the Bible is inseparably bound up with the Word Incarnate and the oral Word (Smalc. Art. 111,8, Trigl. p 497; Sol. Declaratio, XI,17, Trigl. pp 1068,1069, 11, 55,56; Trigl. p 903). Its proper and essential content is the Eternal Son of God, the Word who was made man in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1f; Rev19:13; Heb 1:1f; John 20:20; Luke 24:27; Acts 10:43; 2 Tim 3:15ff). This content it has in common with the oral Word either preceding or following the written Word. Although, therefore, the Word of God in its totality is wider than Scripture, Holy Scripture is, without limitation, God's Word. Everything which Scripture says is God's Word. On the other hand nothing can be proclaimed as Word of God which is not taught in Scripture.

3. We believe and confess that Holy Scripture does not only contain the Word of God, but that it is God's Word as a whole and in all its parts. We reject all attempts made to distinguish between that which is Word of God in the Scripture and that which is not, whether this be done on the plea that Scripture consists of various writings: Old and New Testaments; Law, Prophets and Holy Writings; *Evangelion* (Gospels) and *Apostolos* (other New Testament writings); or on the plea that a fundamental distinction must be made in the whole of Scripture between the Law and the Gospel.
4. We confess that in the entire Holy Scripture, both in the Old and in the New Testaments, even where it is not immediately apparent, God the Father through God the Holy Ghost proclaims the Son, Jesus Christ, as Saviour and Lord (John 3:34; 17:6,14; Mat 22:44f; John 5:39; Heb 1:1ff; Acts 10:43; John 16:13f; 1 Cor 2:3; 2 Tim 3:16). Our belief in the Bible is faith in the Triune God, who speaks to us in the Scripture.
5. We teach with the Confession of the Lutheran Church that Holy Scripture can be rightly understood only by those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of sinners. We believe that only the *sola fide* (by faith alone) leads to the right understanding of the *sola Scriptura* (the Scripture alone), that justification by grace through faith in Christ, the 'chief topic of the Christian doctrine. ... is of special service for the clear, correct understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures, and alone shows the way to the unspeakable treasure and right knowledge of Christ and alone opens the door to the entire Bible' (Apol. IV, 2 German text; Trigl. p 121; cf Theses on Principles Governing Church Fellowship, 5).
6. We teach with the Nicene Creed and with the whole true Christian Church that Holy Scripture is given by inspiration of God the Holy Ghost (*theopneustos*), 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19ff. Inspiration in this sense was the unique action by which God the Holy Ghost gave His Word of revelation to men, whom He chose, for oral proclamation or for written recording, so that of this their spoken or written word it must be said without limitation that it is God's own Word. 1 Thess 2:13.
7. We teach inspiration in this sense not only of the individual words of the prophets (2 Pet 1:19ff), of the apostles (1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 2:13), of the Psalms (Mat 22:43; Heb 3:7) and of the Law (Mat 5:17ff), but of 'all Scripture' (2 Tim 3:16), i.e., the Scriptures as a whole (John 5:39; 10:35; 2 Tim 3:15) and in all single passages (John 2:22; 7:38; Acts 1:16; 8:32) and words (1 Cor 2:13) of the Old and New Testaments (2 Pet 3:16).
8. We teach the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21; Rom 3:2; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 John 1:1–4; Rev 2:7,11,17; Jer 1:9), but we reject the various theories (e.g. mere divine enlightenment, mechanical dictation, etc.) which have been offered as an explanation of the 'how' of inspiration, or by which the verbal and plenary inspiration is in any way limited or denied. Scripture teaches the fact of inspiration, but is silent on the 'how', i.e., on the manner or method. The latter has not been revealed and therefore remains an inaccessible divine mystery; we cannot know how God the Holy Ghost worked the miracle that human words are His Word.
9. We confess that Holy Scripture as the Word of God written by men is at the same time both divine and human. In defining the relationship between the divine and human side of the Bible we could use the analogy of the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate; of the divine and human word in absolution; of the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. But we limit ourselves to what Scripture clearly teaches about the divine and human character of the prophetic Word. God is the prime and absolute source and origin of all revealed truth. But it pleased Him to give His Word through 'holy men' who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost

(2 Pet 1:21). Thus it is God who chose certain men, whom He knew before He created them (Jer 1:5; cf Isa 6:8ff and Ezek 2:1ff), to be His prophets at a certain time and to certain people. It is God who for that purpose sanctified (Jer 1:5; Isa 6:6f) sinful men and put His Word into their heart and mouth (Isa 6:7; Jer 1:9; 15:16; Ezek 2:8; 3:2f). The fact that God dealt with each of the prophets in a different way shows that the personality, character, way of thinking and speaking of the individual man were not extinguished. It is God again who gave the command to write (Ex 17:14; Jer 30:2; 36:2; Rev 1:11; 14:13) and inspired the holy writers. But they retained their individuality and were not exempt from the labour, methods and responsibility of human authorship (Luke 1:1ff; John 21:24; Acts 1:1; Rev 1:11; Pauline Epistles; Psalms). Thus the Bible has a truly human side. We therefore teach and confess that it pleased God to give us His Word under, or in the garb of, the human word of the biblical writers.

10. Because Holy Scripture is the Word of God, it is the perfect (Psalm 19:7), authoritative (John 10:35), sufficient (Gal 1:8f; Rev 22:10), and essentially clear (2 Pet 1:19; Psalm 19:7f; Psalm 119:105) revelation of divine truth (John 17:7). Holy Scripture, being God's Word written by men and for men, presents this truth in such a way that it can be appropriated by men. With the whole true Church of God we confess the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. This inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures cannot be seen with human eyes, nor can it be proved to human reason; it is an article of faith, a belief in something that is hidden and not obvious. We believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God and therefore inerrant. The term 'inerrancy' has no reference to the variant readings found in the extant textual sources because of copyists' errors or deliberate alterations; neither does it imply an absolute verbal accuracy in quotations and in parallel accounts, such absolute uniformity evidently not having been part of God's design. We believe that the holy writers, whom God used, retained the distinctive features of their personalities (language and terminology, literary methods, conditions of life, knowledge of nature and history as apart from direct revelation and prophecy). God made use of them in such a manner that even that which human reason might call a deficiency in Holy Scripture must serve the divine purpose. Furthermore, it pleased the Holy Ghost to employ authors possessing various gifts for writing on the same subject. How in such cases it is possible that differing accounts of the same event or the same saying are the true and inerrant report of one and the same fact cannot and need not always be shown by rational harmonization. We must believe it until 'that which is in part shall be done away' and 'that which is perfect is come' (1 Cor 13: 10). We reject the attempts of modern religious liberalism to make man the judge of the Word of God. None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of the Word of God; for Holy Scripture is the book of divine truth which transcends everything called truth by the wise men of this world (1 Cor 1:17ff,27; Col 2:8) and is therefore able to make us 'wise unto salvation' (2 Tim 3:15).