

A REPLY TO THE OBJECTIONS RAISED BY S. HEBART AGAINST C.I. KOCH'S PAPER

ON THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

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1. The criticism is made that the original paper stated that Christ is merely the purpose and object of Scripture. This criticism is unfortunate. Nowhere in the paper is it suggested that Christ is merely the purpose. Nowhere is Christ made to appear as insignificant or unimportant. The criticism itself is offensive and is a complete misrepresentation of the position adopted in the original paper. Unfortunately it sets a tone that suggest that the Gospel is unimportant in the original paper.

2. The criticism is made that in the original paper the Authority of Scripture is exclusively linked with inspiration, since God is the ultimate Author. Authority was defined in its normative character in the original paper. That Christ is not merely the object but the source of its authority is precisely what is said when the claim is made that God is the ultimate Author of Scripture. It is God who gives Scripture authority. Since Christ has not ceased to be God together with the Father and Spirit, He is linked completely with the authority of the Word. Hence this criticism is invalid.

3. The criticism is made that in the original paper everything revealed in Scripture is equally binding on the Church. It should be clearly understood from the original statement that, while all of Scripture is binding because it is God's inspired Word, not all parts are of equal importance when viewed from the point of view of the purpose of Scripture and the revelation of salvation. The criticism does not note this point. It claims that Christ has flatly rejected many parts of the Old Testament. Christ is now the Canon within the Canon. Because of Christ, the Church may have reason to query the authority of the Old Testament even though Christ and His Apostles originally did not do so. It is claimed that the Gospel evaluates the binding character of the authority of Scripture.

The position taken in differentiating between the authority of Scripture, and even flatly rejecting parts of Scripture, is quite untenable. Scripture may be fulfilled, certain commands and instructions may be given for specific times, but Scripture not the Church determines this. Scripture binds the Church, not the Church Scripture.

4. The criticism is made that in the original paper the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture is linked with the fact that God does not lie. This is seen as objectionable as its consequences are an understanding of Scripture which is false. If the suggestion that the statement – God does not lie – carries with it a false understanding of Scripture, then both Luther and the Lutheran Confessions must hold such a false position.

The position attributed to those who believe that Scriptures do not lie is again made into a man of straw. The claim is made that in this way people attempt to produce a perfect book; to remove all disturbing and embarrassing humanity from the Scriptures. This charge is unfounded.

The problems found in Scripture remain part of that which God inspired Holy Men to write both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. That God does not lie does not remove problems encountered in Scripture. The declaration that this claim represents a failure to grasp what God has done is fine rhetoric but a totally false accusation.

Certainty and security are at stake if only parts of Scripture are divine and reliable. If God and man are CO-AUTHORS as stated in the criticism, then it may be pertinent to ask which parts of Scripture have the authority of God and which parts have the authority merely of men. It is surely common knowledge that many theologians in the Christian Church of today flatly reject the authority of God for large sections of the Word. They measure the authority rather by the customs and attitudes of the people of the time.

The use of the incarnation as a parallel is not valid, because it is not a parallel as used in the criticism.

What the criticism in this paragraph does is to speak of the HOW of inspiration and of the origin of Scripture! This is precisely what is beyond human understanding.

5. The criticism is made that in the original paper the inerrancy of Scripture is linked with the concept of Truth, and that Truth is to be seen in terms of normal human logic and in the sense of what is factual. The claim is made that truth in Scripture is a person. This definition of Truth denotes and rejects Christ's own instruction that if a person would know the Truth, then that person must continue in His Word. Christianity is not a cult of the personality nor is it built up on the subjective ideas of men of any particular age, but it stands on those Truths that have been revealed by God through His sacred writers so that even though Heaven and Earth should pass away, that Word of Truth remains. That the Word reveals Christ does not alter the fact that the way whereby a person knows Christ is through that Word. Luther and the Confessions reject as 'enthusiasm' the practice of basing authority for doctrine in the person rather than in Scripture.

6. The criticism is made that in the original paper the human and divine in Scripture is not fully accepted in all parts. The correction provides a Scripture that gives equal authority to the divine and the human. This must give a Word in which those things which are man's guesses at revelation have to be determined, as opposed to those things which are God's eternal truths. Or is the suggestion that none of Scripture can be viewed as giving that Truth which is eternal? Which parts will be accepted as of Human Authority and of Divine Authority apparently is to be left to the Church and the Theologians to decide. They will judge according to the spirit of their times. This is precisely the way in which Scripture is being handled today, with disastrous results. Surely this position is totally untenable for the Lutheran Church.

7. The concern is expressed that the original paper dealt with the normative authority of Scripture and resulted in an exaggeration of the Formal Principle and a loss of the Material Principle. The assessment is valid only in so far that the paper was to deal with the normative authority of Scripture. The fact that the normative authority of Scripture is being dealt with specifically in no way casts any reflection on the function or on the importance of the material principle. Such a criticism misrepresents the original intent of the paper.

The criticism that what has been presented is in terms of human, rational, logical modes of thought, is very hard to understand. Does the human side of Scripture ask that these be not taken into account? How else can communication that is to be understood take place amongst human beings? The Revelations of God concerning Jesus Christ in the Scripture are in terms of human, rational, and logical modes of thought. Surely this is the great miracle of the inspired Word that as the Apostle put it: "The words that they brought were not the words of men but the very words of God" yet in the form that could be understood and received by human beings.

8. The criticism is made that in the original paper there is a fear that the Material Principle, if applied, hands Scripture over to the arbitrary judgements of man. The correction which follows does not deal with the objection raised. Of course we have to listen to the Word in order to get its message. That is the place of the normative authority of Scripture. When Scripture is heard the Holy Spirit enlightens us so that we may hear the Material Principle, Jesus Christ as Saviour, with the utmost clarity. How else are we to hear of Jesus Christ, except in the terms revealed by God.

However a very serious objection must be raised against the idea that only a special class of Theologian is able to determine the message of God from Scripture. This criticism introduces precisely the kind of theological argument that was used in the time of the Reformation. Priestly control was not acceptable to Luther any more than it should be to the Lutheran Church today. The Scripture is not a closed book. Surely the suggestion is not that members of the Church are to put their lives into the hands and wisdom of a few men who, as is acknowledged in the paper, have often led people sadly astray. Unfortunately, this is not some small matter but has to do with the eternal destiny of people's lives.

9. The condemnation of Lutheran Orthodoxy here is quite amazing, to say the least. Further, the simple declaration that the thoughts expressed in the original paper are theological opinions, not dogma, sits peculiarly at the close of a paper which in turn has spoken with dogmatic certainty, but without giving sufficient Scriptural or Confessional reasons for the position held. This comes through as double-talk.

10. The original paper was asked to deal with the position of the Church as outlined in its Doctrinal Statements and that is why the paper stated things that are rejected and accepted. This was done with full documentation. The criticisms, however, instead of answering the objections in the original paper with documentation, simply give the word of a theologian which is to be accepted as sufficient. Rather than speaking to the problem, this kind of unsubstantiated criticism adds to it.

11. Words fail me personally as I consider the political overtones and implications of this paragraph. They are so obvious that no further comment seems necessary.

12. The problem at this time is not whether these differing views are divisive but whether they can both be correct according to the declared stand of our Church. Nowhere in the Confessions or in the Statements of the L.C.A. does there seem to be any declaration that would allow the two different positions as stated to stand comfortably side by side.