

## DOCTRINAL STATEMENTS AND THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS (DSTO)

### VOLUME 1 B. THE SCRIPTURES

# Attachment 1: towards a common understanding on the authority of Holy Scripture

*This statement was published as 'Attachment 1' to a document entitled 'A Consensus Statement on Holy Scripture', which was prepared by the CTICR. It was submitted to the 1984 General Pastors Conference and General Synod, to subsequent District Pastors Conferences and District Synods, and finally adopted by the General Synod at its 1987 Convention.*

*Edited February 2000.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The following statement on the authority of Scripture (Part 1), and the pastoral advice appended to it (Part 2), are the result of some controversy in the LCA on the authority of Scripture. They are intended to help to settle that controversy.

The statements are not to be regarded as additions to the Theses of Agreement. They are not drawn up to be adopted by the LCA in a formal way. It is, however, hoped that they will be accepted by all concerned pastors and lay people as statements which will lead to consensus in the matters under dispute.

## PART 1

1. God's self-revelation has come to humankind through God's Word. This Word has come through the word of prophets, apostles, and the personal Word, God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
2. The Word of God is concerned with revealing what God wants for humankind and what his will is toward them. It reveals what God has done and will still do for their salvation.

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3. This revelatory word of the prophets, apostles, and the personal Word, Jesus Christ, is recorded for all time in the Holy Scriptures. Hence the Scriptures are the Word of God in every true sense.
4. We can expect no further revelation of God beyond that of the Son himself speaking 'in these last days' (Heb 1:1). Therefore the written word is 'the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged' (*Formula of Concord, Epitome*, 1 [*Book of Concord*, edited by T.G.Tappert, page 464]).
5. Furthermore, Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, through whom God the Father and the Son are present in the church to the end of time. The Holy Spirit is to be found only in the word of God (*Smalcald Articles* III, Art VII, 10 [Tappert, page 313]).
6. We must understand Scripture in keeping with its own central content and purpose. The Spirit witnesses to the Son through the apostolic word (John 14:25,26; 15:26,27; 16:12–14). The Scriptures, which the Spirit inspired, have as their goal the glorification of the Son. Indeed, the essential purpose of the Scriptures is to reveal the Son and his work, so that human beings might have salvation.
7. If we use Scripture in a way that is not related to its essential purpose, then this is a secondary use of the word of God. For example, Scripture is a source for world history; it furnishes insights into psychology and other sciences; and it displays in many places a high literary quality. But instructing people on these matters is not the essential purpose of Scripture. [Compare here the statement 'The Theses of Agreement and Inerrancy' (DSTO I B1):
 

Some ways of speaking and teaching which are contrary to the sound doctrine of the Scriptures and of the Theses of Agreement are to...

  - regard all statements of the Scripture as being of equal value and importance;
  - treat the Bible in a way which gives the impression that the Bible's divine authority makes historical investigation unimportant or irrelevant].
8. The witness of the Spirit to the Son must not be defined too narrowly. This witness includes all that Christ gave to his apostles to hand on to the church (Matt 28:16-20), and all that has been handed down in Old Testament prophecy concerning Christ (John 5:39).
9. Scripture's authority comes from the fact that Scripture in its entirety is the word of God directed to the glorifying of the Son as Lord and Saviour.

## PART 2

1. In keeping with what has been said in Part 1 above and with the whole spirit of the Theses of Agreement, all pastors and teachers of the LCA are reminded, in brotherly love, to
  - test all their preaching and teaching and public statements by the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, as the Theses of Agreement say in IX,10:

In accepting the Confessions as our confession, ie, as the expression of what 'we believe, teach and confess' today, we recognise the duty of the Church, its pastors and congregations constantly to use the Confessions as a guide into the riches of Holy Scripture and to be a truly confessing Church, as our Lord wants us to be (Matt 10:32). For sin and error will continue, and with them will continue the obligation of the Church to confess in living faith Christ and all his Word in the face of opposing error, until he himself will confess before his Father in heaven those who have confessed him on earth.

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- remember in particular the stand taken by the Lutheran Church of Australia in the Theses of Agreement 1:4(e), 5, and 7:
    4. e. In case of differences in exegesis that affect doctrine, agreement on the basis of God's Word must be sought by combined, prayerful examination of the passage or passages in question.
 

If this does not lead to agreement, because no unanimity has been reached on the clarity of the passage or passages in question and hence on the stringency and adequacy of the Scriptural proof, divergent views arising from such differences of interpretation are not divisive of church fellowship, providing that

      - i. there be the readiness in principle to submit to the authority of the Word of God;
      - ii. thereby no clear Word of Scripture is denied, contradicted or ignored;
      - iii. such divergent views in no wise impair, infringe upon, or violate the central doctrine of Holy Scripture, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ;
      - iv. nothing be taught contrary to the *publica doctrina* of the Lutheran Church as laid down in its Confessions;
      - v. such divergent views are not propagated as the *publica doctrina* of the Church and in no wise impair the doctrine of Holy Writ.
    5. We believe that the formal and the material principles must not be brought into opposition to each other, for the Scriptures are the Word of Christ and they testify of him. Loyalty to Christ requires loyalty to His Word, and loyalty to the Scriptures requires loyalty to Christ, His person, His work, His means of grace. We dare not stress the material principle at the expense of the formal principle, or vice versa. Churches uniting should make their pledge of loyalty to both Christ and His Word (cf Eph 4:1-16).
    6. ....
    7. In the application of these principles, particularly in the holding of such divergent views as mentioned in Theses 4 (e), the material principle, agreement in which constitutes the fundamental unity in Christ, is not to be ignored contrary to the law of Christian love, but is to be upheld and applied in full agreement with the formal principle.
2. Considerable confusion can be created among us if we neglect what is said in Theses of Agreement 1:5 (cited above) in particular.
- a. On the one hand, some pastors and members have made doctrines out of Scriptural passages where no doctrine can be shown to exist, and where all that can be demonstrated is someone's opinion about the meaning of the text or texts concerned. So, for example, it has been wrongly taught that
    - engagement amounts to the same thing as marriage. This opinion has been based on Jewish marriage customs referred to in Matthew 1:18-20.
    - women must wear a head-covering in church services. This opinion has been based on 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16.
    - marriage with a deceased wife's sister is against the will of God. This opinion has been based on Leviticus 18:6,16,18.
  - b. On the other hand, some pastors and members have spun out logical deductions from particular aspects of the gospel. In the process they have ignored clear Scriptural statements on the matter they are dealing with, and have finished up adopting false and heretical positions. For example, it has been asserted that
    - the love and almighty power of God make eternal punishment unthinkable
    - since the new age has come in Christ, the conditions of the present age (such as family, marriage, and the state) are no longer valid for the people of God
    - divisions in the church, maintained for confessional reasons, are contrary to the prayer of Christ for the unity of the members of His body.

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3. Our church has always claimed to be a church loyal to and bound by the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. This claim must not be a matter of mere words. It must be a reality. It can be a reality only when the pastors of the church act and speak in a way which matches the claim of loyalty to the Scriptures and the Confessions.
4. Finally, let us remember the words of the apostle:

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose  
(1 Cor 1:10, NRSV).

**Please note:**

In the above document, 'Scripture' is understood in accordance with the *Theses of Agreement* 1:1,2:

1. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible Word of God, written by inspiration of God, 2 Tim 3:16, by the holy men of God, 2 Pet 1:21, as the Spirit gave them utterance, Acts 2:4.
2. We believe that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments are the infallible and only source and norm of Christian doctrine and the sure and authoritative guide for life and practice. 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 Cor 14:37; Psalm 119:160; etc.