

HOLY SCRIPTURE IS THE WORD OF GOD

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1. The Testimony Of The Bible To Its Own Origin And Authority.
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Key To Abbreviations

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Ep	Epitome of the Formula of Concord
LC	Large Catechism
LW	The modern English translation of Luther's Works (Concordia and Fortress publishers)
PPP	The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
SA	Smalcald Articles
SD	Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

Summary Statement

We believe, teach, and confess that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. We believe that the Bible is a self-authenticating account of the acts of God and his dealings with mankind. It includes a revelation of the law of God and the proclamation of his grace and love to sinners. The biblical record begins in the Old Testament with the story of creation and the fall of man and culminates in the New Testament with the birth, the sacrificial death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Since Christians believe that an omniscient God cannot err, they regard the Bible as a written word that is absolutely true in everything that it says.

Satan, the enemy of God and man, has opposed God's oral and written Word from the very beginning of time. Under his influence some have scorned the Scriptures as an elaborate myth, while others have derided it as being untenable as a statement of the facts of history or science. Christianity itself has suffered as Satan's influence has brought false doctrine and unscriptural forms of worship and practice into the church.

In recent times there has been a growing disposition to regard the Bible as a book of sentimental significance that must be taken with appropriate reservations. Many professing Christians refuse to accept a literal interpretation of the entire content of the Bible. Most of these

people acknowledge that the Bible “contains” some truths, that certain facts may be inferred from biblical “myths,” and that the moral precepts of the Bible have some value. At best they limit the validity of the Scriptures to a Gospel content, that is, to specific references to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We confess that we accept the Bible on its own terms, taking it for what it says that it is, namely, the true, authoritative, and saving Word of God. We believe that the inerrant words and thoughts recorded by Moses, the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost are true and that they are worthy of acceptance as the pure and infallible Word of God. We accept Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word of God and honor both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety as the literary vehicles through which God has spoken to mankind.

We recall with gratitude the bold and clear writings of men of faith in the era of the Reformation of the 16th century who responded to the doctrinal errors of their time in confessions based on the Holy Scriptures. Some of these writings, now included in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, stand as the unalterable confession of our faith. Many Lutheran synodical bodies have made a formal pledge and commitment to the *Book of Concord*. They have done so knowing that the authors of these confessions wrote under the unquestioned assumption that the Bible is God's Word.

In responding to the false teachings of their time the authors of the Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century formulated Christian doctrine on the basis of references to the Old and New Testaments. They said that nothing contrary to the Scriptures could be accepted as Christian doctrine. They denied credence to anything not in full agreement with the plain teachings of the Bible.

Martin Luther referred frequently to his unequivocal belief that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God. His classroom lectures, his sermons, and his exegetical and doctrinal discourses are eloquent reminders of his consistent reference to the Scriptures as the sole, all-sufficient, and infallible source of Christian knowledge. He believed that everything in Holy Scripture is worthy of belief even though our limited understanding may not grasp the broad significance of some seemingly “unimportant matters” (LW 5:275) in it.

Comprehensive Statement

Introduction

We believe, teach, and confess that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. We defend this faith through the Word and promise of Scripture itself and find support for our beliefs in the Lutheran Confessions and in the writings of the Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther.

We contend against every effort to minimize the divine authority of Holy Scripture and every approach to the Bible that in any way detracts from a full acceptance of its truthfulness, its purity, and its clarity.

We heartily associate ourselves in agreement with the authors of the *Formula of Concord* who said: “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 (SD Summary Formulation 3).

We organize our consideration under two main headings: A. *The Word Made Flesh*, and B. *The Written Word*. Under each of these divisions we submit the following three sub-headings. I. *The Testimony Of The Bible To Its Own Origin And Authority*. II. *The Usage And Assumptions Of The Lutheran Confessions*. III. *The Witness of Martin Luther*. Citations on the following pages are

from the King James version of the Bible, the Tappert edition of the Lutheran Confessions, and the American Edition of Luther's Works.

A. The Word Made Flesh.

1. The Testimony of the Bible To Its Own Origin and Authority.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:1-5).

These words, the introduction to the Gospel of John, are a major source of our understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ, the God-man conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary. They also convey to us the concept of the Word made flesh. They affirm that Jesus Christ is not only one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, but that he is one with the Word of God which describes him and proclaims the Gospel of salvation. Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, is God incarnate.

In the Greek New Testament version of John I the original term for Word is *Logos*. The concept of a *logos* was known in both Hebrew and Greek antiquity. It referred to the whole truth, the fundamental principle, or the completeness of knowledge about a given subject. John uses the word *Logos* here to refer to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who is one with God in creation and redemption, and is one with the entirety of the inspired Word of God. Though the oneness of Christ in the Trinity and in the written Word of Scriptures is revealed in other Bible references, the Apostle John is the only one of the inspired writers of the Bible to use the specific term *Logos* in referring to Christ. We find it in I John 1:1, where the Savior is spoken of as "The Word of Life." In Revelation 19:13, John says: "His name is called the Word of God."

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to God who has spoken to mankind and to his Son who is the Word and is identified in and with the Word. "God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:1-3). Though the term *Logos* is not used with reference to Christ in this passage, Hebrews is in full agreement with the introductory words of the Gospel of John. Jesus is spoken of as being one with the Father in the reality of the Trinity as well as being one with him in the "Word of his power." Jesus Christ is the Word Incarnate.

Jesus identifies himself clearly with the Word in John 8:31, 32 when he says "to the Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jesus Christ and the Word are one. The *Logos* of John's Gospel represents Christ both as the Word made flesh, and the spoken and written Word of Scripture. The two are one. One may speak of either Christ or the Bible as the Word of God.

The Apostle John opens his first epistle with reference to "that which was from the beginning," namely, "the Word of Life" (I John 1:1). This is a reaffirmation of the *Logos* concept which John spoke of in his Gospel. In the fifth and seventh verses of I John 2 the apostle speaks of the Word of God which emanates from Jesus Christ, the Word of God. John says that it is a Word of God that has been heard from the beginning. In the book of Revelation John introduces

himself as one who has borne record of the Word of God and has given testimony to the life of Christ and has described all that he saw. In one of the apocalyptic visions that follows, John speaks of Jesus: "He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called the Word of God" (Rev. 19:13). Here again John uses the terminology *Word* or *Logos* as a descriptive name for Jesus.

The sacred Scriptures are themselves an infallible and unalterable account of God's revelation to man. Yet they are not merely the black and white of the printed page. They are the *Logos*, the fundamental principle of God's will and grace toward man. There is an inseparable unity between Christ, the Word of God incarnate, and the Scriptures. They are his testament. He in turn testifies to the truth of Scripture: "Search the Scriptures. . . They are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Any philosophical or theological device which drives a wedge between Christ and the Scriptures is destructive of both. In treating the doctrine of election the writers of the *Formula of Concord* declare: "The Scripture presents this doctrine in no other way than to direct us thereby to the Word" (SD XI:12). Christ and the Scriptures are inseparable. Anything that diminishes the Scriptures diminishes Christ, the Word of God.

2. The Usage And Assumptions Of The Lutheran Confessions.

We have referred to the application of the philosophical concept of *Logos* to Christ in John 1. Translated *Word*, the term is descriptive both of Christ and the Word of Scripture through which he is brought to light. The doctrine of the Word made flesh is clearly taught in the ancient creeds. Medieval theologians accepted these doctrinal affirmations and the reformers of the 16th century did not become involved in controversy over the Incarnate Word.

Nevertheless, the concept of the Word made flesh was understood and was firmly believed by the writers of the confessions and they do speak of Christ as *Logos*. In AC I 6 there is a rejection of false teachings about the Trinity. The Word and the Holy Ghost are there referred to as members of the Trinity. In a commentary on the sacramental union in SD VII 36 we have another recognition of the *Logos* concept in the statement that the phrase, "The Word became flesh" is reproduced and explained "with such equivalent phrases as, 'the Word dwelt in us,' or 'In Christ the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily,' or, 'God was with him,' or 'God was in Christ.' "

In a discussion of the doctrine of election in Ep XI 6 the confessors say: "The Word of God leads us to Christ, who is the 'book of life.' " In comments on the same matter SD XI 13 urges us to "consider the counsel, purpose, and ordinance of God in Christ Jesus, who is the genuine and true 'book of life' as it is revealed to us through the Word."

In treating the doctrine of the two natures in Christ in SD VIII 15 the confessors deny that the Lord Jesus was nothing else than a mere man in whom the Word dwelt. Article III of the AC is explicit in referring to Christ as the *Logos*, or Word. The confession declares that "the Word-that is, the Son of God-took on man's nature in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary." The Apology (III 1) similarly affirms that "the Word assumed the human nature into the unity of his person; that this same Christ suffered and died to reconcile the Father to us." The Word of God in Baptism is described by Luther in the Large Catechism as a "heavenly holy Word that no one can sufficiently extol, for it contains and conveys all the fullness of God" (LC Bapt. 17). These words are important because they call to mind the dual role and substance of God's Word. It is both the bearer and the substance of that which is borne.

3. *The Witness of Martin Luther.*

Dr. Martin Luther writes comprehensively about the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the concept of Jesus Christ as Word or *Logos*, in two of his writings. The first of these is his commentary on the Gospel of John (LW 22), where he plainly says: "I believe and confess that there is one eternal God and, at the same time, three distinct persons, even though I cannot comprehend or fathom this. For Holy Scripture, which is God's Word, says so; and I abide by what it states" (LW 22:6). The reformer further says: "We are not inventing this; we derive this wisdom from the Word of God, which is plain and clear and should not be perverted by us . . . since Holy Scripture is in such beautiful agreement and the New Testament so clearly proves the same thing (LW 3:353).

In a Christmas sermon based on the introduction to the Gospel of John (LW 52:41-63) Luther spoke about the Word made flesh, the Son of God who was the Word, or *Logos*, from the beginning. Later in life Luther was asked: "Doctor, isn't there a difference between the Word that became flesh (John 1:14), and the Word that is proclaimed by Christ or by a minister?" "By all means!" he replied, "The former is the incarnate Word, who was true God from the beginning, and the latter is the Word that is proclaimed. The former Word is in substance God; the latter Word is in its effect the power of God, but isn't God in substance, for it has man's nature, whether it is spoken by Christ or by a minister" (LW 54:395).

Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, the *Logos* was central to all of Luther's theological thought. The Reformer found the Savior in Moses and the prophets and remarked that those books were not properly understood unless we see Christ "wrapped up" in them (L W 52:22). He said, "Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what will you find left in them?" (LW 33:26). Luther compared the Scriptures to Jesus' swaddling clothes and cradle (LW 52:171). He did not thereby negate the value and the divine authority of the Word. On the contrary he heightened the credibility of the Word about Christ when he said: "Christ is recognized solely by the Word" (LW 29:5). He said: "Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament, always inculcates faith in Christ and magnificently proclaims him" (LW 26:146). "Christ must be sought where he has manifested himself and wants to be known, as in the Word, in Baptism, and in the Supper. There he is certainly found, for the Word cannot deceive us" (LW 3:108). "The Holy Scripture is open, and you will see that it teaches nothing else than the fact that God sets forth his Son, who was crucified, resurrected, and delivered for our sins" (LW 7:281).

These references to the works of Martin Luther show plainly that he believed that the spoken and written Word of God, that is, the Holy Scriptures, are God's Word both in their origin and in their eternal power and validity. He did not minimize in any way their flawless verity or their divine power. He would have abominated the mischief of contemporary theologians who say that the Bible is God's Word only to the extent that it reveals Christ and the Gospel. It was not enough for him to believe in the Word made flesh, in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word. He demanded a full acceptance of the oral and written Word of Scripture in which the Word made flesh is revealed in the fullness of his inspired and infallible revelation.

B. The Written Word

1. *The Testimony of the Bible to Its Own Origin and Authority*

The Bible is a self-authenticating book of religion. It is unique and without parallel both with respect to what it is and with respect to what it does. It is the Word of God conveyed to its writers and to all mankind by the Holy Spirit. It is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom.

1:16). Challenges to the veracity and the divine origin of the Holy Scriptures have been no more valid than the false witness brought against Jesus at his trial.

The biblical record opens with a sentence of utter simplicity. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). He said: "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). By the power of his Word God called forth the universe and established the earth with its physical characteristics and its varied forms of life. After six days of creation God looked at what he had wrought and saw that it was good. When all this was done he crowned it all with a special act of creation, saying "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them" (Gen. 1:26-28).

The forms of life fashioned before the creation of man went on to live in perpetuity after the order of their generation in the seasonal cycle of life. Adam and Eve, created with eternal souls, were given a special accountability before God and were appointed to a special responsibility toward all other creatures. Adam and Eve were given a dwelling place in the garden of Eden. The voice of God was heard in that garden as the Lord made known his will. In that paradise was "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food" (Gen. 2:9); and God instructed Adam "to dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Two trees in that garden were given special notice with the divine caution that Adam and Eve were not to eat of them (Gen. 2:9).

Even though Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God did not stop talking to them. A severe penalty was imposed on them for their sin, but God's love for them showed itself at once as he placed cherubim and a flaming sword at the gates of the garden to prevent their eating of the tree of life and living forever in their sin. When the Lord cursed the serpent he gave the first Messianic promise: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Ten generations later God had seen that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The Lord then came to Noah to speak to him of an impending flood. God said that he intended to save Noah and his family from this inundation. When the survivors returned to land from the ark that had preserved them, God made the covenant of the rainbow assuring Noah and his descendants that a disaster of that kind would not occur again.

About ten generations after the flood the Word of the Lord came to Abraham to initiate a new stage in God's relationship to mankind. God spoke to Abraham frequently and the patriarch accepted God's promise of a son to be born in his great age and received in faith the assurance of blessing that would come to all mankind through him and his seed. When Sarah expressed her doubts about bearing a child in her advanced age, God simply asked: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14)

After Abraham's death God continued to speak to the descendants of the patriarch, his son Isaac, grandson Jacob, and great-grandson Joseph. After preserving his people from famine in their own country by sending them to the fertile land of Egypt, God spoke to Moses whom he appointed to lead the people back to their own inheritance. Moses thus became God's reluctant spokesman to carry God's command to Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, let my people go" (Ex. 5:1). God said to Moses: "I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron, thy brother, shall he thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee" (Ex. 7:1, 2). A show of

God's power in a series of plagues eventually led Pharaoh to relent and Israel was released from bondage in Egypt. Moses' leadership continued through forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Joshua succeeded him as the Lord's spokesman.

Through a remarkable period of history, Moses had a role of leadership in which God spoke to an entire nation. God said: "These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:6). "I have talked with you from heaven" (Ex. 20:22). We recall the account of the Lord's appearance in the pillar of the cloud, standing in the door of the tabernacle and speaking of Moses "who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. 12:7,8). There are at least fifty instances in the book of Leviticus where Moses says that he is speaking God-directed words. In the last of the five books of the Pentateuch, Moses appeals to the people to keep the Word of God inviolate. He says: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it" (Deut. 4:2). He adds: "Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul. . . and ye shall teach them your children" (Deut. 11:18, 19).

We note also that God instructed Moses to put the Word he had received into writing. The Lord said: "Write this for a memorial in a book" (Ex. 17:14). Moses was obedient to this command of God and "made an end of writing the words of this law" (Deut. 31:24), saying to the people: "Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day" (Deut. 32:46). Moses made sure that the Hebrews understood the significance of the divine testimonies he had conveyed to them with a severe caution: "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance" (Deut. 28:58).

Remembering the spectacular proceedings attending the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, we usually think of Moses as the lawgiver who transmitted the law of God to Israel. Moses also was the ruler of the Hebrew nation, its legislator, executive officer, and judge. He said that: "I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws" (Ex. 18:16). Under divine guidance he directed the worship of the Jewish people and, in his prophetic office, made known the way of salvation to his people.

The restrained simplicity of Moses' portrayal of the creation and the fall of man introduces his record of the historical events of the Old Testament. Thereafter he described the development of the first generations of man with a detailed listing of names and genealogical data. He writes about Noah, Abraham and many others as if he had been an eye-witness of their lives. God commanded him to write in the human medium of language and God provided the knowledge and understanding that enabled him to produce an authentic account of the first years of human history. When it was done the words written by Moses were the Word of God.

In the course of time God came to Joshua, as he had come to Moses, and instructed Israel's new leader to lead the people across the Jordan "unto the land which I do give to them" (Josh. 1:2). God commended the books of Moses to him, saying: "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Josh. 1:8).

The poetic books of the Old Testament furnish eloquent testimony to the contention that the Bible is God's Word. The writer of Proverbs threatens that: "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall he rewarded" (Prov. 13:13). "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. 30:5). The

Psalms also yield a mine of evidence that Scripture is God's Word. "The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those that published it" (Ps. 68:11). "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Ps. 138:2). "The words of the Lord are pure words" (Ps. 12:6). "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Ps. 33:6). "In God' will I praise his word; in the Lord I will praise his word" (Ps. 56:10).

A striking testimony to the credibility of God's Word appears in Psalm 119, the longest single Psalm. Written in the form of an acrostic, it is divided into twenty-two sections with eight verses in each, for a total number of 176 verses. Except for verses 90 and 122, each of these has at least one reference to the Word of God. Such paraphrases as testimonies, statutes, commandments, precepts, and judgments are used to represent the concept of God's Word. The term 'word' itself is used twenty-five times in such expressions as: "I trust in thy word" (42). "Thy word hath quickened me" (50). "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (89). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (105). "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (130). "Thy word is very pure" (140). "Thy word is true from the beginning" (160). "Give me understanding according to thy word" (169). "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments are righteousness" (172).

The collapse of Israel as a nation culminated in the Babylonian captivity, 604-562 BC. In the years preceding and following that captivity God spoke to his people through teachers, usually called prophets, rather than through heads of state. Isaiah, one of the foremost of these prophets, was acutely aware that God was speaking through him as he pleaded: "The Lord hath spoken" (Is. 1:2). Isaiah often referred to the Lord as the Holy one of Israel. He identified him with the act of creation and the preservation of the world. In one of his communications to Isaiah the Lord said that he had not spoken in secret, he had not sought to deceive the seed of Jacob. He said: "I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right" (Is. 45:19). He told the prophet: "I have put my words in thy mouth" (Is. 51:16).

The prophet Jeremiah was no less explicit in saying that the Word of God had come to him. The Lord said to him: "Whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak" (Jer. 1:7). Jeremiah admonished the people to "Hear the Word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at the gates to worship the Lord, thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel" (Jer. 7:2,3). In the end God came to Jeremiah and said: "Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book" (Jer. 30:2). Many other prophets were similarly to receive and record the Word of God as a result of direct speech with God or through visions and dreams. (Num. 12:6).

When the fullness of time was come God spoke anew to his people to prepare for the birth of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. As in the Old Testament, God also made provision for writers to record and expound the significance of the Savior and the events of his life. These inspired writers took the truth of the Word of God in the Old Testament as an established fact and represented Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

The evangelist Matthew wrote for a predominantly Jewish readership in an effort to demonstrate that Jesus truly was the son of David, the promised Messiah. His Gospel includes many references to persons, events, and circumstances described in the Old Testament. He recorded the sermon on the mount and observed that Jesus was perceived as a teacher who "taught them as one having authority" (Mt. 7:29). In contrast to Matthew, Luke addressed himself to a cosmopolitan readership that had come under the influence of classical Greek culture. From its beginning Luke's Gospel breathes the air of "certainty" (Lk. 1:4) about his written "declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us" (Lk. 1:1).

Though he is less concerned than Matthew about associating Jesus with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, Luke gives much more than lip service to the idea that the Old Testament books were the Word of God. He writes of Abraham who "spake to our fathers" (Lk. 1:55), and quotes Old Testament prophets. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke recalls Jesus' word to the rich man who had requested that his five brothers be instructed by an emissary from heaven so that they might escape the penalties of hell. Father Abraham responded: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. . . If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk. 16:29-31). Similarly Luke records how Jesus responded to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on Easter day, explaining the portentous events of the past days: "Beginning at Moses and the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Lk. 24:27).

Luke is emphatic in declaring that the Scriptures are the Word of God. He speaks of the "Word of God" coming to John the Baptist (Lk. 3:2), quotes Jesus as saying: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Lk. 4:4), and notes the amazement of the witnesses to a miracle who exclaimed: "What a word is this!" (Lk. 4:36). People came to Jesus at the sea of Gennesaret "to hear the word of God" (Lk. 8:21), and he assured his hearers that "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away" (Lk. 21:33).

The principal emphasis in the Gospel of John is the deity of Christ. John's personal intimacy with Jesus gives special significance to his many direct quotations of the Savior's own words. The whole sense and purpose of the Old Testament is in Jesus' words: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (Jn. 5:39). In the same vein Jesus chided those who had rejected him: "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (Jn. 5:46, 47). John quotes Jesus as saying: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jn. 14:6), and "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (Jn. 14:24).

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the propagation of the Gospel after the ascension of Jesus. The original setting of the New Testament was the homeland of the Hebrews. Its leaders and apostles were Jews who were loyal to the religion of God's people in the Old Testament. When Peter rose to speak to a large assembly on Pentecost day, he recalled the prophecies of Joel and David and spoke of Jesus whom God had made Lord and Christ. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). Stephen also referred to the Old Testament at his martyrdom making a fruitless appeal to the people in behalf of Jesus, the Messiah. St. Paul likewise called up the memory of Old Testament history in his first missionary sermon addressed to "men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham," assuring them that "Whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts 13:26). Later in the Book of Acts, we read that Paul "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (Acts 18:28).

Ultimately the transition from Old Testament worship to New Testament Christianity was to become an impassible hurdle for most Jews. Rejecting the Messiahship of Christ they retained implacably the practices and ceremonies that had been mere symbols of the coming of the Savior. St. Paul turned away from Jews who refused to accept Christ, saying: "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Paul confirmed God's will for a universal Christendom when he said God "hath made of one

blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26) thus disavowing the special claims of the Jews that they alone were God's people.

The apostolic ministry was a phenomenal success story. The missionary efforts of these men were attended by the blessings of the Holy Spirit and "the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). Luke describes the work of these missionaries and the growth of the congregations and says: "So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20).

No one had a more profound conception of the power of the Word of God than St. Paul. Recall the greeting at the beginning of his epistle to the Romans: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1), and the later confession, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). There was no doubt in his mind of the apostolic authority of the words he wrote. He said: "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). In I Tim. 1:11 St. Paul asserts that he is speaking "according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust." In II Tim. 1:13, he sounds a note of caution that contemporary theologians would do well to heed: "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard from me."

In a closing greeting in II Tim. 3:14-17 St. Paul makes a profoundly significant statement about the Word of God. He urges Timothy to steadfastness, saying: "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of." He reminds Timothy "that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Paul adds: "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."

The initial words of the Epistle to the Hebrews recall that in ancient times God had spoken to his people through the prophets. Now, the writer continues, God has "in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). Later the same writer declares that the Gospel "was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, "namely Jesus himself. The power of the Word of God is described as "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). The Apostle James reminds us of our origins, saying: "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18). He urges us to receive the "engrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

The Apostle Peter, the most dramatically outspoken of the twelve disciples is more than eloquent in his plea for taking the Word of God seriously. He opens the first of his epistles with the assertion that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. He says that he was "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Pet. 1:23). After a brief remark about the temporary nature of life, he makes the bold statement: "But the word of the Lord endureth forever" (I Pet. 1:25). In II Pet. 1:19-21 he uses the clearest possible terms to expound the doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:19-21).

When the Bible refers to the written revelation or the oral speech of God, as it does in over a thousand instances, it uses the common terms "Word," "Scripture," or "the Scriptures." In view of this it is a perversion of language and ordinary literary usage to say that the Bible is God's Word only to the degree that it exhibits Jesus Christ as the Word or *Logos*. The inference

made from this false conclusion is that all else in Scripture is mere fallible construction. We believe that the written revelation, the Bible, is God's Word because he is its source.

We emphatically reject any form of Gospel reductionism that would question the truthfulness of Bible passages not directly related to a narrow sense of the meaning of the Gospel. We reject the statement that the written text of Scripture is not actually the Word of God but is merely a witness to it. We reject the thought that Scripture has a selective validity applicable only to God's redemptive purpose, but not to incidental matters not directly related to the proclamation of salvation. We reject a contemporary disposition to speak of the Word of God "in" the Scriptures, as if the Word of God is merely "contained" in the Scriptures or "derived" from them. We also reject the suggestion that Holy Scripture is God's Word only insofar as it is proclaimed for the sake of the salvation of souls. We believe that Holy Scripture is God's Word in everything it says.

2. *The Usage And Assumption Of The Lutheran Confessions*

The Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century were written under the basic assumption that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The Lutheran confessors shared this view with almost all Christians of their time. A disposition to find only a limited or diminished Word of God in the Holy Scripture is a post-Reformation development within Christendom.

In the Preface to the Epitome the writers of the *Formula of Concord* said: "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 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 the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed.' "

For all its antiquity the word "Bible" is rarely used in the confessions of the 16th century. Luther speaks of the Bible in his preface to the Large Catechism. The preface of the Epitome refers to the Catechisms as the layman's Bible. When the Lutheran confessors wished to refer to the Bible they used such descriptive terms as "Word," "the Word," "the Scriptures," or the "Gospel." These terms were generally used interchangeably and distinctions seldom were made between them. They implied a reference to the Bible, the written revelation of God.

A tally of usage in the text of the 16th century Lutheran Confessions reveals that terms of reference to the Bible appear over a thousand times. The expression "Word," or "Word of God," is the descriptive reference that is used most frequently. The terms "Gospel," "Scripture," or "the Scriptures," are also used in reference to God's revelation. Melanchthon had a strong preference for the term "Gospel," while Luther and the authors of the *Formula of Concord* preferred the designation "Word" or "Word of God."

Of the three terms used to represent the Bible only one, the Scriptures, is completely unequivocal. It is a self descriptive word referring to a body of written literature. We recognize a special distinction of these Scriptures because they originate in the mind and wisdom of God who caused them to be written by Moses, the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles. In the uniquely divine activity of inspiration God has made his will and his grace known to mankind.

The 16th century Lutheran writers referred to passages of Scripture on which they based their doctrinal affirmations. They repeatedly said that they had written nothing contrary to Scripture. In a reference to the inspired origin of the Bible Melanchthon speaks of "The clear Scripture of the Holy Spirit" (Ap Pref 9). The Lutheran writers declare that the Scriptures testify to the truth, that they speak to sinful men, and that this has been "witnessed in all the records of history" (LC 1st Com 35). Students of the Bible are reminded that "the best and safest procedure

is to use and keep the pattern of sound words as the Holy Scriptures . . . use them" (SD 1:50). The confessors give serious warnings against obscuring clear Scriptures by teaching false doctrine. In one instance Melanchthon complained of opponents who "make passages of Scripture mean whatever they want them to mean" (Ap 12:106).

Luther's translation of the New Testament appropriated the Greek word *euangelion*, which he used in his work in the form *Evangelium*, hence the words evangel and evangelical. English translators used the Old English term *Godspel* or, more simply, *Gospel*. The word signified God's spell, or story, and was identical in significance and meaning to the German adaptation of the Greek original. Unfortunately the word "Gospel" came to be used in two differing senses, one broad, the other narrow in meaning. In its broad sense the Gospel was synonymous with the term Scripture or the Word of God. It was used in reference to the whole counsel and will of God, including both Law and Gospel. In its narrow sense it excluded the law and included only the proclamation of the redemptive work of Christ.

The theologians who formed the *Formula of Concord* came to terms with the different definitions of the word "Gospel" in Article V, Law and Gospel. Quoting Luther the confessors said that in a narrow sense "the Gospel is a proclamation that shows and gives nothing but grace and forgiveness in Christ" (SD V:12). A few lines later the article says: "The Gospel. . . is God's Word" (SD V:19). It is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit through the external Word. Similarly Epitome II 4 declares that: "God the Holy Spirit, however, does not affect conversion without means; he employs to this end the preaching and the hearing of God's Word, as it is written that the Gospel is 'a power of God for salvation;' likewise, that 'faith comes from the hearing of God's Word' " (Rom. 10:17). Melanchthon defines the Gospel in its narrow sense when he says: "The Gospel is, strictly-speaking, the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ" (Ap IV:43).

The Gospel is seen in its broad sense when the confessors observe that: "Likewise, St. Paul calls his entire teaching the "Gospel" (Acts 20:24) and summarizes it under these heads; repentance to God and faith in Christ" (SD V:4). Using the term Gospel in its broad and inclusive sense, Melanchthon also says that: "The Gospel declares that all men are under sin and are worthy of eternal wrath and death" (Ap IV:62). In the Large Catechism Luther includes the Golden Rule, "Whatever ye wish that men would do to you, do so to them" in the broad sense of the Gospel (LC 10 Com 286). He takes the same broad view of the Gospel in frequent appeals based on the comment, "now that the Gospel has been restored."

The term, "Word of God" also has, as we have seen, a proper usage under two different meanings. It may be a reference to Jesus Christ, the *Logos*. In most instances, however, the authors of the Lutheran Confessions use the phrase "Word of God" in such a way as to make it clear that its intended meaning is a reference to the spoken or written Word. In Ap XIII:5, for example, Melanchthon writes that "The Word enters through the ears to strike the heart." In the Rule and Norm of SD 13 the authors introduce their doctrinal articles with the words: "We base our position on the Word of God as eternal truth." Their statements were in writing. They appeared on the printed page. They had drawn from the printed pages of the Holy Scriptures.

When the confessors speak about their articles, doctrines, interpretations, and agreements, they are referring to statements conforming to the inspired Scriptures. Melanchthon says that "We can affirm nothing about the will of God without the Word of God" (Ap XV:17). Many other like expressions are examples of their use of the term "Word of God" as clear and direct references to the Scriptures. There are many quotations from the Old and New Testaments which, in their very nature were written documents. They also make reference to the written prophetic and apostolic Scriptures. Melanchthon was clearly thinking of the printed

page when he rejected the practice of the invocation of saints on the grounds that “They have neither God's promise, nor a command, nor the example of Scripture” (Ap XXI:21). He scorned every tendency to select material from the Bible as if part of the Scriptures were false and part true. He said: “If they accept anything, many accept only what agrees with human reason and regard the rest as mythology” (Ap VII and VIII:27).

With the Lutheran confessors of the 16th century we also emphatically reject any thought that the Holy Scriptures are God's Word only insofar as they relate to Jesus Christ or the Gospel. We reject the view that the Bible is a flawed witness to Christ, and that the moral, historical, and incidental accounts on the printed pages of the Scriptures are subject to human error and historical and scientific misconceptions.

We do not diminish the significance of John's Gospel and the Words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We observe, however, that when the confessors use the term “Word of God,” they are generally, and most frequently referring to the written Word and not to the Word incarnate. Both Christ and the Bible are gifts of God to men. We demean one of them only at the cost of a disparagement of the other. Each has its proper role in God's plan of salvation.

We agree with our adversaries that the Lutheran Confessions of the 16th century were historically conditioned. That is to say that the writers of that age defined points of doctrine in contention at that time. In every case the matters of dispute hinged on what the Bible did or did not teach. We believe that God's will and grace encompasses all time and every age and that God's Word is changeless through the ages. Therefore we reject the thought of adversaries who say that since the Lutheran Confessions are historically conditioned they remain a significant historical document but not a definitive statement of faith pertinent to the 20th century.

The Lutheran confessors of the 16th century did not treat the entire body of Christian doctrine. They did not, for example, treat the doctrine of Holy Scripture in a detailed or systematic manner. But they did believe that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. All of their conclusions were drawn from that Word. All of them are as pertinent and valid today as yesterday. The values and the truths of Holy Scripture are timeless. Truth and falsehood are not relative to times and seasons. “His truth endureth to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

3. The Witness Of Martin Luther

Martin Luther's entire career as a lecturer on the books of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg is testimony to his unwavering conviction that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The following quotations are illustrative of his viewpoint: “Holy Scripture, which is the Word of God” (LW 22:14). “The Scriptures are God's testimony of himself” (LW 34:227). “God who is named and made manifest in His Word” (LW 7:336). Luther likened the Bible to a firm and present reality in our hands. “The Word comprehended in letters of the alphabet” (LW 52:205). He said the Holy Scripture “is everywhere in agreement with itself” (LW 4:91). “The Word of God is greater and more extensive than heaven and earth” (LW 4:311). He wrote further: “His Word is so much like himself that the godhead is wholly in it, and he who has the Word has the whole godhead” (LW 52:46). “God. . . manifests and reveals himself to us in order that we may learn to know him. This is the principle and foundation that is set forth in all Scripture. First of all, it is God's Word itself” (LW 5:258).

Luther looked on the Bible as a book that is beyond human reason and understanding because, as he said, “Holy Scripture is divine wisdom, not the wisdom of man” (LW 4:319). “The affairs of God and of faith hinge on the Word and not on our smartness” (LW 23:100). “It

is not man's word which could lie or be wrong, it is the Word of God who is the eternal truth" (LW 23:95).

Throughout his life as a biblical scholar Luther was continually asking the question, "What do the Scriptures say?" and was finding answers in the Word. He looked for truths "handed down in Holy Scripture" (LW 8:6) and often came to the conclusion that: "This has the support and authority of God and Scripture, and the testimony of the Holy Spirit" (LW 8:155). When Luther recalled the remarkable story of the creation of Eve he said: "Although it sounds like a fairy tale to reason it is the most certain truth. It is revealed in the Word of God, which alone imparts true information" (LW 1:131).

Commending the Bible to lay readers Luther said: "The Word of God is such a great treasure and brings. . . marvelous revelations concerning invisible and impossible things" (LW 3:120). "The Word comes forward like a little flame shining in the midst of darkness and scattering its rays through its doctrine and sacraments" (LW 6:148). "Scripture. . . should be read . . . countless times. For they are divine wisdom, which cannot be grasped immediately at the first glance" (LW 3:114).

Luther believed that the oral spoken Word was truly the Word of God, as when Peter spoke on Pentecost day. The Reformer once said that Satan doesn't care a fig about the printed Word. It is the spoken Word that he fears. In reference to his own teaching Luther said: "Our word is in fact the Word of God" (LW 26:21). He counseled Christians: "We must learn to adhere to the Word of God, whether this is spoken by a disciple or an apostle, a saint or an ordinary man" (LW 23:191).

Luther cautioned, however, that the Word of God must be retained in its original sense and meaning. "No violence is to be done to the Words of God, whether by man or angel. They are to be retained in their simplest meaning as far as possible. Unless the context manifestly compels it, they are not to be understood apart from their grammatical or proper sense, lest we give our adversaries occasion to make mockery of all the Scriptures" (LW 36:30). "What God says must be taken quite simply at its face value. For it is not for us to decide to make and remake the Words of God just as we please" (LW 33:166). "Those things which have been delivered to us by God in sacred Scriptures must be sharply distinguished from those that have been invented by men in the church" (LW 36:96).

Luther urged all Christians to "lean solely on the Word of God, neither adding nor subtracting anything" (LW 9:51). When such changes are made, he said, "unbelief runs riot because the Word of God is lost" (LW 9:22). "A curse," Luther said, "upon any love and harmony whose preservation would make it necessary to jeopardize the Word of God" (LW 26:425). Luther had utter contempt for the efforts of one of his adversaries who sought to promote peace by judicious policy of making concessions to the enemies of the Gospel. The Reformer said: "You seek with your magisterial advice to persuade us that, as a favor to pontiffs and princes, or for the sake of peace, we ought, if occasion arises, to give way and set aside the most sure Word of God. But if we do that, we set aside God, faith, salvation, and everything Christian" (LW 33:51).

In his commentaries on the books of the Bible Luther had given careful consideration to the conversations of God with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the prophets. He liked to think of the Scriptures as God's continuing conversation with mankind. He said: "The Holy Spirit speaks to those who read the Word of God" (LW 22:473). Luther called the Bible "the miracle of the Holy Spirit, namely, that he wanted to give all the world the books of Holy Scripture, of both the Old and New Testaments" (LW 41:51). All of us, Luther urged, should be grateful for this great gift and "remain pupils of the Holy Spirit and of Scripture" (LW 3:322).

Luther's further comments on the value of the Scriptures are profound. "When the heart can arrive at the conclusion that God the Father himself is conversing with us, then the Holy Spirit and light enter, and man is illumined and becomes a joyful master who can now test and judge all doctrines" (L W 23:96). "The words of Holy Scripture should not be treated carelessly. For since they are the Words of the Spirit, they are necessarily full of weight and majesty" (L W 29:236). "If we believed firmly, as I do, even though I believe weakly, that the Holy Spirit Himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book and of such unimportant matters, as they seem to be to the flesh, then we would have the greatest consolation" (LW 5:275).

Luther believed, without any doubt whatever, that the Bible was God's inspired word. He said that the "Holy Spirit alone has handed it down in the writings of the Bible" (LW 7:12). He referred to the fact that it was necessary for teachers in the church to be well versed in the Greek and Hebrew languages when they deal with the Word of God because "It was in those two languages that the Holy Spirit wrote the Old and New Testaments" (LW 36:304). Taking account of the human instruments of the Holy Spirit's inspiration Luther said: "The Gospels and the Holy Scriptures, whose truth is all of a piece, are treated in differing ways by men of differing dispositions. One is milder and gentler in his teachings; another is harsher" (LW 26:189). "St. John, St. Paul, St. Peter and the other apostles are reliable and offer us a sure foundation and defense; for it was revealed to them and through the Holy Spirit given to them openly from heaven" (LW 41:58).

Luther considered the Scriptures to be both authoritative and clear. He said: "The authority of God's Word is greater than the capacity of our intellect to grasp it" (L W 36:35). At the same time he said, "The Word of God is perfect; it is precious and pure; it is truth itself" (LW 23:235). "I am content with the meaning and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture" (LW 7:120). The Reformer was equally certain about the infallibility of Scripture. He said: "I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant. Therefore I read all the others, as holy and learned as they may be, with the reservation that I regard their teaching true only if they can prove their statement through Scripture or reason" (LW 41:25). He added: "Human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and the absolutely infallible truth" (LW 1:122). "I have been baptized; I have been absolved of my sins; I have eaten the body and drunk the blood of Christ; I have. the most certain Word of God: He will not lie or deceive me" (LW 6:361).

Luther spoke frequently and with great eloquence about the power of the Word of God. "God existed before the founding of the world. He created everything through the Word. Therefore the Word of God makes and brings everything" (LW 4:386). "If you are armed with the Word Satan has been conquered" (LW 29:20). "This same Word that is preached will exert such a secret power that it will flush throngs of devils out of the heart, the realm where the devil rules so mightily, just as the Elbe carries refuse downstream. He (the Holy Spirit) calls the Word of God a stream advisedly, for it performs so many great acts. It rushes along like a torrent. Such is the effect of Peter's message on Pentecost when with one sermon he drives and washes, as with a stream, approximately 3,000 people from the devil's realm. In one hour he delivered them from death, sin, and devil" (LW 23:274).

Martin Luther was at great pains to make it clear that the church is not in itself a self-contained or independent authority. He said that "Christ rules the church with no other power than his Word" (LW 29:118). "Through his word he rules and ad. ministers his kingdom" (LW 29:13). "The church does not teach itself with its own doctrines, but is taught by God" (LW 29:183). "The church does not constitute the Word, but is constituted by the Word" (LW 36:145).

Luther's work, as he saw it, was “planting the Word, teaching the churches, correcting defects, exhorting to what is right, comforting the weak, and whatever else is called for in the ministry that God has committed to us” (LW 2:171). He responded to critics of his vigorous style by saying: “I myself know very well that I am not worthy of praise. But that I am more cutting and passionate when defending Scripture than some can stand – no one can deny me that, nor do I intend to stop. Let anyone who pleases slander, curse, and judge my person and life – it is already forgiven him. But let no one expect grace or patience from me when he wants to make liars out of the Holy Spirit and my Lord Christ whom I preach. I am not concerned about myself, but I shall defend Christ's Word with a joyful heart and renewed courage without regard to anyone” (LW 39:103).

We may summarize Luther's deep respect for the Holy Scriptures with his own eloquent confession. “The proper honor for the Word is nothing else than a genuine faith from the bottom of one's heart, a faith that holds the Word to be true, that trusts it, and stakes its life upon it for eternity” (LW 36:278f).

Conclusion

We have observed the comprehensive and conclusive internal evidence in the Bible attesting to its divine origin and demonstrating that it is what it says it is, namely, the Word of God. We reject every tendency toward categorizing parts of the Bible under separate heads of relative reliability. A secular author may err in some points and yet write truthfully in others. Inconsistency of that kind is precluded by the Bible's claim that it is the Word of the almighty and omniscient God in heaven. Error or falsehood is ruled out by definition. If the Bible is God's Word no error is possible. It is either truthful from beginning to end or all its parts are equally subject to question.

Holy Scripture is a unitary whole from beginning to end. In essence and by design it is God's offer of salvation to sinners. Every part of it serves this purpose of God. No part of Scripture is either unworthy of the whole or irrelevant to its design and content. Every Word of Holy Scripture is true and is related to the meaning and significance of the whole.

If the story of creation and the fall of man is a myth, then what possible meaning can be attached to the concepts of sin and redemption? If man is the product of an evolutionary process, then when did sin first occur? “When, and under what circumstances, did God first establish his plan of salvation? If the virgin birth is a myth, then the introduction to John's Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” has no meaning. If the miracles of Christ's ministry are to be dismissed as fantasies of Jesus' Palestinian contemporaries, then what credence can we give to the power of the Word of God as it is expressed and effected in the sacraments?

If the story of Jonah is a preposterous fable, then what are we to think of the Words of Jesus Christ who gave credence to that remarkable incident in Jonah's life? Will we accuse the Lord himself of entertaining a fantasy when he said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life?” Fortunately for us God did not leave us an imperfect witness, part truth and part falsehood. He has given us a sure Word that can never be diminished either in its salutary significance or in its absolute integrity.

We have observed that some contemporary churchmen hold the Bible in a kind of pious reverence that does not extend to the view that it is the Word of God in its entirety. Similarly some Lutherans hold the Lutheran Confessions in a form of symbolic regard that does not extend to full acceptance of the biblical doctrines embodied in the *Book of Concord*. Our review of

the Lutheran Confessions has noted that its writers were fully persuaded that Holy Scripture is the Word of God. It was an assumption on which all of 16th century Christendom was in agreement. We emphatically maintain our subscription to the *Book of Concord* and reject every diminution of its symbolic authority and doctrinal validity.

Martin Luther had more than an academic interest in the Word of God. He understood its effect on the lives of believers and therefore could say with all confidence: "A Christian should know that there is nothing more holy on earth than God's Word, for even the sacrament itself is constituted and sanctified and consecrated through God's Word, and all of us have received our spiritual birth from that Word and were consecrated as Christians by it" (LW 36:244).