

## SECOND ESSAY FOR THE SIXTIETH ANNUAL CONVENTION

Delivered by

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**Title: “The Authority of Holy Scripture for Truly Orthodox Practice”**

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In *A Sketch of the Doctrinal Position of the Concordia Lutheran Conference*, we declare the following regarding **THE BIBLE**:

We teach that the Bible is in all its parts and words the Word of God Himself (**Verbal Inspiration**). As such it contains no errors or contradictions, stands forever as the infallible and unchangeable truth, is perfectly clear in and of itself, and contains everything necessary to be known for man's eternal salvation and to train Christians in holy living. The Holy Scriptures are the only source from which all teachings in the Christian Church must be taken, and they are the only standard by which all religious teachings, doctrines and practices are to be judged. (**Bible References:** I Corinthians 2:13; Matthew 5:18; John 10:35, 17:17; Psalm 119:105; II Peter 1:19-21; Luke 16:29-31; II Timothy 3:16-17).

Scripture is the Word of God; and, as such, it has God's authority! *Vox Scriptura, vox Dei* — “the voice of Scripture is the voice of God.” Scripture's authority is ultimately and finally God's authority. The Holy Scripture has divine authority because it is the inerrant Word of the only true God. As the ever faithful and true Word of God, it demands faith and obedience of all human beings. It is and remains the only source and norm (standard) of faith (what we believe) and life (how we are to live). What the living God says to us in His holy Word must be believed and must be obeyed on its own account, simply because the Lord Himself is speaking to us. The authority of the Bible is based on the fact that it is God's own Word; and, therefore, this authority calls for instant and unqualified acceptance of every statement of the Bible on the part of human beings.

Our essay will focus on the *normative authority* of Holy Scripture, namely, that the Bible is the only norm and standard of faith, the divinely ordained arbiter between what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong, what God wills and what God forbids. Dr. J. T. Mueller states in his *Christian Dogmatics*:

By virtue of its normative or canonical authority, Holy Scripture is the only norm of faith and life and therefore also the only judge in all theological controversies. As the

only rule of faith, Scripture performs both a directive and a corrective function; for, on the one hand, it directs the thoughts of the human mind in such a way that they abide within the bounds of truth; and, on the other, it corrects errors, inasmuch as it is the only standard of right and wrong (Hollaz). Calov says very correctly (I, 474): “The Holy Scriptures are a rule according to which all controversies in regard to faith or life in the Church should, and can be, decided, Ps. 19, 7 ; Gal. 6, 16 ; Phil. 3, 16 ; and as a norm they are not partial, but complete and adequate, because besides the Scriptures no other infallible rule in matters of faith and life can be given. All other rules besides the Word of God are fallible; and on this account we are referred to the Holy Scriptures as the only rule, Deut. 4, 2; 12, 28; Josh. 23, 6; Is. 8, 20; Luke 16, 29; 2 Pet. 1, 19, to which alone Christ and the apostles referred as a rule, Matt. 4, 4 ff.; 22, 29, 31; Mark 9, 12; John 5, 45; Acts 3, 20; 18, 28; 26, 22.” (*Doctr. Theol.*, p. 61.) — (John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1934; p. 125).

Dr. Martin Luther once confessed: “The Christian Church is God’s maid and servant. It listens to and does nothing but what it knows to be His Word and command” (Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. I, p. 265, #782). Hence the title of this second essay for our convention:

### **The Authority of Holy Scripture for Truly Orthodox Practice**

All Christians (clergy and laity), must use Holy Scripture as the only source and norm of faith and life. The Bible ascribes to all believers, in clear and express words, the spiritual right and ability to judge all matters of faith and doctrine solely according to Scripture. Our Lord declared, “*It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God*” (John 6:45a). For Christ’s true sheep heed their Good Shepherd’s voice exclusively: “*...The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers*” (John 10:4b-5). The Good Shepherd tells us: “*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me*” (John 10:27). True, that is, orthodox preachers must preach only God’s Word: “*If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God*” (I Peter 4:11a). The hearers are to follow the example of the Bereans, who judged what they heard by God’s Word: “*These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Dr. J. T. Mueller reminds us in his *Christian Dogmatics*:

By adhering to Holy Scripture as the sole source and norm of faith, the true visible Church of Christ on earth proves its orthodox character; in other words, the orthodox Church of Christ on earth is found only where Holy Scripture is obeyed and followed in all questions of faith and life. It was for this reason that Luther so earnestly emphasized the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* as the formal principle of the Reformation and that today the confessional Lutheran Church insists upon this doctrine with the same determination. As soon as a Church, either in theory or in practice, rejects the authority of Scripture... it ceases to be orthodox and becomes heterodox, that is to say, an erring Church, or a sect. (Mueller, *op. cit.*, p. 127).

Our essay focuses upon truly orthodox **practice**. It behooves us, therefore, to be reminded, on the basis of clear Scripture, what orthodoxy truly involves. Under the section on **FELLOWSHIP** in *A Sketch of the Doctrinal Position of the Concordia Lutheran Conference*, we read:

We teach that, inasmuch as God has ordained that the Holy Scriptures be the only source and standard (norm) of Christian doctrine and practice, every Christian should carefully *distinguish* between ORTHODOX and HETERODOX churches, their teachers and their followers (Romans 16:17a; I John 4:1), and to *avoid* the heterodox as dangerous to their very souls (Romans 16:17b; Matthew 7:15; Titus 3:10).

*Orthodox* churches and church-bodies are those which teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution, and consistently apply the pure doctrines of Scripture, not only in word but in *deed*—not only in theory but in *practice*. (Note that Practice must not be confused with the Christian's personal life of sanctification.) Official PRACTICE, that is, the application of God's Word in our congregations, must BE in conformity with sound doctrine, if it is not to deny what is taught. The Christian's life must of course be BROUGHT into harmony with God's Word, but this sanctification is a gradual process and unable perfectly to be achieved here on earth. If doctrine is to be sound, practice must be sound to the same degree; or else a mockery is made of Christian orthodoxy and of the Lord's Word through Paul in I Corinthians 1:10.

Congregations and church-bodies in which false doctrine is persistently taught from the pulpit, in the classroom, and in official publications, as well as those which tolerate false doctrine and/or practice to stand side-by-side with the truth, are heterodox bodies. When false doctrine and practice rears its ugly head in an orthodox body, it must be actively combated and removed without long and dangerous delay if the body is to *remain* orthodox. True Christian unity is based upon PERFECT AGREEMENT AND ONEMINDEDNESS IN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE (Amos 3:3; John 8:31,32; Ephesians 4:3; I Corinthians 1:10).

Without the proper **doctrine** (teaching), there can be no proper **practice**. But orthodox doctrine must be *applied* to life and cannot remain only a set of abstract principles without concrete real-world application. This fact is clearly brought out in the following text: "*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*" (II Timothy 3:16–17). Consider the "profitability" of God's Word, the Holy Scriptures. The text tells us that profitability is not restricted to doctrine but extends to the application of doctrine to life as to reprove, correct and instruct in righteousness. We will shortly discuss each of these specifically. Moreover, the Scriptures used in these God-ordained, profitable ways, enable a Christian to "*be perfect*" or complete, "*thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" The Bible is *all* that is needed for orthodoxy in teaching *and* practice, in principle and application, for faith and life! In Holy Scripture we have "*all things that pertain unto life and Godliness*" (II Peter 1:3b) and that are needed "*earnestly [to] contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*" (Jude 3b). Since the Bible is all we need, we dare not add or subtract from what it declares to us (cf. Revelation 22:18-19). Augustine once stated, "In those teachings which are clearly based on Scripture are found *all* that concerns faith and the conduct of life" (emphasis mine—E. J. W.) (Portion selected).

The doctrine of Holy Scripture also provides all the "*reproof*" we need. The Truth of God stands against all that is false and so exposes and refutes everything contrary to the Truth. God's Word is Truth and all believers know the Truth by God-wrought faith in the same (John 17:17, 8:31-32). Everything that is not God's Truth is reprov'd — exposed and refuted by God's Word. Therefore, the Psalmist declares, "*Therefore I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way*" (Psalm 119:128). Enlightened to accept Holy Scripture as it is in truth God's Word (I Thessalonians 2:13), we are also warned by Scripture, on a daily basis, that we may recognize all that is false and obey this admonition concerning Christian warfare: "*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (II Corinthians 10:5). One chief example of "*reproof*" in exposing the proud lies of the sinful flesh is the exposure of man's delusion of righteousness before God and man's arrogant impenitence. The Bible reprov's man of sin: "*But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have*

*fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us” (I John 1:7, 10). In application to truly orthodox practice, Scripture exposes and refutes all false practice, everything which does not follow orthodox principles. A blatant example of this is found in the Apostle Paul reproving the Apostle Peter’s false practice, as Paul relates to us in Galatians 2: “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, ‘If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor” (Galatians 2:11-18). Mark well the phrase “they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel.” Here is an excellent proof-text for the real-world use of Scripture to reprove as the standard for *walking uprightly* or according to truly orthodox *practice*. Holy Scripture is all we need to expose and refute all false practice because it provides the complete standard for orthodoxy.*

The doctrine of Holy Scripture provides all we need for “*correction.*” This word refers to a return to uprightness or the right state, the correct life. As the previous word exposed and refuted all that is opposed to what is correct and right, this term is the positive aspect of restoring the correct action. God’s Word provides all we need to correct the course of life when we are reproved for being off course! It is more than the compass pointing us in the correct direction, it also empowers us, by the grace of the Gospel, both to will and to do the right thing, to go the right way, to do of God’s good pleasure (cf. Philippians 2:13). As it is written, “*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (I Thessalonians 2:13). Yes, God’s Word effectually works in us to think, say and do the correct and upright thing! In application to truly orthodox practice Scripture “restores to the orthodox state” by telling us the correct practice and empowering us, in Gospel grace, to do it! After the Apostle Paul reproved the Apostle Peter for false practice, he also gave him the correction he needed by these restoring words: “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law; for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified*” (Galatians 2:16). The Gospel enables us to correct our course and to walk uprightly in orthodox practice.

The doctrine of Holy Scripture provides all we need for “*instruction in righteousness.*” This refers to our Christian education as children of God. The Bible trains and disciplines us in all righteous living. The concrete, real life application of what Scripture says to how we think, speak and conduct ourselves in this life is what “*instruction in righteousness*” is all about. The authority of Scripture requires us to apply the Bible’s principles to every situation in life. Consider the connection between heart and life, attitude and action, expressed by these simple, yet sublime, words of our Lord to His disciples and to us: “*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*” (John 13:17). Our Lord begins with a condition of reality, “*if ye know these*

*things.*” He assumes they know these things, for He has taught them to them. Even so, we know what we need to know for righteous living from God’s Word. But, we are to translate that knowledge into action, for the blessing of God-given joy and satisfaction comes from *doing* them. The action is *continuous*: you are blessed if you *keep doing* what you know! Righteous living is to be continuous: we are to serve Him by an active Christian life, enabled by Gospel grace to “*serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life*” (Luke 1:74b-75). As Christians are instructed in righteousness by God’s Word, they grow up and come to full age as those “*who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*” (Hebrews 5:14). Such instruction in righteousness, along with everything else the Scripture provides (doctrine, reproof and correction), enables a Christian to be complete, “*thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (II Timothy 3:17). Thus, the Bible is all that is needed for truly orthodox practice. Each successive generation of teachers are commanded to deliver the same Word of God to the people. As Paul told Timothy, “*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*” (II Timothy 2:2).

Our Lord Jesus Christ set the perfect example for us in His use of Holy Scripture. He demonstrated the absolute authority of God’s Word for faith and practice. It is beyond the scope of this short essay to cite every such demonstration, but one in particular shall be cited for our edification. In Matthew 4 we have recorded the temptation of our Lord by Satan. How the Lord met each temptation with the authority of God’s Word is obvious, as He declares “*It is written*” over and over again (cf. Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Our Savior overcomes the devil with the Sword of the Spirit, God’s Word, every single time. In so doing, He also clearly declares the absolute authority of God’s Word for us, giving us the perfect example of using God’s Word, the Holy Scripture, for truly orthodox practice in our daily lives. Of course, our Savior came to fulfill the Scripture as God’s Christ (cf. Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 24:44), and used Scripture alone to teach (cf. Mark 12:29-30; cp. Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 9:13, cp. Exodus 3:6; Matthew 22:42-45, cp. Psalm 110:1, *et al.*). Our Lord Christ also pointed out how doctrinal error is the result of “*not knowing the Scriptures*” (Matthew 22:29; Mark 12:24). He declares God’s Word to be inerrant (cf. John 10:35). He directs all to “*search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39). He declares God’s Word to be the source of all Truth (cf. John 8:31-32, 17:17). He tells everyone that those who reject what He says are judged by Holy Scripture (cf. John 5:45-47). In short, everything our Savior said and did set the perfect example for us regarding the authority of Holy Scripture for doctrine and practice.

The proper Christian attitude regarding the authority of the Bible for doctrine and practice is expressed by the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Hallowed be Thy Name.” Dr. Luther explains: “*What does this meant? God’s name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also. How is this done? [God’s name is hallowed] when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead a holy life according to it. This grant us, dear Father in heaven. But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God’s Word teaches, profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father.*” The holy life we are to lead according to the Word of God covers thoughts, desires, words and deeds. Regarding our inner thought-life, Scripture exhorts: “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*” (Philippians 4:8). Regarding our words and speech Scripture enjoins: “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*” (Ephesians 4:29). Regarding our actions St. Paul urges: “*Those things, which ye have both*

*learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you”* (Philippians 4:9). In general, the Lord admonishes us: *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). The connection to the Word of God and Godly behavior is seen in this admonition: *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him”* (Colossians 3:16-17). The authority of Holy Scripture, as it relates to our practice, is seen, for example, in setting the proper spiritual priorities (cp. Matthew 6:33 to Luke 10:38-42), submission of the hearers of God’s Word to the teachers of God’s Word in all Godly obedience (cf. I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17), and the example set by pastors (cf. I Peter 5:2-3). The Scripture shows us all how to walk: *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path”* (Psalm 119:105). Dr. Martin Luther remarks, “We are truly sticking in the midst of night and in the densest darkness if that morning star does not send forth its light of which it is said: ‘Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path’ (Ps. 119:105). For if we do not have Holy Scripture to shed light on our actions and to direct them, then this entire life and all the light of reason, yea, and all the wisdom and advice of men are mere darkness and confusion.” (*What Luther Says*, Vol. II, p. 788). How the Scripture directs our practice to be orthodox is seen in our doctrinal position in the Concordia Lutheran Conference. One has only to peruse our position on such practical matters as fellowship, woman suffrage in the church, method of financing the Lord’s work, support of the ministry, lodges, scouting and other organizations and modern social dancing to see how we use orthodox principles to follow orthodox practice.

The Concordia Lutheran Conference stands in marked contrast to other religious bodies who have given up the authority of Holy Scripture in doctrine and practice. Some groups deny that Holy Scripture is God’s Word, while others limit the nature and scope of inspiration, thereby eliminating entirely or limiting the authority of Scripture. Other groups are under the influence of other “authorities” (Pope, reason, rationalism, enthusiasm, *et al.*). Still other groups restrict the application of the authority of Scripture, especially when the popular opinion desires something other than what God’s Word teaches. A desire to please the people, and a fear of losing members, is often at the heart of such behavior. This was evident in our recent “Modern Dance” controversy. Many groups believe that the Bible may be interpreted many ways (contrary to II Peter 1:20), and teach that the Bible is unclear. This, of course, undermines the authority of the Bible entirely. Rather than being able to say “What saith the Scriptures?” these groups are content to allow for many interpretations, as if the question were “What saith the Scriptures *to you?*” as if each verse had a subjective interpretation. In general, the authority of Holy Scripture is largely ignored by the religious bodies of our present age.

In the last two verses of Ecclesiastes we read: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). The very fact that God has given us an all-sufficient standard for faith and life and will judge accordingly, should make it obvious to all that Holy Scriptures must be believed and applied as divinely authoritative. The Holy Scriptures are given to us for the chief purpose of our eternal salvation. The Apostle reminds Timothy, *“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and 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”* (II Timothy 3:14-15). The authority of Holy Scripture for faith goes hand in hand with the fact that Holy Scripture is sufficient for salvation. Only God reveals how we sinners can enjoy eternal fellowship with Him in heaven. He does so

in His Word, the revealed knowledge of God. He gives us His saving Gospel therein! Certainty of salvation is based on what God, who cannot lie, promises us in His Word! In Holy Scripture we have God's promise and oath: "*That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast*" (Hebrews 6:18-19b). Dr. Martin Luther remarks, "Whatever does not come from Scripture is certainly of the devil himself. All that God has done, particularly all that pertains to our salvation, is clearly put down and noted in Scripture so that no one may excuse himself." (*What Luther Says*, Vol. I, p. 84). Remember that Satan knew where to attack in the garden. He *questioned* the very authority of God's Word only to *deny* it (cf. Genesis 3:1, 4). To this day, Satan does all he can to attack the divine authority of Holy Scripture. He has been successful in the case of many individuals, congregations and church bodies. His true goal is to take away the certainty of our salvation. God, on the other hand, wants us certain of our salvation in Christ and so preserves His authoritative Word throughout history (cf. Matthew 24:35) and in our midst that we sinners be "...*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away; but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the Word which by the Gospel is preached unto you*" (I Peter 1:23-25). What is that Gospel? "*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*" (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Our salvation was wrought in history by our Savior "*according to the Scriptures.*" Even so, the certainty, thereof, is "*according to the Scriptures.*"

God ever grant us Gospel faith, through the Holy Scriptures, the only source and norm for truly orthodox Christian faith and truly orthodox practice!

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

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