

# POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE STATEMENTS ON CONTROVERTED ISSUES ARISING FROM “THE THEOLOGY OF THE WORD”

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## Introduction

This paper in your hands is an EXPLORATORY PAPER ONLY. It is not and is not intended to be a final statement on the part of the author on the issues in controversy concerning the Word of God. It is neither finished nor complete intensively or extensively, in quality or in quantity. But it is intended merely to set down on paper some thoughts from which it is hoped that we might be able more clearly to arrive at precise issues of controversy.

The form of the statements set out here is modelled after the Formula of Concord, not because it is naively hoped that these shall become confessions of the church, but because it is felt that the writers of the Formula of Concord in their situation of conflict and controversy in their church saw very clearly that for a settlement of the controverted issues it was necessary above all to have complete openness and clarity. With their insight into human nature they saw very clearly that this could not be achieved by secrecy and charity but only by clearly set out condemnations as well as affirmations. Positive affirmations are necessary to present a position, but negative condemnations of opposing positions are of vital importance to “smoke out the foxes” and to make men honest. If both the negative and the positive statements are accepted then there is agreement. If the positive statements but not the negative statements are accepted then there is no agreement or the matter has been poorly defined.

This is not a secret document, even though it has a very limited purpose, because it is the firm conviction of the present writer that only harm to the unity of the church can be done by secrecy, rather, the way out of our present controversy will be through complete frankness, openness and honesty in a public forum of discussion with all having the humility to retract and to repudiate what they have said if, in the light of God’s Word, they are shown to be in error. Under God we seek unity in His truth.

## I. DIVINE INSPIRATION

We believe that the nature, meaning, and extent of divine inspiration is in controversy among us. This is evident from the fact that while some of us gladly accept the divine inspiration of every word of the canonical Scriptures as having come by the unique working of the Holy Spirit yet others speak disparagingly of such a view of inspiration as being a “Jewish medieval and unbiblical concept” and talking as if inspiration somehow can have no bearing on Biblical authority, indeed, as if inspiration plays no decisive role in our view of Holy Scripture at all.

### *The Point of Controversy*

The point of controversy among us is not that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God, but rather the nature, meaning, extent and implications of divine inspiration.

### AFFIRMATION

1. We believe, teach and confess that every word of the canonical Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired word of God. The Holy Scriptures as a whole and in all single passages and in every word is inspired (Theses VIII, 7.)
2. We declare that by such inspiration we mean that the Holy Spirit of God Himself in some way breathed into the sacred writers (theopneustos 2 Timothy 3:16) the very words which they wrote, so that by this action of the Holy Spirit the very thoughts and words which they committed to writing (graphie) are in fact God’s very own words as if they had fallen from the lips of God Himself (Apology IV; 107-108 Trig.p.153). Divine inspiration affirms divine origin. Scripture is God’s Word because it was given by God.
3. We believe that the Holy Spirit’s act of inspiration was a *unique* action, that is one which is different from what is implied by other usages of the term inspiration today (Theses VIII 6.)

4. While it may be correctly said that the Word of God is inspiring, meaning that it touches and uplifts us today with God's Spirit, yet this is not what we confess by the term "divine inspiration". We confess rather that God is the author of that unique action of inspiration by which He gave His Words to and through men for us all.
5. We believe that in this act of inspiration God did not suppress the individual personality of his sacred writers, but rather he made use of their individual styles and personality.

Sometimes God spoke directly through the prophets in such a way that they themselves were not conscious of the full implications of what they wrote (1 Peter 1: 10-12. Revelation 1:11, etc). At other times God used the careful research of the sacred writers. We do not presume to analyse and precisely to set out how and in what manner God caused the Holy men of God (2 Peter 1:19ff) to write His Word. That miracle, as all others, is a mystery to us.

We do insist, however, that the product, the written material that resulted from this unique action of inspiration (pasa graphe 2 Timothy 3:16) is that which God breathed (theopneustos 2 Timothy 3:16. Theses of Agreement VIII 6) meaning that it came from God Himself, and is therefore His Word (ibid.)

6. We affirm, therefore, that inspiration in its proper and original sense concerned the original writings of the sacred Scriptures and not inaccurate copies or translations of Holy Scripture. (Theses VIII, 10.)
7. We confess that the copies of the original manuscripts and the translations of these copies into other languages are "inspired" in a secondary sense in so far as and to the extent that they are faithful to the original autograph manuscripts. For this reason the work of textual criticism and evaluation, as well as accuracy of translation is of great theological importance to the church and not merely of archaeological interest.
8. We believe that it is proper and in accord with the teaching of Holy Scripture to speak of the Holy Spirit giving a divine impulse to write (2 Peter 1:19ff) and that He suggested the very words and ideas which they were to write so that what was written by such inspiration must be said to be God's own Word. (Theses VIII, 7. see passages there).
9. We believe therefore that Holy Scripture is God's Word because by inspiration God gave the words of Scripture.

#### REJECTION

1. We reject and condemn as contrary to sound doctrine every suggestion that only some and not all parts of Holy Scripture are inspired, or that the main and central thrust of Scripture, the Gospel, is inspired but not every detail of what the Scriptures teach in historical, geographical and other earthly matters. (John 3:12).
2. We reject and condemn as contrary to sound doctrine the suggestion that Holy Scripture is inspired *not* in the sense that God breathed His Word through the holy writers (theopneustos) *but* in the sense that the Word of God breathes or radiates the Spirit of God or is otherwise filled with God's Spirit. (Theses VIII, 6.)
3. We reject and condemn all attempts to put the inspiration of Holy Scripture on the same level with the "inspiration" of words of art today, as if the inspiration of Holy Scripture were not the *unique* action of God. (Theses VIII, 6)
4. We reject and condemn all purely mechanical explanations of divine inspiration as if God simply used the sacred writers as unconscious and impersonal typewriters or machines so that he did not make use of their personality or individual styles and manners. This destroys the humanity of Scripture. We reject, however, any suggestion that it was the persons, rather than the writings (graphe) that were the subjects of inspiration.

5. We reject the use of the term “inspiration” when applied to defective copies and/or translations of the Scriptures when it is asserted that they are inspired in the same sense and to the same extent as the original manuscripts.
6. We reject attempts to point to the origin of the concept of inspiration among the Greek and Jewish secular and pagan writers as if this were the source of the Christian concept of inspiration, denying that inspiration of Holy Scripture was a unique act of God (Theses VIII, 6.) We reject and condemn the suggestion that Christ and His apostles simply took over pagan and Jewish and unbiblical views of inspiration which were unworthy and inadequate. (c.f. Genesis 1-3 Doctrinal statement. rejection d. –B2 bot.)
7. We reject and condemn all new definitions of the term “inspiration” which would highlight not the divine origin of Holy Scripture as the Word of God but rather its power or present action and witness to Christ.
8. We reject the use of 1 Corinthians 12:3: “No one can say that Jesus is the Lord except by the Holy Spirit” as an adequate seat of doctrine (sedes doctrinae) for the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture because it makes no distinction between our saying “Jesus is the Lord” today and the UNIQUE action of the Holy Spirit by which the Holy men of God spoke and wrote the Word of God by divine inspiration in the composition of Holy Scripture. (Theses VIII, 6.)
9. We reject and condemn the statement that Holy Scripture is God’s Word BECAUSE it presents Christ if this is intended to convey the notion that the Gospel content of any statement of Scripture is that which makes it the Word of God. Such a position rests upon the false presupposition that God can or does speak only the Gospel to us, whereas in reality, of course, anything and everything that God says, regardless of the subject matter on which He speaks, is the word of God.

## II. THE MEANING OF INERRANCY

We have observed that the meaning of biblical inerrancy is an issue in controversy among us. The evidence for this is that while one side happily uses the term “inerrancy” as applying to all the words of Holy Scripture in its normal sense, yet the other side appears to be very reluctant to use the term “inerrancy” in a completely unequivocal sense and without some explanation and even re-definition.

### *The Point of Controversy*

It is not in dispute among us that the Holy Scriptures are “inerrant” but the point of the dispute relates to the meaning of this term when applied to the Scriptures, especially in view of the human side of Scripture. Does it mean that every word of Holy Scripture is “inerrant” in the normal sense of that word as freedom from all real errors and contradictions in theology and in matters of fact in all matters – including earthly matters – of which it speaks? Or must it mean something else in view of the obvious humanity of Scripture?

### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe, teach and confess that every word of Holy Scripture, both from the point of view of its human as well as from the point of view of its divine side, is infallible and inerrant in the sense that it contains no real errors and contradictions in any matters of which it teaches.
2. We confess the inerrancy of Holy Scripture understanding that term in its normal and proper sense of freedom from all error and contradiction and mistakes, factual as well as theological, in all matters of which it treats: moral, spiritual, theological, ethical, historical, geographical or other earthly matters, whether it is related to Law or Gospel. (1972 Statement par.1. B1)
3. We believe that this infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture is a matter of faith, that is we believe it because the Holy Scriptures themselves teach this (ibid.). We believe that we are not under any obligation, therefore, to prove the inerrancy of Holy Scripture by demonstrating how passages that seem to be contradictory can be harmoniously fitted together. If persons wish to present such harmonisations of difficult passages they are at liberty to do so, and their efforts may be very useful to set forth more clearly the

meaning of Scripture. However we believe in biblical inerrancy, before and without such harmonisations, with a faith that rests upon the Scripture teaching rather than upon such rational demonstration (1972 Statement on Inerrancy par.1.). In the same way we believe in the real presence without an inspection of the wafers.

4. While we acknowledge that there are many problems in the Holy Scriptures which, on the surface, to our reason, may appear to contradict our confession of Biblical inerrancy, yet we believe that the Holy Scripture's own testimony about itself requires us to believe that this is not really so. We believe that what may seem to be in error or in contradiction with other passages of Holy Scripture is, in fact, "not really so" (Statement on Inerrancy par.2.) Were we to have full access to all the details of the historical circumstances we would see that, what seems to us now to be contradictory, separated as we are from the historical events by thousands of years, would indeed be seen now, as it was then, to fit together perfectly well and harmoniously without error or contradiction.
5. We confess the inerrancy of Holy Scripture as given by the Holy Spirit through the sacred writers themselves in the original manuscripts. That copyists later inadvertently or deliberately introduced variant readings and so also errors into later copies is obvious. The term "inerrancy" is not intended to apply to such variant readings. This does not mean, however, that since the original autograph manuscripts have been lost that therefore biblical inerrancy is of no value to us now. The science of textual criticism and evaluation has enabled us to be almost certain what the original text was in all but a very few areas. Self-evidently even translations that are faithful to an inerrant text are more faithful to the original and so more authoritative than translations that are faithful to a corrupted text (e.g., the Vulgate).

#### REJECTION

1. We reject and condemn all attempts to define the term "infallibility" and "inerrancy" in such a way that is not consistent with the normal usage of these terms as "freedom from all error and contradiction in matters of fact or of theology" (1972 Statement). In particular we reject and condemn such an understanding of biblical inerrancy that implies merely the "oneness of thrust" found in the Scriptures towards Christ.
2. We reject and condemn any insistence upon harmonisation of difficult passages when it is intended thereby that our faith in the inerrancy of Scripture depends upon such rational harmonisation rather than upon the teaching of Holy Scripture itself.
3. We reject and condemn also the slighting remarks that have frequently been made against genuine efforts at harmonisation of difficult passages as if that were somehow an illegitimate exercise, or as if it were much better and honest to allow what appears on the surface to be errors and contradictions to seem to be real and genuine errors and irreconcilable contradictions rather than to show that "it is not really so" (Inerrancy statement par.2.). It is dishonest to show a contempt and disdain for all efforts at harmonisation while professing to believe in biblical "inerrancy".
4. We reject and condemn all slighting remarks made against Biblical inerrancy which would suggest that because it concerns only the autograph manuscripts which have been lost, therefore such inerrancy is of no value to us today.
5. We reject and condemn also any and all attempts to confine the infallibility and inerrancy of Holy Scripture to the Gospel thrust or central teaching of God's Word, and so to exempt the details of history and other earthly matters from such inerrancy, as if Scripture could err when teaching peripheral matters.

#### III. THE HUMAN SIDE OF SCRIPTURE

We believe that a matter in which there is either a considerable degree of confusion and misunderstanding, or else genuine controversy among us is the human side of Scripture.

This is evidenced by the fact that one side speaks of efforts at harmonisation of seemingly contradictory passages of Holy Scripture as if that somehow “wipes out” the human side of Scripture, while the other side feels no threat whatever against the human side of Scripture in such efforts at harmonisation.

### *The Point of Controversy*

We are all agreed that there is a human as well as a divine side of Holy Scripture. Every Word of Scripture is at the same time both human and divine (Theses VIII, 9.). But the precise point of the controversy in this issue is whether the natural limitations of the human mind specifically the human ability to err and to make mistakes came through the human side of Scripture into the sacred written text.

### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe, teach and confess that it is of the utmost importance for a sound view of the Holy Scriptures that every word of Scripture should be seen to be both human and divine, the Word of God in and through the words of men, and that no attempt dare be made to distinguish and separate the word of men from the Word of God in Holy Scripture.
2. For this reason it must be acknowledged that in each and every part of Holy Scripture whatever is said about the human side is said also about the divine side of Scripture and vice versa.
3. We believe teach and confess, therefore, that when Holy Scripture ascribes to itself the attributes of perfection, authority, sufficiency and inerrancy etc (see Theses VIII, 10.) these qualities apply not only to the divine side of Holy Scripture, but also to the human side. (ibid. “... None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible of the inerrancy of the Word of God”).

### *REJECTION*

1. We reject and condemn as false and as a denial of the true doctrine of Holy Scripture when it is taught that some passages of Holy Scripture are divine and some parts are human.
2. We reject and condemn in the same way every suggestion that while such attributes as perfection, holiness, infallibility, truthfulness and inerrancy may be properly ascribed to the Bible because it is the Word of God, yet, because it is a human book, with obvious human features, these attributes of perfection truth and inerrancy, etc, must mean something else than what these terms ordinarily imply.
3. We reject as a false and dangerous error every suggestion that the human fallibility and errancy of the holy writers actually came through into the writing (graphe 2 Timothy 3:16) of the Holy Scriptures in such a way as to undermine the complete inerrancy of any word of Holy Scripture with the result that the written word is subject to errors and contradictions either factual or theological (Inerrancy Statement. par.1.)
4. We reject as contrary to sound teaching and appropriate presentation any tendency of theologians to emphasise the human sinfulness, fallibility and errancy of the sacred writers in connection with their writing of Holy Scripture. The Scriptures themselves and the Lutheran Confessions on the contrary emphasise rather the holiness of the writers and their following God’s will as they wrote and spoke the words of God (2 Peter 1:19ff).
5. We reject and condemn all disparaging and contemptuous remarks made by theologians against those who have attempted to offer harmonisations of seemingly contradictory passages of Holy Scripture as if this were an illegitimate exercise in itself unworthy of a Christian theologian and as if it were better that people should be left with the impression that seeming contradictions and seeming errors in the Scriptures are not merely *seeming* errors at all but real errors and irreconcilable contradictions or mistakes “that cannot be argued away”.

6. We reject and condemn as uncharitable and erroneous all statements by which those who ascribe to the perfection, infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures are held to be motivated by a kind of millennialistic desire for a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross or a desire to be faithful to God's truth.
7. In the analogy which compares Scripture as the Word of God – divine and human – with Christ as the Word of God – divine and human – we reject any suggestion that the humanity of Christ implied the sinfulness of His human nature or that, by analogy, the humanity of Scripture implies the errancy and fallibility of its writings. This is based upon the false assumption that sin and error are an essential part of human nature itself rather than a corruption of the human nature.

#### IV. THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

That the Holy Scriptures have divine authority is not in dispute among us. But on the issue of Why it has authority? or Wherein lies its authority? there is considerable controversy. This is evident from the fact some are asserting that it is the Gospel content that gives to Scripture its divine authority while others say that it is the fact that God gave His Word to us by divine inspiration that accounts for its authority. In the practical situation we have found that the quoting of Scripture passages to prove a particular point is rejected by some as illicit since to separate the passages from their gospel context leaves them without authority. Again some ask the question: How does this affect the Gospel?" or "How does this relate to the Gospel?" and unless some direct connection can be shown the matter is regarded as unimportant and not involving biblical authority.

##### *The Point of Controversy*

The central issue in this controversy is Wherein lies the authority of Scripture? Why has it authority? and What is the extent of Biblical authority?

##### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe, teach and confess that the canonical Holy Scriptures derive their authority – that is their right or capacity to require and to enforce obedience, to command or to give final and ultimate decision and judgement – from the fact that they are God's own Word, because God is the ultimate author of the words of Holy Scripture. (Theses VIII, 6. 10. 1.)
2. We believe, teach and confess that every part of the Holy Scripture, regardless of what subject it may be speaking on, possesses the same divine authority because it is God's Word. (Theses VIII, 7.)
3. We declare, therefore, that to be disobedient to Holy Scripture either in not obeying its commands or in not accepting its teaching as the final arbiter on all matters of which it speaks, is the same thing as being disobedient to the very words of the Triune God Himself.
4. We uphold the authority of God's Word in every part and passage of Scripture so that, provided that passages are not quoted out of context or their meaning twisted, they may be quoted as "proof-texts" which bring to bear the divine authority of God Himself upon a specific matter. This was the practice of Christ and the apostles, of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions and also of our Theses of Agreement as everybody knows. In fact the Lutheran Confessions regard it as "rash" or as "extreme impudence" to affirm something that passages of Scripture do not say or without proof from Scripture passages. (c.f. Apology XXIII, 63. XII, 138. XXVII, 23. XXI, 10. XII, 157.)
5. We believe that because the one ultimate author, God, inspired the whole of Scripture in all its parts and words (Theses VIII, 7.) therefore it will present a consistent theological position with divine authority.

##### *REJECTION*

1. We reject and condemn as an overturning of the Lutheran Sola Scriptura principle any suggestion that the Holy Scripture derives its normative authority for us today – that is its right to require obedience and to give

final and binding judgement and decision – from its Gospel content or from the fact that its general thrust is to preach the grace of God.

2. We reject and condemn as confusion and a misunderstanding of the principle of Scriptural authority when it is said that some passages of the Old and the New Testaments have no authority for the Christians today because they have little or no gospel thrust, or because they speak of God's commands to the Jews or others.
3. We reject and condemn any fragmenting of Scriptural authority with the assertion that whatever is less clearly Gospel somehow has less authority for us today, or that only the Gospel is of normative authority so that to establish the authority of any passage of Scripture it is necessary first of all to demonstrate its relevance to the Gospel.
4. We reject also any suggestion that individual passages of Scripture should not be quoted as "proof texts" bearing divine authority of Gods Words on any particular issue – even though they are not taken out of context or given a distorted meaning – since they are authoritative only in the context of the total witness of the Gospel.
5. We reject and condemn any approach to the Scriptures which regards them as historically conditioned human writings which contain diverse and conflicting theologies from which no absolutely reliable historical information or permanently valid doctrine can be derived.

## V. THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MATERIAL AND THE FORMAL PRINCIPLES

We all agree that there is a Formal and a Material Principle in Biblical Lutheran theology. The Formal Principle refers to the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. The Material Principle denotes Christ, or the Gospel as the central message of Scripture and the Christian faith.

The evidence, however, that there is conflict of understanding on the relationship between these two principles is that some are speaking in such a way as to imply that the authority of Holy Scripture is limited by the Gospel Content of Holy Scripture, or its thrust towards Christ, while others see this as the sacrifice of the Formal Principle to the Material Principle, or Gospel Reductionism. On the other hand when some assert that Scripture is authoritative because it is the inspired Word of God and not just because of its Gospel content they are accused of Biblicism or sacrificing the Material Principle to the Formal Principle.

### *The Point of Controversy*

The disagreement in this matter is about the precise relationship of the Formal and the Material Principles to each other or, how to relate them in such a way that they are not brought into conflict with each other.

### **AFFIRMATION**

1. We believe, teach and confess that true Biblical theology recognises two major principles in its approach to the authority to which man must bow in his understanding of the Word of God. The Formal Principle refers to the authority of the Holy Scriptures as God's Word quite apart from what the Scriptures may say or teach at any point. We understand authority, here, as the right and capacity to command obedience and subjection to its final judgement or decision. The Material Principle refers to Christ and the Gospel of justification for Christ's sake through faith as the very heart and central message of God's revelation in the Scriptures.
2. We believe, teach and confess that these two principles affirm and support each other so that they dare not be brought into opposition against each other. Whatever is firmly founded in the Scriptures cannot possibly negate or undermine the Gospel in any way, and whatever is truly genuinely of the Gospel cannot undermine or negate anything that is truly Scriptural.
3. We believe, teach and confess that only by faith in the Gospel can we really come to accept the Scriptures as the very Word of God and rightly understand it (Theses VIII, 5.) so that it may be said that in this sense faith in the Material Principle, the Gospel, precedes faith in the Formal Principle (the Scriptures). The Gospel is the

cause of our faith in the Scriptures. This is sometimes referred to as the causitive authority of the Material Principle. Accordingly our view of the Bible is the result of our faith in the Gospel. Our *faith* in the Gospel (not our understanding of it) is not a result of our view of the Bible.

4. We believe, teach and confess that the *truth* of the Gospel is not “proved” by the Scriptures. By this we mean that the Gospel was prior to the Scriptures so that its truth is not dependent upon its being revealed to us in the Scriptures.
5. We believe, teach and confess, however, that we today can know what is the true Gospel (Material principle) only from God’s revelation of it in the Holy Scriptures. For us today, therefore, the Scriptures are the norm of the Gospel so that views about the Gospel must be proved only from the Holy Scriptures. For us today, therefore, the Formal Principle is the authority for the Material Principle. Any view of the Gospel (the Material Principle) which is not established by the authority of Holy Scripture (the Formal Principle) is not the one, true and only Gospel, but it is a false Gospel cursed by God. To us, then, the Material Principle is derived from the Formal Principle, we cannot affirm the former except on the authority of the latter.
6. We believe, teach and confess that the Gospel (Material Principle) has normative authority *in* the Scriptures. By that we mean that no passage of the canonical scriptures dare be interpreted in such a way as to bring it into conflict with the Gospel (the analogy of faith). Scripture cannot be in conflict with Christ or with the chief article of the Christian faith. The Material Principle is a negative principle of interpretation it tells us how a passage may *not* be understood.
7. We believe, teach and confess that as the Church proves the correctness of its Gospel teaching from the Scriptures alone (Formal Principle), so also it proves the correctness of all other teachings from the Scripture alone and not, somehow, from the Gospel. (Theses VIII, 1.). In other words the Formal Principle and not the Material Principle is the sole rule, norm and standard according to which all teachings together with all teachers in the church should be estimated and judged. (Theses I, 2. VIII, 1.). As God’s inspired Word the Holy Scriptures are God’s authoritative rule and norm of all that His Church teaches and does in His name.
8. When we declare that the Scripture (Formal Principle) is the norm or authority of the Gospel (Material Principle) we mean simply that the content of the Gospel and the terms in which this Gospel is to be expressed must be taken from the Holy Scriptures. The Gospel is the effective power (causitive authority) that begets faith in the Saviour (*fides qua creditur*), but the Scriptures are the authority (normative authority) that establishes and regulates the statement and confession of the Christian faith (*fides quae creditur*).

#### REJECTION

1. We reject and condemn any and every attempt to bring the Formal and Material Principles into conflict or in any way to undermine and negate the one with the other by employing them outside of their proper God-given roles making the Material Principle into a Formal Principle or the Formal Principle into a Material Principle.
  - a. This is done when it is held that we must first accept Holy Scripture as God’s inspired and inerrant Word and that then, as a logical consequence of this, we will accept Christ as our Saviour. (this makes the Formal Principle into a Material Principle.)
  - b. This is done when the Material Principle is used as a principle of interpretation over the Scriptures in such a way that it determines not only negatively what a passage cannot mean (that it cannot be contrary to the Gospel), but also positively what a passage must mean, so that the Gospel may abrogate all law or alter God’s immutable will to become something else under “the freedom of the Gospel”. (This makes the Material Principle into a Formal Principle).
  - c. This is done also when the normative authority of the Scriptures is made to be dependent upon the Gospel, so that the Gospel becomes the norm of all theology, as if all other teachings of Scripture are to be in some way derived from the Gospel, hinge upon it, or are to be established and validated by it. (This again makes the Gospel or the Material Principle into a Formal Principle.) (Theses VIII, 1.)

2. We reject and condemn also every attempt of theologians today to use the Gospel as a kind of “test for canonicity” of passages or books within the historically accepted canon of the Scriptures, the homolegoumena (the books which were generally and immediately accepted into the canon of the Scriptures). The Gospel, (The Material Principle) is a principle of interpretation within the Canon not a test of canonical authority within the canon.

## VI. LAW AND GOSPEL

We all agree that there are two great doctrines in the Bible, the Law and the Gospel.

But that the terms “law” and “gospel” or “legalist”, and “evangelical” are used in different senses by two opposing sides is evident from the fact that when some insist upon deriving clear and precise doctrines from Holy Scripture others refer to this procedure disparagingly as if it makes the Bible a “book of Law” or “a book of moral codes and doctrines”, or they turn the Scriptures into “a doctrinal law”.

### *The Point of Controversy*

It would appear that the precise point of controversy here is the meaning and use of the terms “law” and “gospel” and related words and how these are to be applied.

### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe, teach and confess that there are two great doctrines taught in the Holy Scriptures, the Law and the Gospel.

The Law, properly speaking, is that doctrine of Holy Scripture in which God tells us both positively and negatively how we are to be and live and in which he reveals his wrath, condemnation and punishment for sin, or speaks of His rewards for good words on a civic plane.

The Gospel is properly speaking that doctrine of Holy Scripture in which God reveals His gracious love towards sinners and what He has done and is still doing for our salvation.

2. We believe, teach and confess that while these two doctrines Law and Gospel are in fact opposites of each other, yet they do not abolish or destroy each other but must always go hand in hand. Both the Law and the Gospel are important for the salvation of sinners and for the Christian life of sanctification and must be preached and taught in the church.
3. We recognise that both the Law and the Gospel are God’s doctrines, they are both good and necessary for God’s people so that they should both be regarded as terms that evoke our love and reverence.

### *REJECTION*

1. We reject and condemn as a distortion of both the Law and the Gospel all teaching and speaking that would make the Gospel abrogate the Law as if the Gospel has somehow done away with the need for God’s children to be obedient to the law as the expression of God’s will in the Scriptures, or as if there is no longer any need for Christians to study the Law so as to inform themselves of the immutable will of God.
2. We reject and condemn every slighting expression against the Scriptures being used as “a book of Law” or as a “book of doctrinal Law” as proceeding from anti-Scriptural assumptions or presuppositions:
  - a. at best a distortion of the term “law” to mean that which is fixed, firm, immutable and authoritatively decided by God; or
  - b. at worst a dissatisfaction with, or a chafing under, the normative authority of Holy Scripture as having the power of God to require obedience and to demand subjection to God’s final word.

3. We reject and condemn the use of the expressions “evangelical” or “evangelical freedom” or “freedom under the gospel” when they are used to imply that
  - a. Somehow the Gospel has eliminated our need to be obedient to the will of God as expressed in the Law, the holy immutable will of God, revealed in the Scriptures; or that since they have been freed from the curse of the law by faith in Christ Jesus, therefore the Law can place no restrictions on them whatsoever, or
  - b. that all hard and fast rules, all absolutes, yes even all fixed and precise formulations of doctrines (doctrinal laws) have been done away by the Gospel, or
  - c. that “the freedom of the Gospel” is somehow a freedom from all restraint, a freedom from every external restriction, a freedom *from* God’s Law rather than a new freedom to obey it freely.
4. We reject and condemn especially as confused, deceptive and unbiblical language every use of the term “law” and related words that would simply mean something fixed, determined, authoritatively decided, precise, and clearly formulated; and every use of the term “gospel” or “evangelical” and related words that would simply mean something like vague, unclear, indecisive not precise or authoritatively decided.

With such irresponsible use of language confusion and false teaching must soon be born.

## VII. THE CANON OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

We are all agreed that there is a Book of Holy Scripture and we are generally agreed which books belong to canonical Scripture. But when we see conflicting statements about what is meant by canonical Scripture, or when we find methods and tests being applied to canonical Scripture in such a way as to bring the canonicity of books or portions of books into question, and when it is acknowledged by some that there are conflicting theologies between several books of Holy Scripture then it appears that there is a disagreement among us on what canonicity really means and implies.

### *The Point of Controversy*

The point of controversy in this matter is canonicity is on what is meant and implied by the canonicity of books of Holy Scripture and how this is determined.

### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe, teach and confess that the question of the canonicity of the books of the Holy Scripture is basically an historical one.
 

Whatever the holy writers themselves thought or felt about the ultimate destiny and use of the writings which the Holy Spirit inspired through them, God Himself knew what He wanted preserved for all men for all time and He saw to it that the books He inspired so impressed themselves upon His church that they forced their canonical recognition upon the Church.
2. All the criteria of apostolicity, harmony, etc, which the early church regarded as important in evaluating the books that were competing for canonical recognition is a matter that we cannot enter upon here, however we regard it as very important to see that the early church regarded the requirement of “apostolicity” as implying that the work was written by an apostle or his helper so that the writing possessed the apostolic authorisation given by Christ Himself (Ephesians 2:20.) “Apostolicity does not mean simply “historical closeness” to Jesus.
3. We acknowledge that among the 27 books of the New Testament there are 7 that were not immediately received or recognised by the early church as belonging to canonical Scripture for one reason or another. These are: Hebrews, James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John and Revelations. These books are called the antilegomena, and the rest are called the homolegomena. The distinction between the antilegomena and

the homolegomena is an historical one, and the Lutheran church has never dogmatically asserted that the antilegomena must be received as canonical Scripture on the same level with the other books. If a Lutheran theologian may, for some reason, be convinced that one or the other of the antilegomena do not belong to the canonical books of the Holy Scriptures then he is not thereby an heretic. Luther too, for example, did not accept the book of James as canonical.

4. We believe, teach and confess, however, that when any book is received and acknowledged to be canonical Scripture this judgement implies that it has the same canonical status with the other books. There are not degrees of canonicity, with some books or parts of books being more canonical than others.
5. We believe, teach and confess that to accept a book as Canonical Scripture means to accept as fact that it was inspired by God and that it is infallible, inerrant and authoritative like the rest of canonical Scripture. (Formal Principle). This implies also that the Material Principle, the gospel must be decisive in the interpretation of all passages in that book so that no passage therein can be given an interpretation which conflicts with the Gospel.

#### REJECTION

1. We reject and condemn as confused and unfair misunderstanding of Luther and others when the way in which they regarded some of the antilegomena is taken as indicative of the way they regarded the rest of Scripture (homolegomena).
2. We reject and condemn the confusing usage of the term "canonical Scripture" when it is held that a book of the antilegomena, eg, 2 Peter, is accepted quite unambiguously as belonging to "canonical Scripture" and yet it is held to be written by a forger in the second century AD when the book itself asserts that the writer was the apostle Peter himself who saw the Lord and heard the voice on the mount of transfiguration (1972 Statement on Inerrancy par.4 point 2. where we are not permitted to "hold that what according to clear biblical statements 'actually is or actually happened' may be regarded as what actually is *not* or actually did *not* happen;")
3. We reject and condemn as a confused undermining both of the Formal and of the Material Principles when it is asserted that the antilegomena quite unambiguously belong to the canon of Scripture and yet it is maintained that there is to be found conflicting theologies in these writings some of which assert a messianic millennium, or deny the possibility of a second repentance, or have a different concept of faith (Lecture II. p.8. Theology of the Word.)
4. We reject and condemn as contrary to sound teaching statements that would imply that there is no clear or authoritative canon of Holy Scripture at all; e.g., "the borderline of the canon runs through its very middle."
5. We reject and condemn as inadequate the suggestion that in the early church's test for canonicity of a book the question: "is it apostolic?" meant simply "Was it historically close to Jesus?" or "Does it witness to Christ?" rather than to enquire about apostolic authorship or authorisation by Christ.
6. We reject as inadequate also any process of canonisation of the Old Testament which makes it totally dependent upon the giving of the New Testament, because certainly the Old Testament was properly regarded as canonical Scripture before the New Testament was given. Today, however, we may *recognise* the canonicity of the Old Testament simply by accepting the verdict of Christ and His apostles. This, however, is not what *established* the canonicity of the Old Testament.

#### VIII. DOGMAS OF THE CHURCH AND DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE

There seems to be some confusion or disagreement among us also in connection with the term "dogma" and "dogma of the church" and its relationship with Scripture teaching or doctrine.

This confusion is evidenced by the fact that statements are made by some which seems to suggest that a dogma of the church somehow possesses greater authority than a simple teaching of Holy Scripture.

## *The Point of Controversy*

The point of controversy on this issue would seem to be what is the precise relationship of Scripture teaching to church doctrine or “dogma”?

### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe that whatever the Scriptures clearly teach is a DOCTRINE of Holy Scripture.
2. We believe that all doctrines of Holy Scripture are equally binding upon the church and that no one may set aside such teachings or teach contrary to them. (Theses I.4.b.)
3. We believe that not all the teachings of Holy Scripture are equally important when viewed from the centre and core of the Scriptures, Christ and justification through faith (Theses I, 4.b.)
4. We believe that the church may set out or declare such specific doctrines of Holy Scripture as are of particular importance in its situation. But by doing so these doctrines of Scripture, now dogmas of the church, do not gain any more authority than they had in the Holy Scriptures before the church specifically declared them. Church dogma derives its authority only from the clear teaching of Holy Scripture and not vice versa. (Theses I, 2. VIII, 1.)

### *REJECTION*

1. We reject the idea that only such clear teachings of Scripture as are of obvious importance to our salvation or as are related to the Gospel are to be regarded as doctrines of Holy Scripture.
2. We reject and condemn as being opposed to the Formal Principle such statements as would assert that only those teachings of Holy Scripture as are related to the Gospel have binding authority upon us, so that details of history and cosmology and other earthly matters for which we can see no connection with the Gospel are without normative authority and are unimportant for us, so that we may agree or disagree with them under the “freedom of the gospel”.
3. We reject and condemn the approach to Holy Scripture which regards all doctrines of Scripture as equally important as if the Bible were intended to be merely a book on general knowledge, failing to see the centrality of Christ and the Gospel in Scripture.
4. We reject any and every approach to Holy Scripture which would verify the teachings of Scripture by the authority of the Church or which would regard only such teachings of Scripture as important or authoritative on which the church has declared a doctrinal stand.

## IX. SCRIPTURE AND REASON

There would seem to be also a very deep-seated problem or controversy among us on the place of reason or logic in our theology. This is evidenced by the fact that some appear to reject a position because it is “too logical” and they declare that we cannot bind the Holy Spirit in the categories of Aristotelian logic. Others are disturbed when they are asked to espouse a position which is contrary to reason and illogical, but this does not seem to affect their opposition in the slightest who appear, rather, to be quite happy that it is illogical and unreasonable, and declare rather with some pride that it is the result of “dialectical thinking”.

Or again, some openly declare that many teachings of Scripture are illogical and unreasonable when others reject this and say that they are merely beyond reason rather than contrary to reason.

## *The Point of Controversy*

The point of controversy in this matter appears to be very deep-seated, perhaps in the whole view of life and reality. Some view reality as essentially ordered and therefore logical, others view the world and the universe as essentially chaotic and unstructured so that reason and logic do not express reality but are rather an a priori system imposed upon reality. "Dialectical thinking" is considered to be more compatible with reality. It is not clear, however, what "dialectical thinking" is, or how it differs from confusion.

#### *AFFIRMATION*

1. We believe that reason is a gift of God and that it has a legitimate function in understanding and applying God's Word. But we hold that the proper function of reason and logic is always and only as a servant and a tool which is in every respect subject to the authority of God's word, never sitting in judgement over the Scriptures. (See Statement on Genesis 1-3 –B3).
2. We believe that necessary conclusions and applications of Scripture doctrine which are vitally important for our salvation can only be made by sound reason and logic, and that God expects and requires this of us all, so that God Himself regards reason and logic as a tool to come to grips with reality.

I cannot know, for example, that Christ died for me except by a logical deduction from the Scripture passages such as "He died for all". That passage then becomes the major premise of a logical syllogism. A quite reasonable minor premise is then postulated, namely: Mel Grieger belongs to "all". Then the conclusion can logically be drawn: "Christ died for Mel Grieger". If logic and reason has no place in our theology at all then I cannot know that Christ died for me.

3. We believe that sound logic and reason is a gift of God which He has given to us through which we can correctly see real relationships in our world and experience. The principles of logic are sound as far as they go.
4. We assert, however, that while it is clear that God expects us to use reason and logic as His gift yet the sound use of that same gift will clearly reveal to us its limitations, and we fully expect that there will be many matters relating to the nature of God, for example which are quite beyond reason and logic. It is unreasonable to expect the finite mind to comprehend the creator Himself. Sound reason, therefore, can only be a servant and never a master or judge in theology.

#### *REJECTION*

1. We reject and condemn with Luther and the Lutheran Confessions the proud use of human reason and logic that would exalt itself as judge of Scriptural truth.
2. We reject and condemn also the condemnation of the use of reason and logic as a servant in the understanding and application of the teachings of the Holy Scripture.
3. We reject the alleged use of "dialectical thinking" as a substitute for logical thinking if it is used to arrive at conclusions that are neither taught specifically in Holy Scripture not can be arrived at by reasonable or logical deductions from Scripture teaching. This may well be a plausible device by which one can justify a fondly desired illogical, unreasonable and illegitimate conclusion, in short a means of self-deception.
4. We reject the concept of "dialectical thinking" until it is quite clearly and precisely shown: What are the rules of "dialectical thinking"? What are the processes by which a correct "dialectical conclusion" can be reached? Is a conclusion arrived at by dialectical processes always true and correct or are false dialectical conclusions sometimes possible? How can we know whether a conclusion arrived at by dialectic processes is true or false? By what dialectic process can such a conclusion then be verified?

We suspect that the whole thing is in the heart rather than in the head – a form of subjectivism (Theses I, 6.) appealing to intellect.