

The DNA of the LCMS

Do not Lutherans, by definition, have the same DNA? Are LCMS and LCMC members together on Scripture except for ordaining women?

(You may know fine Missouri pastors, but one has to proceed by LCMS formal documents. Moreover, we need to be alert to the fact that the LCMS is currently torn by an internal struggle between the 52% conservatives and the 48% ultraconservatives).

The LCMS is not a member of the LWF because the LWF only requires the Augsburg Confession of 1530 (CA), although the Batak Lutherans were allowed to write their own confession.¹

The LCMS requires Scripture and the complete *Book of Concord* and not in the way Chapter 2 of the ELCA Constitution requires Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions.

The LCMS so-called *Brief Statement* of 1932 and *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* of 1973 (both available online) are quasi-confessional documents requiring that one conform to LCMS doctrine about Scriptural inerrancy—including historical, geological, astronomical, and geographical matters.²

Inerrancy has been, of course, defined variously. The LCMS has carefully spelled out what it means by inerrancy. Included, for the LCMS, is the simultaneity of the formal (inspired inerrancy) and material (justification by faith alone) principles of Scripture. The LCMS view of Scripture undercuts the whole Lutheran enterprise.³

For the LCMS ordaining women is clearly against Scripture. No exceptions.

The LCMS mandates the third use of the law. (Forde militates against the third use of the law. There you have the controversy in a nutshell.)

Those holding the third use (sometimes calling such laws “evangelical counsels”) claim that the Bible has specific directives (laws) for the Christian life, including structures for the church and ministry.

Those holding to only two uses of the law claim that the Bible is an important witness to how Christians have used reason in their time to work out life in the Kingdom on the left, but that this is not revelation, a matter of salvation, and that the first use of the law is what governs life, including the Christian life, in this age.

¹ The LWF is a federation, not a communion—in spite of what the LWF said about itself at its Curitiba, Brazil, Assembly, and therefore the CA is enough—even some Moravians accept the CA.

² See excerpts from the 1973 *Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles* in the critique of the LCMS Study Bible found at the end of this PDF file.

³ Oswald Bayer has shown how for Luther the formal principle must not be prior to or simultaneous with the material principle—or the centrality of the Word of the cross is lost. See Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, chapter 4: “What makes the Bible become Holy Scripture?” (Simply put, the huge error in making an inerrant text the prior miracle, prior to the scandals of particularity and holiness/sin, is that revelation in the cross and resurrection is merely derivative.)

The first use is to restrain evil, to do no harm (Romans 13:10). The second use is the affirmation that the law always accuses, that all our works, even our best works, are totally caught in sin, even as Christians.

The Missouri mindset is not confined to the LCMS, but is basic to those called conservative evangelicals, and therefore many in LCMC and the NALC. It becomes evident that “Biblicism”⁴ (which is hardly different from the fundamentalism of conservative evangelicals generally) is the underlying issue.⁵ Thus those in LCMC who think we could work with the LCMS because we really are conservatives together, except for the blip about women's ordination, misunderstand the practical consequences of the LCMS' required doctrine of inerrancy.

⁴ Biblicism is the presupposition that what is found in the “canon” is “close enough” to a video tape of words and events, and that as Bayer writes, “a preestablished harmony exists within Scripture, which is to be read in a flat way and which does not have a central message” (Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, p.77).

⁵ There is no “clear,” “simple,” “self-evident” approach to or understanding of historical (or other) materials, including Scripture. To claim or even infer such is a trick of the Evil One.

FROM ONE EXTREME . . .

LC-MS: *THE LUTHERAN STUDY BIBLE*

LC-MS: Stuck on inerrancy —

“Jesus attributed these books to Moses” (p.14).

“Luther titled them ‘the Books of Moses’” (p. 14).

“Conservative biblical scholars have always attributed these five books to Moses” (p. 14).

To be sure:

“The Bible itself clearly teaches that Moses used other sources – written and oral – for composing the first five books of Scripture. Moses’ most important source was God Himself; God dictated portions of the books to him” (cf Ex 24:3) (p. 14).

At the same time:

“A few passages possibly indicate later editing to provide clarity” (p. 15).

“Joshua, Moses’ assistant, or others may have helped Moses in organizing, writing, and compiling this broad variety of materials” (p. 15).

Nevertheless:

“The Holy Spirit blessed, guided, and directed the ‘research’ of Moses just as surely as He guided the writers of the New Testament” (p.15).

How this is shown in a specific case:

“The notes for Genesis are written from the perspective that Moses accurately described the events of creation based on God’s revelations to him. (p. 18).

“The first cycle of time, initiated by the distinction of light from darkness, first, “one.” Moses used the cardinal number here instead of the ordinal form “first”: his time-related words make it quite clear that we are to understand this day 1 as a normal 24-hour day, bounded by an evening and a morning (notes to 1:5) (pp. 19-20).

Spinning Luther. The LC-MS selectively quotes Luther to make it seem that he, too, was an inerrantist.

“We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively” (LW 1:5) (p. 16).

“These, then, are all historical facts. This is something to which I carefully call attention, lest the unwary reader be led astray by the authority of the fathers, who give up the idea that this is history and look for allegories” (LW 1:93) (p.22).

But Luther clearly was no inerrantist. For him the Bible’s authority is established by its power to convict of sin and convince of grace through the preaching of Christ, as Luther writes:

“All the genuine sacred books agree on this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Rom 3) and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Cor 2). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul taught it” (LW 35:396).

Inerrancy is the tie that blinds. In contrast, for the LC-MS the message of the Bible is authoritative first and foremost because “the book” is “supernatural.” Faith, though ultimately directed to Christ, is first directed to and dependent upon the Bible as the inerrant, written word of God.

In 1973 at its New Orleans convention the LC-MS adopted *A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles*, which affirms:

- “that God is the true Author of every word of Scripture” (2).
- Further, “the soteriological purpose of Scripture in no sense permits us to call into question or deny the historicity or factuality of matters recorded in the Bible” (3).
- “The Holy Scriptures . . . contain no errors or contradictions but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth.” (5).

A quasi-confessional document. In 1971 at its Milwaukee convention the LC-MS had already determined that “such doctrinal formulations are subordinate to the Lutheran Confessions,” but “such statements, together with all other formulations of doctrine, derive their authority from the Word of God.”

Therefore in 1973 the LC-MS declared: **“A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles, in all its parts, to be Scriptural and in accord with the Lutheran Confessions, and therefore a formulation which derives its authority from the Word of God and which expresses the Synod’s position on current doctrinal issues”** (11).

Texts cited above:

The Lutheran Study Bible, Concordia, October 2009.
Portions available online at cph.org/lutheranbible.
A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles,
available at: www.lcms.org/president/aboutlcms/astatement.asp.