

## True Reverence For God's Word<sup>1</sup>

**W**e read in the last chapter of the Prophet Isaiah: “**To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My Word**” (Isaiah 66:2). These words which the prophet speaks in the name and by the command of God describe true piety in opposition to that outward formalism of the apostate Jewish people. True piety consists in the humble acknowledgment of sins and in holy reverence for God's majestic Word. So it should be with every Christian, especially, however, with every theologian. Luther is right when he says that the entire true theology can be described as reverence for God's Word. For the Reformation of the Church it occurred this way, that God through His servant Luther again placed reverence for God's Word in place of the authority of the pope, as indeed also Rev. 14:7 had foretold. The counter-reformation of the papal church consisted in the strengthening of the false authority of the pope, for which the Council of Trent is proof. The Reformed counter-reformation consisted in and consists in this, that in its departure from the Lutheran Church it erects a building which is according to the building regulations of human reason. The modern Lutheran counter-reformation consisted and consists in this that by denying the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures they in principle drive reverence for God's Word out and make God's Word the object of criticism.

Students of Concordia! You will be instructed in our St. Louis Concordia in the theology which consists in a humble spirit and in reverence for God's Word. For the beginning of the new student year I answer briefly the question: WHAT DOES REVERENCE FOR GOD'S WORD INCLUDE?

### I.

In the first place, **the knowledge that Holy Scripture is God's own and infallible Word**. And that is not a “theological deduction,” but the direct teaching of Holy Scripture. When the Saviour says: “**The Scripture cannot be broken**” (John 10:35), He thereby gives the guarantee that the Scriptures in every one of its words is God's Word, for in its context this passage deals with the usage of a *single* word of Scripture, the word, “god,” Psalm 82. Furthermore: In His High Priestly prayer the Saviour says of His apostles: “**I have given them Thy Word,**” (John 17:14). Soon after that He adds that all believers until the Last Day will believe on Him through the Word of the Apostles. Further: as you know the Holy Scriptures do not consist of thoughts suspended in the air, but of words, of *written* words. And of these written words Christ's apostle, the Apostle Paul, declares: “**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God**” (2 Tim. 3:16). In short, it is not merely a human or theological *deduction*, but a *direct* statement of Scripture that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are God's own and therefore infallible Word. Everyone who considers it otherwise, everyone who together with modern Lutheran theology does not want to “identify” Holy Scripture and God's Word, shows no reverence for God's Word, but becomes a critic of the Word of God. May God preserve us and all our colleagues united in faith and confession from this blasphemous destructive error!

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<sup>1</sup> Address For The Opening Of The New Student Year 1930-31. *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. I, No 11, November, 1930, pages 801 to 803.

## II.

In the second place, **reverence for God's Word includes the knowledge of that which God's Word teaches.** Without this knowledge the zeal for God's Word would be a zeal without understanding. Therefore Paul admonishes his true son Timothy to take heed not merely only to himself, but also to the *doctrine*; **“for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”** (1 Timothy 4:16). In fact, the necessary knowledge refers to the *entire* doctrine of the Scriptures, to the doctrine in all parts. Christ's commission reads quite unambiguously until the end of days: **“Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”** (Matt. 28:20). Therefore the Apostle Paul also says, while he at the same time holds himself up as an example to the pastors of Ephesus: **“I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God”** (Acts 20:27).

Students of Concordia! To acquire the entire Christian doctrine in all its parts requires diligence, much diligence, on the part of students of theology. Laziness in this point would not show reverence for God's Word but the opposite, disrespect. So then reverence for God's Word includes also that of which the Apostle Paul reminds his beloved Timothy with the words: **“Take heed unto thyself,”** that is to your Christian conduct! Reverence for God's Word implies a conduct and life in sincere godly reverence. Otherwise the Holy Spirit who dwells in you will be grieved and God's Word will be blasphemed among the unbelievers.

## III.

Thirdly, **reverence of God's Word includes that in the Church of God we receive nothing as legitimate doctrine alongside God's Word.** In our time the ecclesiastical “union fever”, the spirit which cultivates different tendencies [in doctrine] as having equal rights in the church, the spirit which wants unity without agreement in the doctrine of God's Word, prevails. That is not in keeping with reverence for God's Word. God's Word demands absolute rule in the Church of God. It is for this purpose that God has given His Word to His Church. The Church should only speak out of God's mouth. God's Word should be the sole source and standard (norm) for Church doctrine. The Saviour exhorts: **“If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth”** (John 8:31,32). Therefore also the Apostle Peter exhorts: **“If any man speak”** — namely in the Church of God — **“let him speak as God's Word”** (1 Peter 4:11; Luther's translation). And when in the congregation at Ephesus spirits were active who did not remain with the doctrine of the apostle, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy that he should *order* those spirits, **“to teach nothing else [no other doctrine],”** 1 Tim. 1:3. Heterodox teaching and heterodoxy have no right to exist in the Christian Church. Whoever permits *man's* word to be placed alongside God's Word, whoever practises *brotherly fellowship of faith* with those who *depart* from God's Word, has every reason to examine himself whether he regards God's Word seriously.

We so-called Missourians and brethren in confessional fellowship [companions in confession] have until now by God's grace followed the right way in regard to church union. Certainly we have seriously engaged in so-called “free conferences”, that is in doctrinal discussions for the establishment of doctrinal unity where it still does not exist.

But we have held brotherly fellowship of faith only with those who confess “**the doctrine of Christ**”, the unfalsified doctrine of Christ, as the Apostle John in his second Epistle requires, and as is required in the entire Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. On this point, on the one hand, we have been praised by a few, but on the other hand we have been severely rebuked by most. We must consider the possibility that we stand before as great an encircling movement as ever before. How will it fare for us here? That we know quite precisely. We read by the prophet Jeremiah: “***And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.***” (Jeremiah 1:19). We are victorious when by God's grace we continue in reverence for God's Word. The encircling movement wins the war and can penetrate the front, sides and centre only when we abandon reverence for God's Word by our own fault. May God in His grace grant the former!