

# THE CONFSSIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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## Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”  
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

### Essay 1

#### Holy Scripture: The Source of Our Outreach Message

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“Eureka! Eureka!” (Archimedes). I have used this expression of the famous physicist, mathematician, and astronomer with a purpose. He said this after the discovery of one of the physical laws. Well, even his contemporaries testify about his unusual intelligence. Historians say that he could do everything he wanted to do. We also know another famous saying of his. Plutarch cited his saying: “If there was another Earth, he would stand on ours and move the other one.” According to Pappus of Alexandria, he said: “Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth”<sup>1</sup>. But he was not the only one, whose scientific achievements and works survived until now and made a significant contribution in the development of our life. Sometimes they even turned our life upside down. Just remember about the invention of penicillin by the British microbiologist Fleming in 1928. That was a revolution in the medicine for it opened the door for the treatment of some diseases, which were considered to be incurable by that time.

Revolution... When our Lord Jesus Christ descended to us with the preaching of the Word, that was also revolution. That was a revolution in the world-view of that time. That was a total reformation of the human mindset. People at that time saw their life in the strict submission to the Law, its total fulfillment. A Jew had to do something himself in order to change his life. But when Jesus came He stood on the Earth of the Law and moved it by fulfilling it. And then He gave His people the Gospel. He made it with His Word. Power and strength of God's Word, written in the inspired Scriptures still remain the source of our salvation and our message to other people... the only source.

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<sup>1</sup> δος μοι πα στω και ταν γαν κινάσω

## I. Holy Scripture

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish theologians agreed at Jamnia (90 and 118 AD) about what books were to be considered as authoritative. But in fact they only re-confirmed the old truth. Even though some people doubt the reality of these Councils, nevertheless after that there was no discussion about what books are to be included into the Old Testament. There were several criteria by which a book was included into the canon of the Holy Scripture: 1) this book has to be written in between Moses and Ezra, when the Holy Spirit inspired people to write God's Word as they said; 2) the content of the book should not contradict writings of Moses; 3) Hebrew has to be the original language; 4) and in general – this book has to be written in the geographical limits of the Palestine. It was later when Christians developed several criteria as to what books should be included into the New Testament: 1) the book must be written by apostle or a person that was in tight terms with apostles; 2) the book must have clear testimony about its Divine inspiration; 3) it must be recognized by the whole Church; 4) all the books must agree with each other<sup>2</sup>. In 363 AD theologians gathered at the small council at Laodicea examined almost all the questions connected to the Canon of the New Testament. They agreed then that the Canon consists of all the books we are familiar with now, except Revelation. Later in the year 397 AD theologians at the third Council in Cartage declared that only 27 books in the New Testament can be called inspired<sup>3</sup>. However, all these inspired books in both Testaments represent integrity, based on the message of Salvation – in the Old Testament it is the message that is to be fulfilled, and in the New Testament this is the message fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This is inspired message, thus – firm and infallible. The Holy Word itself testifies about this: *“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”* (Matthew 5:18). And St. John writes: *“...the Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35). St. Paul addresses Timothy in his 2 epistle: *“and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Thus, all the books of the Old and the New Testaments testify of Christ, the Savior, who descended to the level of the human life from the glory of Heavens, and while in this human life He submitted to His Law, fulfilled it for us and bore the punishment which was not His naturally. For He is God from eternity, who became man for the sake of Golgotha and for the sake of the resurrection from the dead. All the Scriptures testify about this unspeakable mystery of God's love that was revealed to us in Christ. Therefore the integrity of the Holy Writ – is completely Christological. While witnessing about Himself, Jesus Christ told that the whole Old Testament testified about Him (Jn. 5:46). No wonder that the Holy Word is so efficient and a source of our preaching; in fact – the only source. This infallible message of the Law and Gospel brings people to faith by the Holy Spirit... and thus, to salvation and the life everlasting with the Father in the Heavens. Therefore, Holy Scripture – is infallible Word of God.

Let us now listen to the Fathers and Confessions. They give us a strong support to the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Martin Chemnitz writes in his “Enchiridion”: *“Thus God enlightens hearts with His Word... He converts people only through the Word... He creates and gives contrition, but only through the hearing of the Word... He instigates faith from hearing, namely from the hearing of the preaching of the Word... He is God of all comfort.”*<sup>4</sup> Everything this second Martin of Lutheranism talks about is impossible if the Holy Scripture is not own Word of the Eternal God. He uses it in order to bring

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<sup>2</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Chemnitz, *“An Enchiridion: Ministry, Word and Sacraments”*.

people to Himself, convert them to the saving faith and then to support and strengthen it. This living Word can do unthinkable things only because it is the Word of the Almighty God. He, Who can do everything, uses this Word in two ways: He shows a man sin in the Law. He shows human sinfulness and tells that humans cannot themselves struggle with it. He shows death to a human being. And then He crashes this wall of sin around human heart that was there from the very first minute of the human life. This wall did not allow us to see the real life, life with the God in Heavens. He crashes this wall while creating saving faith in the heart. He comforts us with His Word of the Gospel. He binds our wounds; wipes off tears; takes by the hand and brings to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... to the cross of Golgotha. Philip Melanchthon writes about the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession II, article IV 107-108: *“Truly, it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture, which clearly ascribe justification to faith, and, indeed, deny it to works. Do they think that the same is repeated so often for no purpose? Do they think that **these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?**”* Melanchthon wrote this in defense of the Augsburg Confession which was presented to the Roman-Catholic theologians. This is what he writes about the Holy Writings in the Augsburg Confession (V, 1-3): *“That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the **Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel,** to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.”* A little bit further in the Confession Melanchthon continues. But now he points to the reason why we receive Holy Spirit through the Word of God. He says: *“For man's powers without the Holy Ghost are full of ungodly affections, and are too weak to do works which are good in God's sight”* (AC XX, 31). Doctor Luther in His Smalcald Articles chapter III, 7-8 clearly shows us power of this Word of the Law and Gospel. Thus he re-confirms its Divine inspiration. He says: *“But whenever the Law alone, without the Gospel being added, exercises its office there is [nothing else than] death and hell, and man must despair, like Saul and Judas; as St. Paul, Rom. 7, 10, says: Through sin the Law killeth. On the other hand, the Gospel brings consolation and remission not only in one way, but through the Word and Sacraments, and the like, as we shall hear afterward in order that [thus] there is with the Lord plenteous redemption, as Ps. 130, 7 says against the dreadful captivity of sin”* (SA, part III, III, 7-8). In the preface to his Large Catechism Doctor Luther addresses those people who inconsiderably treat God's Word and do not consider it to be power of God for Salvation, with these words of reproach. He once again tells us that this is the Word of Heavenly God Himself (LC, preface, 10-11): *“Therefore I beg such lazy paunches or presumptuous saints to be persuaded and believe for God's sake that they are verily, verily! not so learned or such great doctors as they imagine; and never to presume that they have finished learning this [the parts of the Catechism], or know it well enough in all points, even though they think that they know it ever so well. For though they should know and understand it perfectly (which, however, is impossible in this life), yet there are manifold benefits and fruits still to be obtained, if it be daily read and practiced in thought and speech; **namely, that the Holy Ghost is present in such reading and repetition and meditation, and bestows ever new and more light and devoutness,** so that it is daily relished and appreciated better, as Christ promises, Matt. 18, 20: Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. Besides, it is an exceedingly effectual help against the devil, the world, and the flesh and all evil thoughts to be occupied with the Word of God, and to speak of it, and meditate upon it, so that the First Psalm declares those blessed who meditate upon the Law of God day and night. Undoubtedly, you will not start a stronger incense or other fumigation against the devil than by being engaged upon God's commandments and words, and speaking, singing, or thinking of them. For this is indeed the true holy water and holy sign from which he flees, and by which he may be driven away”*.

*“For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.”* We can talk a lot about what is included in these words. But the outcome will be only one – salvation through the faith for the sake of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His death on the cross of Golgotha. When we gather for the sake of the Savior at the preaching and study of the God's Word, we do it with one and only reason: in

this Word we meet Christ, the Savior. Do you remember epigraph I used at the beginning of the paper? This was an exclamation of Archimedes. I think it is a proper place to use it for our search. “*Eureka! Eureka! (I found, I found!)*.” In this case these words we can exclaim with joy and thankfulness for the very fact that the Lord God found us. In the Small Catechism Luther colorfully speaks about this (SC, II, 6): “*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.*” And Luther did not invent anything new. He just summarized and exposed that, what Lord God said through St. Paul in his Epistle to Colossians 1:21-23: “*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But how He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, establish and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.*” It was later that Lutheran Fathers when speaking about justification in the Formula of Concord clearly stated the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scripture; namely, about the work of the Holy Spirit in it and through it. They say (FC, SD, chapter III): “*Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above, that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness. These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the holy Gospel; and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves*”. “**Eureka! Eureka!**”

## II. Word of God in history

However, the devil did not stop trying to take people away from God, from His goodness and mercy. He makes continuous efforts to make this real. Even more, he always tries to use the corrupted Word of God in order to achieve his goal. The first example of such a corruption we can find already in the Garden of Eden, when the enemy of human beings approached the forefathers with the famous saying: “*Did God say...?*” He wanted to compel humans to start doubting the truth of the Word of God, in its power. And later in the desert Christ gave us the most effective tool to struggle with these attacks. Every time the Devil tempted Jesus with misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures, Jesus answered: “*It is written...!*” However, if we look at the history of humanity, we can see that he actually achieved something he wanted to. But in the history of the Church there always were Fathers, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit defended the truth of the Scriptures. Sometimes it was kind of easy to do, but sometimes they met a strong opposition of their opponents. If we look at the history of the Church, we will note that such a defense started already after Christianity became an established religion. After it became independent from the Jewish religion and pagan beliefs it found the immediate necessity to defend its truth from the attacks of those religions. At the beginning Christianity tried to systematize its teaching. Apologists were among first to do this. The story about Justin Martyr is very interesting because it says about where he found the truth. At first he studied Stoics and Pythagoreans. But after he did not find in them anything, he was thrilled by the studying Plato, expecting that he would find truth there. But finally he met a man, who bound him to the study of the Holy Scripture and the prophets. This man assured him that only the Holy Scriptures present the Divine Truth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Justin then said: “*My soul immediately burned and I started to study Prophets and friends of Christ. I meditated about their teaching and it was there that I found the most reliable and useful philosophy. This is how I became a philosopher.*”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bengt Hagglund, “*History of Theology*” (CPH, St. Louis, Missouri, 1966), p. 26

At the early years of Christianity, it encountered with the Gnostic problem. They interpreted Word of God from the point of view of three abstract concepts: truth, wisdom and reason. Gnostics thought that a man is saved only by the higher knowledge, which they had in their possession. This knowledge is one of the forms of the mystic wisdom that leads to the completeness. Gnostics borrowed certain elements from the Holy Scripture. They even called Christ to be a Savior, but only because He gave this saving knowledge into the world. However, Jesus sufferings and death on the cross was of no importance for them. That is why the Church openly opposed this heresy for it corrupted God's Word and openly rejected its Divine character. In fact, Gnostics themselves invented many scriptures, which, as they said, carried hidden wisdom, gnosis.

At the end of the second century in large cities there appeared catechetical schools. They explained Christianity in a form of answers to the questions. These schools became a basis for the Christian Theological schools which appeared at that time. In the time between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries there were several schools. Even though they differed in some questions, however at the very end they led to some unification of the Christian world-view. But sometimes these differences were very significant. For example – Cappadocian and Carthaginian schools completely rejected philosophy, considering it to be useless and dangerous for the Christian teaching. Others, as for example Antiochene and Alexandrian schools, tried to explain teaching of the Christian church on the basis of philosophy. *“The so called Alexandrian school was the chief defendant of reason and philosophy. In Alexandria, in this center of the science, which overshadowed by its schools and scientific knowledge even famous Athens, Christian Church was first to master science and to use philosophy for the sake of faith... Clement (of Alexandria) somehow solved the question about the relations between philosophy and religion, faith and knowledge. Clement said that there is no knowledge without faith and faith without philosophy.”*<sup>6</sup> Tertullian from Carthage Theological school was a fervent opponent of Clement and his disciple Origen. He considered heresy to be a *“daughter of philosophy”*. Alexandrian school was engaged in the allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scripture. They tried to confront different things: classical philosophy and Biblical teaching. Clement thought that the Holy Scripture of both Testaments contains everything classical philosophy taught about. He said that we just need to know how to reveal content of the Holy Scriptures. But it will be impossible to achieve, if one apprehends texts of the Bible literally. Antiochene school used rational-analytical method of Aristotle in order to interpret the Holy Scriptures. That is why Antiochenes often did not acknowledge not only the divine inspiration of some Biblical stories, but also books. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia did not acknowledge canonicity of the *“Song of Songs”*.

However, even inside these two schools there was no agreement. Mostly, these agreements occurred between the earlier and subsequent representatives of this school. Athanasius the Great, for example, could not hold faith in the closed philosophical system. On the contrary, he rejected philosophy in the development of the Christian doctrine: Bible was the only basis for this. He insisted that Bible has to be interpreted in the light of Christ and salvation He brought into the world. In his 39<sup>th</sup> Easter epistle he writes: *“These are origins of the salvation. Those people that want them satisfy their thirst by the **living word**, consisted in them. Only they instruct the piety. And let no man add to them or take away from them. For when the lord preached to the Sadducees He said: ... you know neither the scriptures (Mt. 22:29); and He reproached Sadducees and said: “learn the Scriptures... these witness about Me (Jn. 5:39).”*<sup>7</sup>

And after the 4<sup>th</sup> century the question of inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the question of the Biblical canon was not at stake very often. Only sometimes these questions appeared while in discussions. But after a long period of silence these debates started to appear in the time of Reformation, when tradition started to come to the surface. They were highly estimated, but they led people away from the

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<sup>6</sup> Ivan Andreyev, *“Christian Apologetics”* (Purification Monastery, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> <http://christianity.shu.ru/Texts/athanasius/mess/messag39.html>

pure Word. They just invented new teachings. In his sermon on the Epiphany in 1522 Doctor Luther said about this very expressly: *“In the third place, they hold up to us the saints’ interpretations of the Scriptures, and consider them a great light. They finally adhere to them and believe that in this interpretation they possess something that no one could reject, and claim again and again in order to keep us away from the pure Word that the Scriptures are obscure and make many heretics”*<sup>8</sup>. And a little bit later in this sermon he condemns the same assailants, who tried to accuse him in blasphemy. Note how he does this – by the Word of God. He directs against them the pure and infallible Word of God. He allows Holy Spirit to testify in the Word about their blasphemy and about their sin. *“However, that heretics originated from the Scriptures, is true. From where else should they have come? There is no other book that teaches the Christian faith but the Scriptures. Therefore, as no one can become a Christian except by the Scriptures, so also can no one become a heretic but by the same Scriptures”*<sup>9</sup>. Luther was disturbed with the situation in the Church. That Church departed from the Holy Scriptures very much and deepened in its own interpretations, traditions and orders... He worried about the fact that they took Christ away from the Bible. He even told: *“Take Christ away from the Bible and what you would find there.”* Theology of Luther – is theology of the Word. He firmly held to what Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”* No wonder why canonists of that time tried so much to force Luther to keep silent. But the work started already. A small fire started to become bigger and this fire changed all the Church. It turned it to the true teaching of the Bible. At that time already Jesus Christ and the Word of God came back to the Church. And now Word of God can be heard in the native language. *“Here I stand!”* This is the slogan with which Luther started the Reformation of the Christian Church. He did not introduce anything new as he was blamed for. He did not invent a new teaching! He just confirmed the authority of the Holy Scripture in the Church as the *norma normans*. I think that the words of Luther *“Here I stand”* remind me of another famous saying of Archimedes *“Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth!”* Looks like Luther has found a fulcrum on which he could firmly stand, lean on. But the only difference lies in the fact that he does not have to do anything. He just has to stay firmly on this. And the Lord Jesus will turn his life of sin and death. *“... But also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* (Rom. 4:24-25). *“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness”* (Rom. 4:5). *“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”* (Rom. 10:4). *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9). *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life”* (Tit. 3:5-7). It looked like after this question was resolved that there was no need to talk about it, but the problem started anew. The Word of God underwent new attacks from theologians - and now from the new theologians. They started attacking the divinity, inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures even more vigorously.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the theological scene there appeared naturalism. It was strongly manifested in Deism. The basic principles of the natural religion can be summed up by these principles: 1) there is a supreme god; 2) he has to be worshiped and served; 3) this worship must consist mainly with piety and innocence. Sin is the deprivation from all this and it has to be repented of. If there is no repentance, then there is no forgiveness as well; in the new life evil will be punished and good will be rewarded. It was later that Deism became even more dependent on the philosophy and rationalism. Morality for the rationalist is even more important than the religion itself. In the time of Enlightenment theology tried to

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<sup>8</sup> Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Baker Book House, 2000, v. 1, p. 341, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Baker Book House, 2000, v. 1, p. 342, 47.

“humanize” Christianity. Theology had to promote human welfare and to harmonize well-known rational principles. That is, the main goal of the rationalism lay in achievement of the earthly happiness and rational morality. Then in the 18<sup>th</sup> century appeared Neologism. At that time typical ideas of Enlightenment have already penetrated the Theology of Protestantism. Johann Salomo Semlers was one of the leading representatives of Neologism. He tried to renew theology and to free it from the chains of dogma.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher thought that the Old Testament was a part of the canon only because it was connected to the New Testament which he considered to be the norm of Theology. He changed principle of the Scripture for the “evolutionary principle of tradition.” He considered Holy Scriptures equal to the Tradition. He thought that the Holy Scripture was first only because of its chronological succession. He said that it could not be the basis for the faith because the faith is already in there. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century there appeared another liberal school. It used historical-critical method for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. They changed traditional teachings and harmonized them with the ethic and moral principles. Ritschl, for example, said that salvation, or justification – was a restoration of the ethical freedom that was lost by the man because of sin. Christ can be called God only figuratively. Thus, we can see that they paid very little attention to the Holy Word. Karl Barth was very influential at that time. In the preface to his commentary on Romans he said: *“The matter contained in the text cannot be released save by a creative straining of the sinews, by a relentless, elastic application of the ‘dialectical’ method. The critical historian needs to be more critical. **The interpretation of what is written requires more than a disjointed series of notes on words and phrases. The commentator must be possessed of a wider intelligence than that which moves within the boundaries of his own natural appreciation**”*<sup>10</sup>. We can continue until the infinity to give different examples of the misuse of the Holy Scriptures, denying its authority and Divine origin. However, this paper does not aim to examine all of them. But at the end I would like to mention one more attack on the Holy Scripture. It was made at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by German theologian Rudolph Bultmann. He wanted to become a Lutheran pastor and even started to study at the Seminary. As a result of his search he decided that mythical picture of the world which lays in the foundation of the traditional Christian teaching, and which divides world into the three spheres (world of God and angels atop, world of humans in the middle, and world of devil below), is foreign for the modern human being. Thus Bultmann concluded that Christianity has to be demythologized. However, he perceived demythologization not as the destruction of the Christian mythology, but as its completely different interpretation. That is, it had to be anthropological. And this means that Christian myths have to be perceived as a special method of expressing man-to-God relations.

However, even though devil tries to take a man away from God and from its true interpretation, even though he tries to convince people that God’s Word is only a story of the ancient people, Holy Spirit continues to work inside this Word, converting people to God, creating faith and sustaining it. A teacher of the Law said these words about Paul’s sermon: *“But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: ‘Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God’”* (Acts 5:34-39). Nobody can destroy God’s truth. It exists today as well as the Word of God does. And while we still feel devil’s

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 8.

attacks on the Holy Scripture, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church together with all the other members of the CELC confidently and boldly teaches on the basis of the Scriptures: *“We believe, that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments in their pristine form, as they were written down by the prophets, apostles and evangelists, are God-inspired. And this means, that Holy Scripture does not only contain within itself the word of God, but that it is exactly Gods Word in its fullness and entirety. On this account, Holy Scripture is inerrant and infallible in all that it teaches, since it is the single infallible rule and norm of Christian doctrine and practice. We reject the historical-critical method of interpreting Holy Scripture as a completely impermissible, blasphemous method of using of human reason to rule over Holy Scripture”*<sup>11</sup>. What an incredible joy – to possess God-inspired Scriptures that tell us about Jesus Christ, about salvation and the life everlasting! And no hellish forces can overshadow its power and shake its authority. Even though devil tries very strongly to take this reliable foundation of the Scripture from us, we still remain persuaded and this persuasion comes from the Holy Word. *“Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth.”* Let us now talk about how we can move the earth, turn it using infallible, God-inspired, holy and active Word of God.

### **III. Place to stand on – Holy Scriptures**

A place to stand on... Frankly speaking, I always thought that I could swim well enough. I can swim far away into the open sea and be there some time. However, last year I went to the sea with my family to spend there my vacation. One day I swam some time already and decided to come back to the shore. While I was approaching the shoreline I decided at one time that it was safe already to stand on the firm ground. But I couldn't feel it. And after I couldn't feel a place to stand on immediately I started panicking and drowning. I thought that I ran out of strength and that I would not be able to swim back to the shore. But one more minute and I felt the ground. Indeed, it is so important to have a place to stand on. It does not only give us a sure confidence but a strength also. With the sure place to stand on we can do a lot of things. Recently I watched a TV program that was a story about construction of the Egyptian pyramids. And while watching it I was impressed with the skills with which ancient Egyptians heaved heavy stones. They also used earth as their place to stand. And when we speak about “a place to stand” in the world we live in now, I immediately remembered these words of the Savior in the Gospel of Matthew 11:28: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* In the sinful world it is necessary that we be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. He is angry at us for the sins we commit with our thoughts, words and deeds. We sadden Him with these sins and go away from the life, real life. But He did not leave us. He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ into this world to do everything we were not able to do. Saint Paul talks about this in his epistle to Ephesians 2:13-16: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”* The Holy Word tells us this also: *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless”* (Rom. 3:11-12). Natural man considers words about Christ the Savior to be the foolishness. Modern people consider themselves to be strong enough, so that sometimes they reject everything about the salvation that has to come from somewhere aside. And if he suddenly starts to understand this, then he tries to save himself with his own power and to come closer to God and be reconciled to Him. I have remembered the words I have read on the CD I once bought. These were the words of the famous Persian philosopher Jelaluddin Rumi. He said: *“I tried to find Him on the Christian Cross, but He was not there. I went to the Temple of the Hindus and to the old pagodas but could not find a trace of Him anywhere. I searched on the mountains and in the valleys but neither in the heights nor in the depths was I able to find Him. I went to the Caaba in Mecca, but He was not there*

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.ukrlc.org/eng/Kor\\_dokt\\_tv\\_eng.htm](http://www.ukrlc.org/eng/Kor_dokt_tv_eng.htm)

*either. I questioned the scholars and philosophers but He was beyond their understanding. I then looked into my heart and it was there that He dwelled that I saw Him; He was nowhere else to be found*<sup>12</sup>. Sin has come deep inside the human being. Devil darkened human mind. So how can this darkened mind do something? How can blind eyes find the way out? We cannot do anything. That is why God does everything for us. That is why He opens our eyes in His Word through the Holy Spirit the same way He did it to His disciples near Emmaus. We do not need to look inside our heart for we will not find salvation there. We should not look for salvation nowhere except for the Holy Word. God Himself tells us about our salvation in His Word. And not only tells us but gives also. In the Bible our Heavenly Father gives us His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior from death. First He crashes the wall of sin and then brings up faith with His sweet word of the Gospel. By this faith we are tied to Christ. This Word creates faith. “... *When the Word of God is preached, he neither does nor can understand it, but regards it as foolishness; also, that he does not of himself draw nigh to God, but is and remains an enemy of God, until he is converted, becomes a believer [is endowed with faith], is regenerated and renewed, by the power of the Holy Ghost through the Word when preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own*” (FC, chapter 2, II, 5). This very Word of the Living God is our “place to stand.” And we stand on It not to complete our salvation. No! We are saved only by grace through faith for the sake of the Savior Jesus Christ. We do not have to add to this on our part. That would be even funny if we try to add something to the thing completed already. The only begotten Son of God saved us and gave us the life everlasting already now. We rely on Him by faith and receive by it everything He has done for us already. Christian faith convinces us that we are sinners and that we have to cling to Christ in faith asking Him about forgiveness. And by the same faith we receive Christ’s benefits. Now we can boldly stand on this island of life, on this “*place to stand on*”, the Word of God which testifies us about Christ and Salvation. The Holy Spirit will continuously support us on this island. This is our “place to stand” in order to live. And we are totally passive in this.

But this place to stand can also serve us a little bit differently. And not only can but must. If we stand firmly on the Word we can bring Christ into the world, we can preach to people the Gospel and bring them closer to God by the Word. Yes, we can use our own abilities to preach the Good News. Sometimes people can object saying they will not be able to do it. No! They can! They just can address people with the Word of God which is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord Holy Spirit will do the rest. We have the most active means to work with people. This is our place to stand on! The only place! This is “the place to stand on” contained in the preaching of the Gospel. The Preface to the Large Catechism (12) gives us beautiful explanation of this “place to stand”: “*And what need is there of many words? If I were to recount all the profit and fruit which God's Word produces, whence would I get enough paper and time? The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. But what shall we call God's Word, which drives away and brings to naught this master of a thousand arts with all his arts and power? It must indeed be the master of more than a hundred thousand arts*”. When preaching the Word of God in all its purity and truth we are preaching Christ, the Redeemer. Heavenly Father will openly testify about His love toward us in Christ by His Holy Spirit. We have already noted earlier in this paper why this Word is so powerful. Certainly, it is because this is the infallible Word of the Most-high God Himself. And certainly it is because we find Son of God, the God-Man Jesus Christ in this Word (Jn. 8:36): “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*”. And Paul tells about this: “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*” (Rom 1:16). This Gospel we want to preach boldly into the world being persuaded with what Paul addressed to the Philippians 3:8-11: “*What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his*

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<sup>12</sup> Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), “Where is God?”

*resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead”*. **Knowing Christ Jesus!** Paul considers only this to be the most important part in his life. He also teaches us about this. And where we can find Him? Only in the Holy Bible, in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments which our Heavenly Father gave us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for salvation. When bringing these Scriptures to the people we rejoice because we bring to them the Good News about Jesus Christ Himself. This is our privilege. And we should treat it with all the seriousness and respect. When we stand on this firm basis of the Word of God, we can say together with the apostle: *“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:57).

### **Epilogue**

Eureka, eureka! At the end I would like to tell you an interesting parable which I have found on the Internet. It tells about a small boy walking on the seaside and throwing starfishes back into the sea. Suddenly he met an elderly man. A man was very astonished with what he saw. That is why he asked the boy the reason for doing this. And the boy answered that he wanted to save them throwing back into the water. A man laughed and said that this was very stupid idea for there were millions of starfishes on the seashore and a boy simply could not save all of them. A boy thought for a moment and then answered: “Yes, I will not save all of them, but maybe this one, at least.” And he threw it into the sea. We also have a lot of such starfish that have to be thrown into the living water of the Word of God. And we can do it and must do it with our preaching. And may God help us! *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Heb. 13:20-21).