

# Confessional Fidelity

BO GIERTZ



*Ruben Josefson<sup>1</sup> takes the designation “confessional” from those in the current debate concerning women pastors who have incorrectly taken the title for themselves, and gives it back to those who deserve to wear it.<sup>2</sup>*

SO SAYS INGMAR STRÖM<sup>3</sup> in *Woman, Society, Church* concerning Ruben Josefson’s essay, “The Evangelical-Lutheran Position,” in the same book. Thus, those are truly “confessional” who find no opposition in the Bible or the Confessions to opening the office of the ministry to women. One who honestly desires to be faithful to the Confessions naturally listens with interest. More so, his own faith and work as a pastor stand endlessly in debt to the Confessions. If it is true that it can be shown with good reason that our Confessions represent a view of Christianity and biblical interpretation that naturally leads to introducing women pastors at an appropriate time, then this whole controversy can be ended—certainly a relief for all parties involved. What are the reasons, then?

## I. LUTHER’S VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Josefson first presents the Lutheran view of the Bible. At all essential points, the view presented is in line with “Neo-Protestantism,” for lack of a better term. Luther, it is said, not only claimed Scripture as the authority against Rome, but also gave rise to a new understanding of the Bible: one that signifies a radical break with the view that the Bible is a formal authority. Scripture’s authority is contingent upon the content of the message about Christ as the Lord of forgiveness. The Bible and individual parts of the Bible have no authority simply because they can be traced to the prophets and apostles as authors, but rather they become apostolic and foundational for the church by conveying the message of Christ. “Whatever preaches Christ, that is apostolic.”<sup>4</sup>

One comes across the above-mentioned Luther quotation in modern attempts to make Luther the spokesman for a “Neo-Protestant” view of the Bible. Therefore, it must be stressed once again that this quotation is out of context and misinterpreted. It comes from Luther’s “Preface to the Epistles of James and Jude,” where he puts forth the thesis that James’s epistle has wrongly come into the canon and in reality cannot be an apostolic writing.<sup>5</sup> He finds evidence for this in that it does not witness to Christ. In conjunction with this, he says that everything that is an apostolic witness to Christ, but “does not teach Christ, it is not apostolic, not even if St. Peter or St. Paul teach it.”<sup>6</sup>

This last remark has given rise to the misunderstanding that Luther would create a boundary within Scripture which makes it possible to distinguish between what is apostolic and what is not (and thus is not a message from God); however, this is an obvious misunderstanding. Luther teaches that all biblical writings testify to Christ and, needless to say, also Peter and Paul when they speak in the Bible. He says this even in this context. The criterion that an authentic biblical writing should preach Christ is upheld, “because all Scripture points to Christ” (*sintemal alle schrift Christum zeiget*). Luther here refers to Romans 3, and apparently has in mind Paul’s words that the Law and the Prophets testify concerning the righteousness from God, thus about Christ.

What Luther here establishes is, therefore, the rule according to which one can distinguish a genuine biblical book from a false one and an inspired text from one that is not. However, that one could distinguish between certain parts within a prophetic or apostolic text that are God’s word from others that are not is a totally foreign thought to Luther, whose writings are full of examples of his unlimited trust in the biblical word. I present only one from the “Theses Concerning Faith” (*de fide*), 1535. Here one finds the often-quoted expression “to set Christ

BO GIERTZ (1905–1998) was Bishop of Göteborg in the Church of Sweden. This essay originally appeared as “Bekännelsestrohet” in *Kvinnan och ämbetet enligt skriften och bekännelsen* [Women and the Office according to Scripture and the Confessions] (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1958), 114–34. The essays collected in this volume were published mere months before the acceptance and approval of women’s ordination by Sweden’s Church-wide Assembly (kyrkomötet) of the same year. It was translated by Weslie Odom, a fourth-year student at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The translator thanks Kristina J. Odom, Eric R. Andræ, and others for suggestions regarding the translation.

1. Ruben Josefson (1907–1972) was Archbishop of Uppsala from 1967 until his death.
2. Ingmar Ström, “Kvinnan–samhället–kyrkan” [Woman–Society–Church], in *Kvinnan, samhället, kyrkan* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1958), 192.
3. Ström (1912–2003) later became Bishop of Stockholm (1973–1975).
4. Ruben Josefson, “Den evangelisk-lutherska ståndpunkten” in *Kvinnan, samhället, kyrkan*, 168.
5. WA DB 7: 384; AE 35: 395–96.
6. Josefson, “Den ståndpunkten,” 170.

against Scripture,” which is used even by Josefson.<sup>7</sup> However, this word of Luther is abused. As the context shows, Luther claims that his opponents twist and misinterpret Scripture, and that they appeal to this perverted Scripture contrary to the doctrine of justification by faith. It is against this misinterpreted Scripture that Luther now says he appeals to Christ himself. In this context there is no inkling that Christ could be or needs to be referenced against anything that is really in the Bible. Next, Luther says that all the prophets and fathers have proclaimed everything contained in Scripture through the Holy Spirit (*spiritu Christi omnia sunt locuti, quae habentur in scripturis*). Since we do not have the same measure of God’s Spirit as they had, because our flesh strives against the Spirit, and because of the many deceiving spirits, it is necessary that we hold to the apostles’ trustworthy commands and writings. It is these apostles who have been sent to us by God as infallible teachers (*infallibiles Doctores*), and cannot, therefore, unlike us, err.<sup>8</sup>

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***One approaches the Bible with the conviction that God speaks to us precisely through this word as it is given to us.***

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That the Bible is not a “formal authority” is quite true, if one by that means it is not an authority immediately accessible to reason. Or that anyone at any time, regardless of his attitude toward God, would be able to look up instructions for a moralistic life or be guaranteed sufficient secular history or scientific enlightenment. It is just as true that the Bible remains a closed book to the one who approaches it with the false conviction of the “piety of the law,” namely, that the most essential thing in life is to discover God’s commands and do them. Josefson rightly stresses the great importance in Luther’s finding the key to Scripture in the doctrine of justification by faith. There he has found the center from which the Bible in all its parts must be understood. It is equally important and necessary to warn against a legalistic view of the Bible, but one must then also make clear to himself what a legalistic view of the Bible is. It means to make the law a way to salvation and the fulfillment of the law a condition of salvation. However, it is not “legalism”—as modern man often means—that one stresses the law and makes the law still valid. In that regard Luther was terribly legalistic according to modern thinking. One of the things that probably strikes a modern reader most in meeting Luther is the intractable severity with which he lays claim to God and Christ’s demands. In doing this, he time and again brings forth

the written word, just as it stands, and sets it stubbornly and unavoidably before us. Luther had to fight many of the hardest and most bitter conflicts in his life because he would not abandon the literal understanding of a clear and authoritative biblical word, for example, concerning the right of the governing authority to bear the sword (with regards to the Peasants’ War) or the testimony of the words of institution that Christ really is present in the Supper’s bread and wine (in the conflict with Zwingli).

So far the view of the Bible. A Lutheran way of reading and understanding the Bible must first and foremost mean that one truly approaches it with the conviction that God speaks to us precisely through this word as it is given to us. Every attempt to find a first principle that makes it possible for us to sift out the supposed dross from the Bible and take from it what is really God’s word is incompatible with Luther’s whole way of looking at and dealing with the word. This does not mean—as we are so often accused of maintaining—that everything in Scripture is on the same level, that the biblical word is simply mechanical, and so forth.<sup>9</sup> Certainly one of Luther’s great gifts to Christianity is that he taught us to see that Scripture has a center, core, and star, namely, the Redeemer. All else must be seen in light of him, since they are put in the appropriate place only in their right relationship with him. When this happens and Scripture says what it is supposed to say in the greater context of the Bible, then it is the clear and pure word of God.

## II. THE CONFESSIONS’ VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Let us move on to the Confessions. The decisive question here is in what way a Christian church is bound by God’s word concerning her external forms, offices, and such. As is well known, the Reformation made the Roman church the object of harsh criticism because it had created a variety of institutions, offices, and forms for the divine service that contended with God’s word. Constantly appealing to Scripture, the reformers demanded a change. They tried to shape their reforms so that the church would better correspond to God’s will as we meet it in the Bible.

“Neo-Protestantism” (if I may still use that term) now wants to see the Reformation’s lasting contribution, not in that it claimed Scripture’s authority, but rather that it took on a new, principally liberated stance toward the biblical word. Rome wanted to build canon law directly on the biblical word and so read the Bible as a law book containing regulations given by

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9. For example, Erik Sjöberg makes the following accusation against those opposed to women’s ordination: “The New Testament prohibition against women speaking in the church . . . cannot possibly be seen as binding for the church at all times. . . . The opposite position would mean a legalistic and mechanic biblicism that is untenable and incompatible with an Evangelical-Lutheran view of the Bible, a reality to which we have already called attention” (SOU 1950:48, 41 f.; emphasis added). SOU 1950:48 was one of the official proposals from the Swedish governmental agency Statens Offentliga Utredningar that recommended women’s ordination. Many dioceses rejected this proposal, though ten years later the measure would be approved.

7. Ibid.

8. WA 39, I: 47 f.; AE 34: 105–32.

God, which could immediately translate into practical regulations. The Reformed, for their part, have made similar attempts at creating a church structure after New Testament examples, which they perceive as binding for all time.

It is both right and important to stress that Lutheranism does not treat the Bible as a “formal authority” in that way. It is precisely because God speaks here that it is necessary at each point for one to seek to understand what God means, to whom he speaks, what the purpose of his word is, how it fits into the greater context, and, therefore, how it should be understood and applied today. There are a series of commands and regulations in Scripture that have limited validity because they have been given in a specific situation and indicate the will of God there. This is not only the case with the Mosaic ceremonial law, but also with certain clear and definite commands in the New Testament such as the prohibition concerning blood (Acts 15). What determines if a command of God has limited validity is always the Bible itself. God’s word, read in its whole context and understood rightly in light of Christ, clearly shows that this prohibition regarding blood was never intended to apply other than as a *modus vivendi* in a time of transition when the Jews and Gentile Christians had to live side by side in the same congregation.

Further, Luther always stresses that an example in the Bible is in itself not binding for us to act in the same way, unless it is connected to a command. For example, we are not bound to a life of celibacy following Jesus, but we are bound to pray for our enemies and persecutors. Applied to church regulations this means that we are not bound to emulate everything that happened in the New Testament church. But where there is a command, as in the case of the sacraments, we are unconditionally bound, under the condition, of course, that this command is given to all of God’s church in all times. I may here insert that *this* is what makes the question of women pastors a truly serious matter for the church. Here there is both an example and a command. Jesus and the apostles acted in a very specific way, and Paul tells us that this happens according to God’s command. He appeals to all the authorities early Christendom understood as holy: God’s word in the Old Testament, Christ’s command, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is quite obvious that he intends this ordinance to continue to stand for all Christian congregations because it is founded on God’s will.

The errant claim that, despite this, changing the church’s ordinances concerning this matter is compatible with our confession, is due to a particular view concerning what is by divine right<sup>10</sup> and therefore must always be binding. These arguments must be examined, and Josefson summarizes them clearly. He refers to Wilhelm Maurer’s *Pfarrerrecht und Bekenntnis*,<sup>11</sup> and says:

It is likely that the Lutheran view of ecclesiastical order developed under a conscious confrontation with the Roman Catholic doctrine. According to the Lutheran view, divine right cannot be directly based on individual Bible passages as the Roman doctrine of the church presupposes. Certainly Bible passages are quoted here and there, but a closer examination of the context where this is done shows that divine right only exists when the divine command coincides with a word of promise. So the administration of the sacraments is based on divine right, because God’s promises are connected to it and thereby it is an expression of the gospel. One may also say that there must necessarily be a connection to justification for a command to have legitimacy. What is by divine right, included in the gospel and binding for the church, is thus not identical to biblical law as the earlier doctrine of canon law designed by Gratian<sup>12</sup> claims. Maurer notes that ‘the Lutheran Reformation has, against Gratian, determined that divine right does not consist in the law literally understood or in the gospel legalistically understood, but becomes known to faith as God’s creating command.’<sup>13</sup>

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Josefson here concisely reproduces Maurer’s main thesis, which argues that only a certain kind of biblical passage can be a foundation for ecclesiastical regulations, and introduces the term *das göttliche* (or: *schöpferische*) *Mandatwort*. For a biblical word to be such a mandate does not depend on its form, consisting of a command from God, but on the content: it must be a word of promise. If it does not contain a promise, it does not have creating power and effect. Thus, it cannot be a creating mandate, and is not binding for the church.

One must now ask what Maurer bases this distinction upon, as this has enormously significant consequences. The distinction is not directly expressed in the sources. The term itself, creating mandate, was coined by Maurer to make his theory more precise, more particular. The Confessions in their terminology do not make such a distinction in God’s word. This does not negate, of course, the fact that it may still be there.

Maurer provides as proof four passages from the Confessions.<sup>14</sup> After noting that one seems to find in our Confes-

10. *Gudomlig rätt* is closely related to *jure divino* in Giertz’s usage throughout.

11. Wilhelm Maurer, *Pfarrerrecht und Bekenntnis: Über die Bekenntnismäßige Grundlage eines Pfarrerrechtes in der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1957).

12. Gratian of Bologna, twelfth-century jurist often referred to as the “Father of Canon Law.”

13. Josefson, “Den ståndpunkten,” 175f.

14. Maurer, *Pfarrerrecht*, 97.

sions statements that base ecclesiastical regulations directly on specific biblical passages, he says that these remarkably rare instances are shown to have another meaning upon closer reflection. Certainly monasticism and the mass for the dead are rejected because they are not scriptural, but in what way is monasticism “without support in God’s word?” It is because one wants to earn the forgiveness of sins and justification by it. When is rejection of the world without God’s call and command (*sine vocatione, sine mandato Dei*)? When is a self-chosen act of worship and of no avail to salvation.

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***It is certainly no small sin to establish such services in the church without any command of God or some example in Scripture.***

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We will pause here to look at the proof passages. First Maurer refers to the Apology (xxvii, 58) where Melancthon polemizes against Rome’s reference to Nazirites in the Old Testament as an attempt to defend monasticism. He points out that Nazirites did not take their vows to earn forgiveness of sins before God. One cannot compare monastic life, created by men without any support in God’s word (*sine verbo Dei*) to earn salvation, to a Nazirite vow supported by God’s word (*qui habebat verbum Dei*) and not instituted to earn the forgiveness of sins. According to this passage the sole determining factor is actually not that a command be a “mandate” that includes a promise. The Nazirite vow was founded on God’s word, even though this word was not a creating word of promise. The problem with monasticism is not only that—on a wrong path—it desires to earn grace before God, but, just as much, that it is created without any support in God’s word. According to the Confessions, one of the most serious arguments against a doctrine is that it tries to win God’s grace with the help of works. This cannot be compatible with the word, yet one need not necessarily conclude that only such doctrines conflict with God’s word or that this is the only viewpoint with which ecclesiastical law must be concerned.

Maurer’s second proof passage is found in the same article in the Apology (xxvii, 41) dealing with forsaking the world. Melancthon says this can happen in two ways. One way is without a calling, without God’s command (*sine vocatione, sine mandato Dei*). This displeases Christ because the deeds we invent for ourselves are useless worship. The opponents here wrongly appeal to Jesus’ word about the one who has forsaken house, brother, children, and so forth. We know that God’s commands (*mandatum Dei*) forbid us from abandoning our wife and children, but there is another way of abandoning property and family in accord with God’s command (*mandato Dei*): such

as when a tyrannical power makes us choose between denying the gospel or being driven from the land. Here we have God’s command rather to suffer wrongs (*Hic habemus mandatum*) and deprive ourselves not only of possessions, wife, and children, but even life; we should give even our life for the sake of the gospel. It would be ridiculous, however, to say that one way to serve God would be to kill oneself and so forsake one’s life without any command of God (*sine mandato Dei*). In the same way it is ridiculous to say that there is some service in abandoning possessions, friends, spouse, or children without any command of God (*sine mandato Dei*). Here in the Apology the word *mandatum* is used no less than five times, and each time it concerns God’s command—binding for both the church and the individual. It is not a word of promise when God forbids us to forsake wife and children, or even when he commands us to abandon everything for the sake of the gospel. We do not win forgiveness of sins in either way. Both are part of life as it takes shape lived in faith. Thus monasticism is against God’s word not only in that it is a false way to salvation, but also, first and foremost, that it cannot honestly appeal to any ground or reason in the Bible. Rather, it contradicts commands given by God. Conversely, the correct forsaking of everything worldly can be founded on clear commands given in God’s word.

At the risk of tiring the reader, I must refer also to Maurer’s two remaining proof passages. “Why can the mass for the dead not be founded on Scripture?” he asks. For Maurer it is not because a corresponding biblical passage does not exist, but because it makes God’s gift into a work of man so that his name is abused and the Second Commandment is broken. The testimony of God’s word is missing everywhere man establishes his own work to earn the forgiveness of sin. Though one can assent to this with one’s whole heart, an objection must be raised when Maurer claims there is no binding and obligatory word of God for the church except where it promises the forgiveness of sins and is, thereby, a creating mandate. The objection becomes even stronger the deeper one delves into the Confessions; but let us look at the remaining proof passages.

This third one, concerning the mass for the dead, is again taken from the Apology (xxiv, 89, 92). There it asserts that the opponents’ attempt to defend the mass for the dead has no support or command in Scripture (*nulla habent testimonia, nullum mandatum ex scripturis*). It is certainly no small sin to establish such services in the church without any command of God or some example in Scripture (*sine mandato Dei, sine exemplo scripturae*) or to allow the Lord’s Supper, which is instituted as a remembrance and proclamation for the living, apply to the dead. This breaks the Second Commandment and abuses the Lord’s name.

It cannot be said much more clearly that the decisive thing for the reformers was what was really in Scripture and what was not. The mass for the dead is rejected, of course, because “there is no corresponding biblical passage.” This argument is as weighty as the following: the essence of the mass for the dead contradicts Scripture’s teaching on the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. Here too there is no support for Maurer’s distinction, since, for the Confessions, the Bible has unconditional author-

ity, whether it speaks in the form of command or promise. Melanchthon repeats this a little later (Ap xxiv, 92): *Nec tutum est in ecclesia cultus instituere sine auctoritate scripturae* (It is not safe to institute an act of worship in the church without the authority of Scripture).<sup>15</sup>

The fourth and final proof passage remains (Ap xv, 14). It says: “Now if someone wants to institute certain works for the purpose of meriting the forgiveness of sins or righteousness, how will that person know that these works please God without God’s word? How will they make others certain about God’s will without God’s command and word?” Here again Scripture stands at the center. This and only this can give a reliable answer concerning what is pleasing to God. Of course it is correct that Maurer says, “The testimony of God’s word is missing everywhere man establishes his own work to earn the forgiveness of sin.” How could this be otherwise? Of course God’s word cannot confirm what is completely contradictory to the heart of the gospel! But this does not mean that God’s word has nothing to say as soon as it does not speak of the forgiveness of sins or contain a promise of grace. The promise of the forgiveness of sins for everyone who believes in Jesus is without doubt the main purpose of everything in the word, but this truth does not limit God’s right to speak. What he may have to say in addition to this is also his word, and the church has no right to say: “This does not concern me, because it contains no promise.”

We also see in the Confessions that divine right is not limited to that which contains a promise. What is by divine right is truly all that God has ordained for his church. Therefore the Supper must be distributed under both types simply because Christ has commanded us to do it so and not because there is some specific promise connected with the chalice; the gift is the same in the bread and in the wine. The Confessions stress time and again that the church does not have the right to change Christ’s command. Further, there are no conditions wherein obedience would only apply when a promise is connected to a command. It is true that the command to baptize is connected with the most wonderful promises, but that is not *why* it must be obeyed. On the contrary, it says:

Thus we have considered the three things that must be known about this sacrament, especially that it is God’s ordinance and is to be held in all honor. This alone would be enough, even if baptism were an entirely external thing. . . . In the same way, even if we had nothing more than these words, “Go and baptize,” etc., we would still have to accept it as God’s ordinance and perform it. But here we have not only God’s commandment and injunction, but the promise as well. (LC IV, 38)

Can it be said any more clearly that the command in and of itself is sufficient? If the command is given by God and directed to us, it must also be carried out. We have no authority to

determine first if we would classify it as a mandate connected to a promise or something we have invented ourselves. Even such distinctions can become “human regulations, without any foundation in Holy Scripture.”

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Finally, even the home and the state are founded upon divine right according to the Confessions. Maurer insists quite rightly that even the word here is a creating, life-giving word, which has the character of a promise. This expresses God’s love to the fallen world, which he, despite everything, maintains and allows to live on with the help of marriage, family, the legal system, and other beneficial orders. But this is only one side of the issue. Everyone who knows Luther’s writings on governing authority knows that he just as strongly insists that the state and legal system are also expressions of God’s punitive righteousness, which “carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer,” as it says in Romans 13:4, which Luther cites in this context time and again. If one takes seriously “that nothing else can create a foundation for authority, and nothing else can require permanent obedience than *das schöpferische Mandatwort*,” then one must eliminate this whole aspect of the authorities’ task. The reformers would no doubt call this a forbidden intervention into God’s orders. We see, then, that God’s commands are valid regardless of whether or not we find in them a promise.

**III. THE SWEDISH DEBATE**

Now, it is possible that Maurer has meant this whole presentation only as an illustration of an important tendency in the Confessions. As such it has value, for without a doubt most of the lasting commands and ordinances that God has given his church can be seen as a direct reflection of his good will to grant us the forgiveness of sins. If one digs deep enough into the context, the same will stand behind them all even if one sometimes has to believe without seeing. But in the Swedish debate, Maurer’s thesis has been used as the norm according to which one can distinguish a confessional view of ecclesiastical law from a deluded one.<sup>16</sup> Against this it must be said that this distinction is not in accord with the Confessions. For them it is not the character of a promise that makes a command valid, but the simple fact that it is God’s word and directed to us.

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15. All English citations from the Confessions are from Kolb-Wengert.

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16. Josefson, “Den ståndpunkten,” 176 f. See Gustaf Wingren, *Kyrkans ämbete* (Lund: Gleerup, 1958), 12–15.

Above all, due to an important addendum Maurer himself makes to his thesis, one wonders if he can rightly be appealed to as he has been in the Swedish debate. Specifically, he notes that according to the Confessions there is also a divine mandate that calls for fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, rightly understood, because these are the fruits of faith, “and good fruits have God’s command.”<sup>17</sup> But for these there is no word of promise. The purpose is not justification; they are fruits of the forgiveness of sins. Thus there are true commands of God that cannot necessarily be connected to justification, but that the Christian willingly and gladly performs—not to earn the forgiveness of sins—but because he loves God and knows that this is God’s will. He does it, as it says, “*propter gloriam et mandatum Dei*,” (Ap XII, 139) on account of the glory and commandment of God.

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*It is very dangerous to speak of things that have to do with God differently than he does.*

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This is an important addendum because it is also said thereby that life in an evangelical church is not only regulated by mandates that promise forgiveness. There are also divine regulations for other things, and these can only be deduced from the word. Even obedience to the ordinance determined by God in the matter of division of duty between man and woman in his church belongs to what a Christian willingly and gladly accepts. This obviously is not to earn the forgiveness of sins, but simply “to God’s glory and because he has commanded it.”

There is a tendency today both in questions concerning the Bible and the Confessions to limit their scope by setting up theories concerning a correct evangelical attitude toward them. I have had occasion to point out a few such attempts. When it comes to Scripture, the theory is that only what preaches Christ is God’s word. When it comes to the Confessions it is the attempt to limit what is binding to “the creating mandate.” I have tried to show that such attempts, however many correct observations they contain, are not in line with the Bible and the Confessions. Here one has reason to recall another word of Luther: “It is very dangerous to speak of things that have to do with God differently than he does or with other words than he himself uses.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, we always have reason to be cautious when presented a theory or principle that makes it possible to give the correct evangelical reply to all questions concerning the office of the ministry or evangelical church regulations. There is especially reason to be cautious when such a theory experiments with terms and distinctions that are not the Bible’s own. It is

far safer to do as Luther says. Certainly he had a much clearer and uniform evangelical ethos and perspective than most. In concrete matters, however, he still always goes to Scripture and views all available material; he summarizes it, tries to understand it, examines God’s meaning, and so finds the answer.

In the debate concerning women pastors, one too often encounters attempts to determine the whole matter according to a previously determined “evangelical” principle.<sup>19</sup> So we often hear that according to an evangelical view the office of the ministry in itself certainly is according to divine right, but its external forms can be regulated according to human right.<sup>20</sup> Thus, one concludes, we are well within our full right to introduce women’s ordination. As if this matter was only a question concerning the external forms for the church’s office! As soon as one goes to the Bible itself one finds that it is inseparably connected to the question of creation and God’s intention for man and woman in relation to one another. Here the whole matter of the division of roles is set forth: the distribution of services and gifts that God has bound to the distinction between man and women both in marriage and in the congregation. The desire to decide such a question by referring to the notion that the Christian church has full freedom to arrange the office’s external forms according to its discretion is not to let the Bible be heard.

It seems to me that the discussion concerning women pastors has so far given rise to at least *one* valuable result. There seems to be a consensus that the New Testament (if one sees it as a whole and takes into account all that it has to say) really says “no” concerning women pastors. Even Erik Sjöberg<sup>21</sup> and Krister Stendahl, who support the proposition, note that, for the New Testament authors, obstacles existed that were of fundamental significance and were seen as founded on God’s will.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Stendahl says concerning this that there is fundamental consensus among exegetes. The question is not what is actually said in the New Testament, but rather “it is the view of the Bible that matters.”<sup>23</sup> Stendahl has since declared—with an admirable desire to speak clearly and openly—why he is of the opinion that we cannot make the New Testament position ours, but must build on some other tendencies he claims also exist in the New Testament and appear to be leading to the annihilation of its foundational perspective. It is not my goal here to scrutinize this view of the Bible further. I only note that one who shares this view cannot reasonably claim to be “faithful to the Bible.” The words must be allowed to keep their meaning; to be faithful to the Bible, if it is to have any real meaning, must

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19. See Eva-Gun Junker, “Till debatten om kvinnliga präster,” *Kristen humanism* 20 (1958): 42.

20. Here especially *gudomlig rätt* and *mansklig rätt* are used in the same way as *jure divino* and *jure humano*.

21. Erik Sjöberg, b. 1907, was Associate Professor of Exegesis at Åbo Academy and Lund University.

22. Erik Sjöberg, *Exegeterna om kvinnliga präster* (Stockholm: Svenska kyrkans diakonistyrelses bokförlag, 1953), 65f. See Krister Stendahl, “Bibelsynen och kvinnan” [The View of the Bible and Woman], in *Kvinnan, samhället, kyrkan*, 139.

23. Stendahl, “Bibelsynen,” 140.

17. Maurer, *Pfarrerrecht*, 100.

18. WA 15: 43.

mean that one holds fast to the message that the Bible truly contains when examined as factually and conscientiously as possible. To note as an exegete that the New Testament writings say one thing, and for particular reasons be convinced that the church in our time must say something else, cannot in any case, according to plain language, be said to be faithful to the Bible. It can mean faithfulness to a new approach or developments one claims are in the Bible. From a personal point of view, it can mean a deep, serious faithfulness to the Lord Christ, if one assumes some kind of progressive revelation. But it is not what one with good, unambiguous language should call fidel-

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*The battle over women pastors is a battle also for faithfulness to the Bible.*

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ity to the Scriptures. And this is no injustice to those who have aligned themselves with the problem’s solution maintained by Stendahl and with him the Diakonistyrelsens Sociala Utskott [Diaconal Social Committee]: for it would not be unfair if one says that one cannot accept the claim that this is only a matter of two different interpretations of Scripture and that faithfulness to the biblical word in both cases are equally unconditional. It is not only a question of two different interpretations of the same biblical word, but also a question of two fundamentally different views. In one view, the biblical word is God’s word and can never cease to be. For the other, it is a matter of trying to find something of lasting value within time-conditioned messages. It is this fact that justifies seeing the battle over women pastors as a battle also for faithfulness to the Bible.

Something similar could be said of the Confessions. I have attempted to show that there is no real foundation for claiming that the title *confessional* should now rightfully belong to those who want to have women pastors. If the word *confessional* is to have any meaning, it must first and foremost mean an internal loyalty and affinity with the whole way of viewing the Bible and God’s way of working through his word as expressed in our Confessions. Our church is a church of the word to such a high degree that every change in precisely this point necessarily has consequences for all that follows. One cannot substitute faith in the Bible and the will to listen to the whole biblical message, in its correct evangelical meaning as the Confessions testify, with some theological principles, however good and correct they might be. The question is about God himself and his will. According to an evangelical conviction, one cannot know anything concerning these except through the biblical word.

Finally, it is fitting that Luther himself speak:

Now we have taught so often that we should do nothing unless we have the express approval of God’s word; God himself has nothing to do with us, nor we with him, except through his word, which is the only means by which we recognize his will, and according to which we have to govern our actions. Whoever has a god but not his word has no god, for the true God has included our life, being, estate, office, speech, action or inaction, suffering, and everything in his word and shown us by example that we must not and shall not seek or know anything apart from his word, even of God himself, for apart from his word he does not wish to be understood, sought, or found through our invention or imagining.<sup>24</sup> [LOGIA](#)

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24. WA 30, III: 213–14; AE 46: 276.

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## A CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

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