



# Moving Forward Faithfully— Reclaiming the Transcendent Truth and Authority of God’s Word

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As we look back on and celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, today is a perfect opportunity to reflect on our current context as well as the opportunities to shape our future with the gifts of our rich confessional heritage.

One of the issues that provided impetus for the Reformation was the nature of the authority of Scripture in directing the life of the church, both corporately and individually. Luther’s position was clear and concise. It is Scripture alone that is the “*Norma Normanza*” for all matters of life and faith. Luther wrote that the Bible “alone is to be trusted because it is through itself most certain, most easily accessible, comprehensible, interpreting itself, proving, judging all the words of all. All leaders must subordinate themselves to its witness<sup>1</sup>.... The Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges, arbiters but only witnesses, disciples and confessors of Scripture.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>D. Martin Luthers Werke (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1993) 7:96.

<sup>2</sup>Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, Chapters 1–4* (1535), in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut Lehmann, and Christopher Boyd Brown, 75 vols. (Philadelphia and St. Louis: Fortress and Concordia, 1963) 26:58.

*The modern world is in a paradoxical rebellion against authority, while desperately seeking some norm or norms to guide our common life. Bradosky urges that Christians reclaim the centrality of the biblical witness as a life-giving authority, whose Word is vital to all peoples.*

After 500 years, the issue of authority, truth, relevance and the use of Scripture is not only a matter of great contention but a source of division in both the culture and the church, pointing to the need for a reformation and renewal as powerful and substantive as the first.

While we live in a culture that seems to be in a state of rebellion against all forms of authority, we are simultaneously desperately searching for a set of values to norm and guide our life together. A culture, like an individual, will always struggle to survive. A culture is, by definition, a group of people who share a common set of values. Without sharing a common set of values, a culture will disintegrate. Inclusivity, acceptance, tolerance, and multiculturalism are not values sufficient to provide for the cohesiveness of culture and therefore will also accelerate its demise. The acceptance of every value is synonymous with having no values around which a strong culture can develop. The struggle within a culture becomes desperate when there is no longer a common set of values that defines and norms it. Perhaps our seeming denial or rebellion against any authority is really a cry for some authority and set of values that is not destructive but is, rather, life-giving.

We have turned to our own wisdom and insight, struggling to find such hope-filled authority. However, all too frequently we experience the failure of these varied sources of authority, resulting in increasing levels of suspicion, skepticism, and fear.

We have looked to technology as a source of authority at our fingertips that we can own, use, and control. Computers and the Internet give us access to more information than we can process. The Internet has been used as a means of connecting us, creating community, and producing hope for artificial intelligence, which may or may not be an improvement over human intelligence. Hoping for authoritative information, these same resources have been used to manipulate us, deceive us, divide us, spy on us, and undermine our security.

We have pursued science as a source of ultimate authority. What was once a system of theories constantly being tested and changed based on new evidence has become a source of dogma that must be believed by scientists in order to be included in the scientific community. If not devoted to rescuing earth from imminent destruction, science would encourage us to believe that the answers to our struggles here may lie in the far reaches of our galaxy.

The academic community is another source of authority in which we have placed our trust. We turn to people with degrees in a variety of subjects, as if the degree imparts true wisdom regarding the application of truth to life. Some assert that, because they have degrees, they are experts and others must follow their direction, even on matters they have never studied.

In our attempts to live longer—even if we are not living any better—we have placed ourselves under the authority of health care providers who encourage us with testing, replacement parts, transplants, surgeries for healing and cosmetic improvements, therapies, drugs, diets, and countless solutions for preventing illness

and maintaining fitness. In spite of their best efforts and rising costs, every solution is temporary at best.

Others turn to political authority vested in party platforms and agendas as their source of hope, believing that political solutions can and must address every problem. The struggles for political power and control seem to produce more broken promises for the many and benefits for the few who can afford to purchase influence among decision makers. We know firsthand that political solutions do not necessarily provide for unity but rather can become the foundation for greater division through values that are diametrically opposed.

Underneath each of these alternative sources is the unceasing pursuit of the power and authority of self. Self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-realization are never far from pure selfishness and narcissism, basing meaning on personal experience, sexual identity on feelings, and exploiting relationships for personal gratification. Not far behind in such selfishness is the accumulation of wealth—money and possessions as a means of establishing authority by asserting power and control over others.

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Dallas Willard asserts that not only is our problem the pursuit of these sources of power and authority but the speed at which we pursue them and the lack of time spent in evaluating the results of placing our trust in them. His book, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, begins with the story of a pilot. He writes: “Recently, a pilot was practicing high-speed maneuvers in a jet fighter. She turned the controls for what she thought was a steep ascent—and flew straight into the ground. She was unaware that she had been flying upside down.... This is a parable of human existence in our times...most of us as individuals, society as a whole, live at high-speed, and often with no clue to whether we are flying upside down or right-side up. Indeed, we are haunted by a strong suspicion that there may be no difference—or at least that it is unknown or irrelevant.”<sup>3</sup>

What the pilot experienced in her disorientation has everything to do with the speed of the aircraft. Some dismiss Willard’s illustration as improbable because they have been upside down and have experienced the sensation of blood rushing to their head, as well as the resulting pressure. You should be able to tell if you are upside down. However, what they fail to consider is the effect of speed. When

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<sup>3</sup>Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) 1–2.

speed is producing a gravitational force greater than the normal gravitational pull, you no longer have the sensation of being upside down. Because of the speed, the blood is being pushed to the back of your head as you move forward. Without reference to other clues regarding your orientation, you could be easily convinced that pulling back on the controls would cause you to climb, when in fact it brings about your demise. When the church tries to keep up with cultural trends so that it is moving at the same speed as the culture, it may become just as disoriented and be unaware that it may also be flying upside down. Thinking that the next maneuver will cause it to soar, it crashes and burns.

There is good evidence to suggest that this is descriptive of the state of the church today. Mainline churches, including the Lutheran expression of the church, are in a state of decline. Some are in a more rapid decline than others, but when compared to population growth, we are in far worse shape than most are willing to admit. Many are still living in a state of denial and refusing to acknowledge this current reality. Still fewer have studied the reasons for such a decline. Into this vacuum, I offer the following observations:

1. Some believed the church needed to change its focus and direction in order to achieve relevancy. The faulty assumption was that the gospel of Jesus Christ depends on us to make it relevant to the secular culture. The mission of the church was diverted from the Great Commission or the Great Commandment to the agendas of the culture. By promoting the agenda of the culture, some believed the culture would then be more open to the mission of the church. However, as the church abandoned its mission in favor of speaking out for the culture, there was no need for the culture to respond to the church, because the church now adopted the cultural values as its own. The church became mired in the political as a means to attain popularity. Political agendas and activism became the means for demonstrating relevancy. But the result was a church that became less popular and increasingly irrelevant to the culture.
2. One of the specific cultural values that undermined the authority, mission, and ministry of the church is the preoccupation with the cultural dogma of the continuous progress of humanity towards positive change, sophistication, and therefore superiority over our predecessors. This social dogma asserts that the present is far more valuable than the past and that the values, ideas, lifestyle, philosophies, and lack of religious faith in the present are far superior to the past. The hermeneutic of the present is skepticism for anything in the past. This hermeneutic adopted by the church is devastating to Christian faith passed on from countless generations that preceded us. By denouncing the authority of the past, we posit the relevancy of the current culture and its various platforms of authority, often without serious critique. However, it is only a hermeneutic of faith that produces believers.
3. The sense of the transcendent gave way to the systems of salvation we could manufacture for ourselves. Science, technology, medicine, and politics led the

way. Rather than discuss the nature of the kingdom of God, the church was content to settle for political parties and platform agendas. Others have usurped the responsibility once held by the church of establishing values and the moral framework that provides stability for the culture. Still others have taken over responsibilities that were once essential ministries of the church: caring for the poor and hungry, the widows and orphans, the sick and dying.

4. Internally, the church adapted by abandoning the authority of Scripture. In order to validate the values of the culture it also had to abandon the historic interpretation of the Scripture. Seminary professors, in the name of “historical-critical method,” were free to engage in deconstructive methods of interpretation, revisionist methods, and reductionist methods or Gospel minimalism. (Time and space will not permit me to provide you with examples of each, but they are abundant.) Given the relativistic understanding of truth in our culture—and resulting church cultures that embrace a methodology in which one is bound to an internal (self-absorbed) conscience, there is a belief that “bound conscience” allows for biblical interpretation in a virtual “free-for-all” in which every believer should be able to interpret the Scriptures in any way that fits their worldview and personal needs. This is not a Lutheran understanding; we have a methodology for the faithful interpretation of Scripture that is rooted in our Reformation heritage.
5. What has preoccupied us for decades is teaching the content of issues and agendas rather than the faith. It is no small concern that our people know more about environmental issues than they do the life of Jesus. We know more about political issues than our confessions. We know more about the economy than we do about ecclesiology. We know about social ills but very little about the spiritual ills that plague us. We are aware of world hunger but care little about helping others hunger for God. We are aware of our need to conserve water resources but fail to lead others to the wellspring of the water of life. We talk about freedom but say little about obedience. We focus on grace but don’t see the value of repentance and transformation.
6. The over-institutionalization of our churches has worked to hasten our decline. I read these words recently: “The Church was at first an intimate fellowship with Jesus. In Greece, it became a philosophy and a theology. In Italy, it became an institution. In Europe, it became a culture. In the United States, it became just another non-profit corporation.” We have adopted a corporate model requiring the upward flow of power, money, and control to the uppermost levels of church structures, and have become dependent on those at the top to address the problems and concerns, to produce the changes necessary for renewal and reform. What the over-institutionalization of the church succeeded in doing is to suck the life out of the local congregation. The front line for mission and ministry became those stuck in bureaucratic offices, who have the least contact with those in need. They are the least effective in delivering what is helpful, but use every con-

tact to promote the values of their internal culture and insist on conformity with their agendas. As they continued to fail, decreasing in size and financial assets, they resorted to what every dying institution does.

7. Institutional survival has now become the mission. Preserving their existence becomes the most important goal, even if it means compromising the gospel. Evangelicals are no exception to the problems of over-institutionalization. As they overbuilt their infrastructure they were forced to fill the seats and make their message popular in order to afford that excessive infrastructure. The easiest way to popularity is to compromise the gospel or redefine it for the sake of a more popular message that is sure to please. The characteristics of institutional survival are defensiveness, deceit, attacks, creating new enemies to blame for failure, and protection strategies. Denial of the truth and maintaining images become all-important. Loyalty to the institution becomes the ultimate value.

The churches in our culture did not reach the current state of decline instantaneously. It occurred a little at a time. George Barna describes this concept of social change as gradualism. As a pilot, the understanding and use of the compass is an appropriate analogy for understanding the effects of gradualism and our context. If you are following a course and have deviated from your compass heading by a few degrees but are only flying five miles, you will be assured of finding your destination airport for a safe landing. If you are off a few degrees and you are going 500 miles you could miss an entire city. If you are off a few degrees and you are going 5,000 miles you could miss an entire state or two. The longer you go, the greater the delta or change. This methodology for change is imperceptible but intentional. Those advocating such change seem to have a consistent set of mantras, "Why are you worried about the little things? It is only a few insignificant degrees of change. It won't affect you." By the time we realize how far off course we are, we are lost and desperate for direction-finding assistance.

Fortunately, the realization of the need for reform and renewal is growing. Some long to speak up and move forward, refusing to accept the spiraling decline as the status quo. Because of our history and heritage, I believe that Lutherans are in the best position to lead such a movement. Our confessional heritage is conducive to providing the foundation and theological structure for these efforts. That pathway forward must include the following essentials:

1. Asserting the authority and norm of the Word of God in Holy Scripture.
2. Acknowledging the historical interpretations of Scripture as an essential part of our legacy.
3. Affirming that Jesus Christ is the only source of salvation, that he alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the incarnate Word, the fullness of the Scripture and yet defined by his own Word. The Scripture is his sanctuary.
4. Advancing the mission of the Church as Christ instituted it in the Great Commission (Matt 28).

5. Advocating for renewed commitment to catechesis—teaching the faith; vocation—living the faith; and an ecclesiology based on mutual accountability and responsibility—the application of our Confessional heritage that forms and shapes our identity, making us a blessing to the entire church.
6. Abandoning all vestiges of the over-institutionalization of the church in favor of the primacy of the local congregation as the front line for mission and ministry.
7. Aspiring to return to the primary focus of the church—discipleship—and creating a culture that values making disciples through equipping and empowering the laity.

This reform and renewal will require the same level of sacrificial commitment as the Reformation or the Confessing Church Movement led by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in opposition to the German Church. The German Church had been conscripted by the culture and succumbed to political pressure of leaders like Hitler and others. Under such pressure, it was willing to compromise the truth for the sake of its own survival. Bonhoeffer decried the cheap grace the Lutheran Church of Germany was offering people. In place of such cheap grace he reminded them of the costly grace of Jesus Christ and the risky demands of discipleship. “When Christ calls someone, He bids them to come and die.”

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If Bonhoeffer were alive today he might well be reminding us that the cross of Christ, his sacrificial love for the salvation of the world, must be manifest in our own lives. It is at the cross that sin is forgiven, salvation is received, and new life begins. The cross is not the sign that all is lost but that everything is gained. The only way we can truly experience life is to die in Christ. In such a death, we live. The cost of reforming and renewing the culture of the church exacts a huge toll on those committed to such a cause. To this cause, without regard to the price, we must commit ourselves. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we boldly confess Christ, even in the hostile environment of the institutional church, American culture, or any other oppositional forces in the world committed to eliminating or subjugating all those who believe in Jesus Christ. We keep the cross in front of us, acknowledging what is sure to come. It is the saints who came before us who willingly offered their lives for the sake of the gospel. They have passed on the gospel of Jesus Christ in its purity to us, and it is that same gospel that we proclaim. The witness of those saints encourages us to live today with the same hope and promise that sustained them.

What sustained them is the assurance in the promises of Scripture. Luther understood the Scriptures as the ultimate authority for faith and for life. It is from



the Scriptures that the church obtains its authority, as the Scriptures bring the church into existence and sustain it. Luther's sense of the holiness and transcendent nature of Scripture is as profound as his love for it.

In his lectures on the Psalms Luther writes,

What pasture is to the beast, the nest for the birds, the stream for fish, the Scriptures are for believing souls. To the arrogant, of course, they are a stumbling block; he will have nothing to do with them, since they offer him nothing. But to him who approaches the Scriptures with humility they open themselves and themselves produce humility, change man from a desperate sinner into a child of God. They give everything which the soul needs, and it is to tempt God, if anyone will not be satisfied with the Scriptures. They are the fountain from which one must dip. Each word of the same is a source which affords an inexhaustible abundance of water to everyone who thirsts after the saving doctrine. God's will is completely contained therein, so that we must constantly go back to them. Nothing should be presented which is not confirmed by the authority of both Testaments and agrees with them. It cannot be otherwise, for the Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks and they are His Word.

In his lectures on the Psalms Luther regards the expressions "God speaks," and "the Scriptures speak," as convertible. To hear or to read the Scriptures is nothing else than to hear God. They are his sanctuary in which he is present. Therefore we dare not despise one single word of the Scripture for "all its words are weighed, counted and measured."<sup>4</sup>

Luther believed that the Scripture is the Word of God. It is purely transcendent, proceeding from the Holy Spirit with the cooperation of people who wrote according to the inspiration of the same Spirit. Further, Luther believed the Scripture was both inerrant and infallible. He wrote in *Councils and the Church*, "I have learned to hold the Scripture alone inerrant."<sup>5</sup> Men may err and be deceived but God's Word cannot err. In his commentary on 1 Tim, Luther wrote, "We have the actual Word of God. It is a great thing to know that one has the very sure and infallible Word of God."<sup>6</sup> The Word of God will never fail you. "The Word of God is the very wisdom of God and absolutely infallible truth."<sup>7</sup> This Word is powerful enough to effect the salvation it announces and to impart the life it promises. This Word is the manger that holds the Christ as its content points to him as our Lord and Savior. Through the Spirit and the Word, God lets himself and his will be known and grasped. "Thus the Holy Spirit makes you His pupil and impresses on your heart what reason is unable to do, namely faith and trust in these words."<sup>8</sup> This Word is our most essential treasure. "The Word is a treasure, but not like the treasure of men."<sup>9</sup> This treasure is not only to be on our hearts but in our ears and

<sup>4</sup>M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1944) 17–18.

<sup>5</sup>LW 41:25.

<sup>6</sup>LW 28:239.

<sup>7</sup>LW 1:122.

<sup>8</sup>LW 23:170.

<sup>9</sup>LW 28:239.



on our lips. "It is surely necessary for Him to be with you, not only to have His words resound in your ears but also to strengthen your hearts with his light and fire."<sup>10</sup> "The Word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the Word of faith which we preach)."<sup>11</sup> I believe Luther's understanding of the Word was comprehensive in scope. It is through the Word that we come to Christ, the kingdom of God comes to us, faith is given, we are called and converted, our sins are forgiven, our conscience is consoled, our hearts are comforted, we become the saints of Christ and we properly worship in Word and Sacrament.

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Luther's high view and authoritative understanding of the Scripture was matched by the careful way he engaged in the process of interpretation. He believed there were at least five important principles in that process.

1. The literal sense of Scripture is identical with its historical content. There is no going behind the text in order to discover a different event than the event reported. Begin with the words in the text and let them speak.
2. Discern both law and gospel in the text. Does it point to our sin and our need for grace, or does it provide the clear remedy through the gospel of Jesus.
3. The Scriptures always point us to Jesus.
4. The Scriptures interpret themselves. Read the entire Word of God in order to understand and interpret the individual parts.
5. The Bible has a universal and immediate sense, granted by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the eyes of faith, that transcends historical conditions and events, and must be interpreted in the public reading and study by faithful people.

This understanding of the authoritative and transcendent nature of the Scripture as the norm for all matters of life and faith must again be asserted as the foundation for reform and renewal in the church today. This authority must be understood to transcend all other competing authoritative sources in our culture. In reflecting on the first reformation, many applauded Luther's efforts in moving the Bible from the cathedral to the kitchen table of every believer's home. Today it must be reassembled in its totality from the trash heaps of those who have engaged in minimalism, deconstruction, and revisionist techniques for minimizing its normative influence. It must be pulled away from those who deny its truth and power while asserting contemporary hu-

<sup>10</sup>LW 24:290.

<sup>11</sup>LW 9:279.

man wisdom as more authoritative and relevant to our needs. This transcendent truth must find its way back into the daily devotional life of every Christian—a guide to every relationship, the foundation of the faith we believe, and the inspiration to engage in Christ’s mission that provides direction and purpose for living.

While clergy play an important role in providing the clear proclamation of the Scripture as they engage in Word and Sacrament ministry and in catechesis—faithfully teaching the truth contained in the Scripture—the power of this new or continuing reformation will be the role of the laity, what I believe was Luther’s original intention. This focus is the nature of discipleship, which is just beginning to impact our life together. Our understanding of Word and Sacrament propels us into discipleship, a life of following Jesus. What we receive in worship we carry with us into the world. In baptism, we receive Christ and his kingdom. We take on a new identity as a child of God, a citizen of the kingdom Jesus came to proclaim. To our own name is added the name “Christian.” We become little Christs. Parents, along with the Christian community, take on the responsibility of discipling the child to become a follower of Jesus, maturing in the faith until they, too, are able to share their faith in Jesus with others and disciple them. Unfortunately, we have often abandoned those children and families after the sacramental act is concluded. We have failed to ask the far deeper Lutheran question, “What does this mean?” What are the implications for parents and sponsors? How have we trained discipleship coaches to walk with parents and children in an intentional process toward becoming a mature follower of Jesus Christ?

Asking those questions would insure that we understand the implications of baptism, leading us to a mature understanding of the priesthood of all believers, as well as a more complete understanding of Christian vocation. Such an understanding of baptism would include time for daily confession, forgiveness and repentance, making good use of the promises received in baptism. Private confession with another brother or sister in Christ would not seem foreign to our life but a treasure that unbinds and frees us.

The understanding of discipleship moves us from the Word read and proclaimed at worship into a life of daily reading, reflection, study, and meditation on the Word, providing time for Christ to speak through his Word as he is present in it. This discipline is more than a personal and privatized endeavor. Disciples must come together to reflect on Scripture, sharing insight and meaning, offering encouragement and care through the mutual consolation in the Word.

The primacy of prayer in our worship compels us to lead a life of daily prayer. Luther encourages us to pray prior to our reading and reflection on the Scripture so that Christ will be our teacher through the Holy Spirit, who comes to us in our prayers. Failure to begin with prayer means that we will be our own teachers and miss what Christ would have us learn. This life of prayer draws us ever closer to Christ and is a powerful resource in guiding and directing our decisions. Intercession for others is equally important as an expression of our love and care for them.

Even the offering should not only remind us of Christ's sacrificial love during worship but inspire us to invest our lives in the lives of others. That is the commitment of discipleship, to invest our life in the life of another. While we gather as a community, the love of Christ we receive is to be invested in the life of all those with whom we share a relationship.

The Creed should remind us to grow in our understanding of the faith we possess. Teaching the faith is a primary component in equipping the laity as disciples of Jesus. Christian education must begin at the earliest possible moment and never end. We must teach and be open in our learning to fully embrace Jesus, not according to our own preconceived understanding but according to his revealed identity in the Word. He is who he claims to be: the Lord of Life; the Savior of the world; the Messiah; the Way, the Truth and the Life. Teaching the faith transforms our worldview from our secular culture to a biblical worldview of the kingdom of heaven Jesus came to proclaim. Only in this worldview do we glimpse how the world looks from God's perspective. Confessing the Creed together reminds us that our learning equips disciples to confess their faith in Christ Jesus, to bear witness to Christ. Christian education not only helps us mature in our faith but also equips us to pass on what we have learned in every relationship. The challenge in Christian education is not the mere accumulation of information as though we are designed to be a reservoir of information. Rather, we are to intentionally pass on what we are learning immediately, as we learn it, as though we are a pipeline through whom God's Word enters the lives of others. Learning to share the content is as important as the content itself.

The Eucharist does not end in consuming the bread and the wine. The presence of Christ we have received in the sacrament creates a longing to share Christ's presence through caring for and demonstrating Christian community to others, both within and beyond the body of Christ. We see the nature of that Christian community described in Acts 2:42–47. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." These verses create a powerful glimpse into Christian community. Discipleship invites us to ask the question, what does this mean? Disciples are challenged to mature not only in their understanding but also in their application of the faith to daily living. The nature of this community is one that bears witness to the profound love of Jesus Christ. This community is incarnational, highly relational, and reflective of Christ's love that demands mutual responsibility and accountability. This is the nature of life-to-life discipleship that is our greatest resource for reform and renewal today.

This is only a partial list of the connections that one can easily make between our Lutheran identity in the centrality of worship and discipleship. I began with worship not only because of its centrality in our life together but also because its foundation is the Scripture from beginning to end. The Word of God alone is powerful enough to bring the reform and renewal the church needs. Probing the depth of the Word of God when we regard it as transcendent and authoritative truth opens us to its life-giving and transforming power. It transforms our values, understandings, and behaviors, equipping us to invest our life in Christ in the lives of others through catechesis, or teaching the faith, and vocation, or modeling and living the faith, in the context of a Christian community committed to love expressed in mutual responsibility and accountability. It is the Word of God in Holy Scripture that defines and describes this process as Jesus disciplined his first followers.

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While the world debates absolute truth and relative truth, objective truth and subjective truth, ultimate truth and situational truth, universal truth and cultural truth, for the sake of its own renewal and for the sake of the world the church must boldly proclaim the transcendent truth of Sacred Scripture. We do so not simply to argue for it as one among many understandings of the truth, but in word and deed we regard it as the norm above all other norms for all matters of life and faith, believing it, confessing it, and living it. It is our only hope for “*semper reformanda*.” ☩

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