

REFLECTIONS ON “SOLA SCRIPTURA” At LCC Joint Pastors’ Forum

Understanding the Scriptures properly is not only “what pastors are supposed to have learned at university”, once and for all, it can also be a matter for renewed, even continuous serious engagement. This is especially true if, as our Constitution states, our church is “founded on Holy Scripture ... as the revealed Word of God and as the only norm and guide for faith and life”, as well as in view of divergent popular approaches to interpreting the Bible.

Prof Flip Theron of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch addressed the Joint Pastors’ Forum of the Lutheran Co-ordinating Committee (Lutheran & Moravian churches in the Western Cape) on this issue at their annual retreat in Paarl on 10 September 2002.

Prof Theron took as point of departure the shared Reformation concept “*sola scriptura*” (through Scripture alone) as well as a study document, distributed in advance, entitled *Die Gesag van die Skrif*. This document was due to be presented to the forthcoming General Synod of the NG Kerk, and was sub-sequently adopted by that body with a request for comment. The central thrust of the document, authored by Prof Theron, is to reaffirm, in understandable language, our belief in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God.

This is especially important because of the difficulty of showing how the Scriptures, written by human beings, can still be the Word of God. Important also in the face of certain popular viewpoints. Modern liberalism regards the history of the people of Israel, as well as the person of Jesus, his incarnation, cross and resurrection, as incidental or irrelevant, and is only interested in timeless religious truths, e.g. the Sermon on the Mount. Present-day fundamentalism, again, tries to make the theological significance of the Scriptures dependent on their scientific and historical validity. The Bible as a book should not, however, distract us from the message of the Bible: that God became flesh, a human being, part of a particular people at a particular juncture of history, spoke in the language and thought patterns of the time, while at the same time transcending all that and bringing salvation and eternal life.

This brief note cannot do justice to Prof. Theron’s talk or the thorough, tightly formulated 10-page document, but will hopefully stimulate interest in the Cape Church. The discussion which followed indicated a large measure of common understanding. The document is recommended for study and is available from the Communication Desk or the Church Office.

UP