



## **Dr. Kloha's Plastic Text of Scripture: Synodical Convention Controversy**

**By T. R. Halvorson**

### **Introduction**

The *Convention Workbook 2016* of the Lutheran Church – Missouri synod contains these two overtures:

- 4-23 To Settle Prof. Jeffery Kloha Controversy
- 4-24 To Request Public Clarification of Kloha Paper

In preparation as a delegate to the convention, I studied the issues raised by these overtures. *Brothers of John the Steadfast* published my study as a series of articles in three parts:

1. The premises and resolves of the overtures.
2. A summary from a layman's perspective of the contents of what appeared to be the final version of the academic paper that triggered the overtures.
3. My layman's issues and conclusions regarding the paper.

Following the convention, *Brothers of John the Steadfast* published a fourth part:

4. Dr Jeffrey Kloha and Textual Criticism – A Post Convention Report

This document collects the four articles and adds an *επιλογος*.

## 1. Overture Premises and Resolves

Overture 4-23 says,

A controversy has arisen concerning Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Prof. Jeffrey Kloha and a paper which he presented in Oberursel, Germany, titled “Inspiration, Authority, and a Plastic Text.”

Prof. Kloha’s use of a nonbiblical term “plastic text” suggests that a Christian layperson can never be certain that the Bible they have in their home is the true and complete inspired Word of God.

The overture seeks to have the convention set aside time for Prof. Kloha to speak about his view of Scripture, and to answer several questions:

- Did Mary or Elizabeth speak the Magnificat?
- Is the Bible lay people have reliable? Does it represent closely the original autographs? Is it the very Word of God?
- Do sheep have a reliable Bible by which they can judge whether their shepherds teach true doctrine?
- Is the “Brief Statement” a true understanding of the doctrines it discusses? Is your position the same as the position of the “Brief Statement”?

The final resolution of the overture calls upon the convention, after hearing Prof. Kloha, to vote either to expel him from the LCMS or approve of him, lay to rest the controversy, and bring a God-pleasing peace to the Synod.

The second overture tells how this became a public concern.

Whereas, The Rev. Prof. Kloha’s initial paper, entitled “Text and Authority: Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on a Plastic Text,” has caused serious concern to the conscience of many because, somehow, the entire paper was obtained and became a public document to be read by many (even if it was posted in copyright violation) via the Internet (<http://thebarebulb.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/textand-authority.pdf>).

If you try to access that URL today, you receive a 403: Access Denied message, saying the file requires authorization, and “You must be logged in and a member of this blog.”

Notice that the title of the paper in this second overture is different than in the first one.

This does represent the fact that the paper was revised. Then it underwent still further revision. These versions were intended for and delivered to professional, academic conferences, and represented the state of Prof. Kloha's research and formulations on each respective date of presentation. They were not intended for general dissemination, and particularly not for presentation to lay people.

The second overture expresses concern about the paper in the version available by the time the overture was written, that either:

- It represents historical-critical method.
- While not representing historical-critical method itself, it might suggest that Prof. Kloha is teaching historical-critical method at the seminary.
- Even if neither of those is the case, it still gives people who read it or hear the presentations the idea that Prof. Kloha endorses higher-critical method, though without saying so directly.

Another concern of the overture is the apparent unavailability of any final version of the paper. The most current version available when the overture was written was delivered at a conference entitled "The Day of Exegetical Reflection," held at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, on May 8, 2014. Video of the presentation is available at <http://concordiatheology.org/2014/07/door14/>. The overture expresses concern that the video shows the paper had become longer, and it was too long to be fully presented at the conference. Therefore, those approving memorializing the overture to the convention could not find out what was the final form of the paper. They could not discover all changes, additions, and omissions that had been made.

The paper about a plastic text of the New Testament was itself plastic, and inaccessible.

Later, on August 15, 2014, President Harrison reported to the Regents of the seminary that he, President Meyer, Rev. Daniel Preus, and Prof. Kloha had met to discuss concerns about the paper, and Prof. Kloha had "made numerous changes and omissions to increase clarity and greatly decrease concern. We find no false teaching in the revised paper." The overture says this shows yet a further revision and new version of the paper that was not officially published. The resolution of the overture is to:

direct the Rev. Prof. Jefferey Kloha to make available to the public his fully revised paper in which he "made changes and omissions to increase clarity and greatly decrease concern" (with corrections revealed through highlighted added words and line-through removed words included within the revised paper) so that all those who have concerns can read what the Rev. Professor's clarifications are.

Since then, we see formal publication of what appears to be the final version of the paper. It is a chapter in recently the published book, *Listening to the Word of God: Exegetical Approaches*, Achim Behrens and Jorg Christian Salzmann, eds., Marion Salzmann, trans. (Göttingen, Niedersachs Edition Ruprecht 2016), titled “Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Ongoing Revisions of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.”

The term “plastic text” does not appear in the article, and the title speaks instead of “ongoing revisions” of the Greek text of the New Testament.

Having reviewed the overtures in this part, the next part of this series will summarize from a layman’s perspective the contents of what appears to be the final version of the paper.



## **2. Summary of the Paper**

Part 1 of this series set forth the premises and resolves of two overtures in the *Convention Workbook 2016* of the Lutheran Church – Missouri synod concerning a paper by Dr. Jeffrey Kloha about ongoing revisions to the text of the Greek New Testament. Those two overtures triggered this series.

This part summarizes from a layman’s perspective the contents of what appears to be the final version the paper. A third part will give my layman’s issues and conclusions regarding the paper.

What appears to be the final version of the paper was published recently as a chapter in the book, *Listening to the Word of God: Exegetical Approaches*, Achim Behrens and Jorg

Christian Salzmänn, eds., Marion Salzmänn, trans. (Göttingen, Niedersächsische Edition Ruprecht 2016), titled “Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Ongoing Revisions of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*.”

Here is the take-away garnered by me as one layman. As you read this, bear in mind, much of what Dr. Kloha is saying is simply his report of what others are doing or saying. Editors of editions of the Greek New Testament are doing things, textual critics are doing things, and skeptics are challenging Scripture. Those things would be happening even if Dr. Kloha had become a diesel mechanic and never said one word about the Greek New Testament. In assessing his paper, first distinguish between matters where he is only reporting versus matters where he is expressing his own views or proposals. It would be a mistake to shoot the messenger just to make it easier to bury our heads in the sand. Everyone concerned should read his paper itself.

The New Testaments that we lay people have in English are translated from Greek texts. Formerly, there was stability in the Greek text. Now the text is not stable.

The people who produce versions of the text are making changes more rapidly than in the past based on:

- manuscript discoveries
- study of patristic material
- study of early translations (Latin, Syriac, and Coptic)
- changes in methodology

The pace of change is too rapid for hardcopy editions to keep up. Electronic and online versions of the text have changes that outrun printed editions. Dr. Kloha states a challenge this situation poses:

How do we account for this in the teaching and preaching task? When we are writing commentaries? When dealing with apologetic issues? And, when the text is changing regularly, online, live before our eyes, if you will, how do we continue to pray *Verbum Dei manet in aeternum* [the word of God remains forever]? [p. 181]

All this is the result of something called textual criticism. When manuscripts have variations on the wording at some location in the New Testament, people who produce the Greek text make decisions about which variation is right.

In the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, plenary means the whole thing, and verbal means the parts right down to the very words. The whole of Scripture, and every

part of it right down to the very words, is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore it is authoritative.

This doctrine applies to the autographs, not to copies. An autograph is the original text when a document is first written and before any copies are made. The existence of variations in the copies means that the text used to make translations, besides not being the autograph, is not an accurate copy of the autographs. If we do not have the words of the autographs, then wherever there are manuscript variations, we might not have the very words that the Holy Spirit inspired.

Some textual critics have given up on trying to recover the autographs. Instead, they seek something called the *Ausgangstext*, or in English, the “Initial Text.”

This reconstructed text is not “what left the pen of the evangelist.” ... Rather, the editors are producing the text from which all existing copies derive. This is a significant change. No longer are the editors proposing to reconstruct, say, the letter that Paul sent to Rome. Rather, they are constructing the form of Romans that became part of the *Corpus Paulinum* sometime by the end of the first century, and from which all extant manuscripts derive. [p. 177.]

In the case of the Gospels, the situation is even worse. The target is the text of, say, Mark that existed sometime, perhaps a long time, after the first century.

This opens the question, what becomes of the authority of the New Testament? How do we explain the inspiration and authority of the text when the text keeps changing, and we do not know if we have the words that the Holy Spirit verbally inspired?

People challenge the text with such questions as this: If the Holy Spirit could inspire the apostles to write his very words, why couldn't He protect the transmission of the text? One miracle of inspiration of the text is no greater than another, of preservation of the text. If we can see that the Holy Spirit did not inerrantly preserve the text, what does that say about his inerrant inspiration of the autograph?

Kloha says Lutherans have not adequately addressed such challenges. He asks, “How will a Lutheran theology of the Word deal with these new editions of the Greek New Testament, editions that will change on a regular basis?” [p. 181]

Kloha mentions a couple metaphors or frameworks for viewing the nature of Scripture. One is an incarnational view, and another is a sacramental view.

He briefly likens the nature of Scripture to the nature of Christ. In the incarnation, Christ is both divine and human. The Word is both God's word and human words. This analogy

has been used in Lutheran theology. Kloha passes quickly from this, saying, “it might be more helpful to use a sacramental framework.” [p. 182]

Kloha briefly states an analogy between the Word and the Sacraments, based on both being means of grace, and on the Word being operative in the Sacraments despite contingencies in the earthly elements. But this leaves us with “more of a mess on our hands than we would prefer.” [p. 182]

Next Kloha enumerates and develops three prejudgments about Scripture. One is that Scripture is inspired and authoritative. The second is about avoiding two opposite errors. One error is not seeing the divine Word and its authority in the text. The other error is not seeing that God’s Word in the text is stated in human words. This section is interesting and valuable for refuting several varieties of foolish readings of Scripture in many quarters. But it does not directly advance against the problem of a text that changes before our eyes.

The third prejudgment is a core point of the paper.

I will state my third prejudgment, which must also be incorporated into our hermeneutics: The reality of the historical nature of the transmission of the text and canon of the Scriptures. My explicit concern is this: The theological *a priori* we have at times used to argue for the authority of the Scriptures does not address the historical data that we now have regarding the formation of the canon and the manuscripts of the New Testament. We need a way of understanding the Scriptures that is able to deal with the challenges raised by the historical questions of our day. [p. 187]

After a rendition of the *a priori* dogmatics such as by Quenstedt, Kloha says, “Critics of the Scriptures and their inspiration will be able to demolish, and in fact already have, this naïve argumentation. And it has caused doubt among our people.” [p. 189]

There is also an *a posteriori* dogmatic that says, as Pieper does, no doctrine has been affected by the manuscript variations. That is true, but it changes the subject from the reliability of the text to the reliability of doctrine. Consequently, this argumentation also does not hold up against criticism.

Kloha says of these kinds of arguments for Scriptural inspiration and authority,

[Bart D.] Ehrman’s book [*Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*] challenges the kind of argumentation for Scriptural authority described above. And the people in our classrooms and pews, who have been taught by us and by our students, have had their faith rocked to the core by Ehrman



and his manuscripts, and Elaine Pagels and her gnostic gospels, and by the “Gospel of Judas,” and by *The Davinci Code*. [pp. 191-92]

Again,

We can comfort ourselves with our dogmatic formulations based on a single, original autograph, and repeat those formulations to our hearers, and in many cases that is enough. Soon enough, however, there will be another Bart Ehrman or Gospel of Judas or History Channel show that will cause the people in our congregations to question their trust in the Scriptures. [p. 201]

In a section titled, “Toward a Lutheran Approach.” Dr. Kloha begins, “I propose as a way forward that issues of the text are identical to issues of the historical development of the canon of the New Testament.” [p. 192] He recounts,

For Chemnitz, God is the source of authority, but that individual writings were in fact, from God had to be ‘judged’ and verified by the church, both as to the human authors and to their content. This took place historically, and Chemnitz goes to great lengths in his ensuing discussion to cite evidence from the church fathers, beginning with the earliest then available, that affirms this process of ‘judging’ the authorship and content of the writings. I would urge the same approach today: That we assume inspiration as an a priori, and then do the challenging and difficult work of going back to the earliest and most reliable sources in order to ‘judge’ and verify which readings are, in fact, apostolic. [p. 193-94]

This brings us to three classes or ranks of writings that are proposed to be Scripture, and the historical process of the church identifying which ones have what kind of authority.

- *homologoumena*
- *antilegomena*
- *notha*

*Homologoumena* are writings that the church quickly recognized as inspired and against which no one or nearly no one in the church spoke. This happened very early with the 13 writings of Paul. It happened later, but still early, with the four Gospels.

*Antilegomena* are writings like Hebrews against which appreciable voices in the church speak, saying they might be valuable, but we cannot be sure they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Of course, the world speaks against all Scripture. But here we are not concerned with that. We are concerned with witnesses from within the church against a writing.



*Notha* are spurious or apocryphal writings that have no authority, though they might be good, pious writings which a Christian may read with benefit.

Of the antilegomena, Chemnitz says, “No dogma which does not have a certain and clear foundation in the canonical books dare be constructed from these [antilegomena] books. Nothing that is in controversy may be proved from those books if there are no proofs and confirmations in the canonical books. But what is said in these books must be explained and understood according to analogy of what is clearly set down in the canonical books. [p. 196]

Lay people are accustomed to seeing the same 27 books in the same order in their printed and bound copies of the New Testament. They might never have heard of two ranks of books within what they call the New Testament. They might not realize that in Lutheran theology, we never have agreed that the *antilegomena* are Scripture. But it is so, and there is a messy historical process relating to this.

Dr. Kloha proposes that “we apply this traditional canonical distinction not only [to] the books but also to the individual words in those books.” [p. 196]

The variant readings by the manuscript tradition can be classified as to their canonical status. Individual readings may be classified as ‘homologoumena’ readings – those ‘used by all’ the manuscripts and firmly in the text. Others would have to be considered ‘antilegomena’ readings – those ‘spoken against’ by the manuscript tradition and not to be considered firmly authoritative. And finally ‘notha’ readings – those readings that are clearly spurious, secondary additions or alterations and therefore not to be considered authoritative. [p. 197]

Dr. Kloha calls this a “canonical-textual approach” and says it allow us to view the changing wording of new editions of the Greek text within the theological and historical framework that the church always has viewed the biblical text. He says, “It helps us to realize that we are still today sorting out the *antilegomena* from the *homologoumena* as we continue to sort out the best readings from those which are later alterations in the manuscripts.” [p. 197]

An important feature to understand about his proposal is that where a phrase has variant readings in different manuscripts, a version of the phrase is *antilegomena* because “it is spoken against by not by the critic but by the manuscripts themselves.” [p. 198]

When that happens, the approach would treat both readings as *antilegomena* because each is spoken against by the other. “Therefore, in our teaching, neither reading is independently authoritative, but each has a secondary authority.” [p. 198] In other words, both readings have a rank like the rank of Hebrews, because Hebrews is *antilegomena*. You

then do with it what Chemnitz said to do with *antilegomena*.

The question arises, can we teach and preach from, say, the Nestle-Aland text if it is not the autograph? Kloha says, “I am certain that we can, because the church has done exactly that from the beginning, even if we have not acknowledged it.” [p. 199] Already there have been 28 editions of the standard Greek New Testament, and the church has carried on even with the changes from edition to edition.

To receive the Bible from God’s hand as his Word, as it is, with all the messiness of its writing and gathering into canon and copying, is not capitulation to the skeptics. It is a statement of confidence. That here God does his work, here, in my space and time, by this his Word – even in this edition of the text – which makes us his people. [p. 202]

In part 3, I will give my layman’s issues and conclusions about Dr. Kloha’s paper. A layman’s view might seem irrelevant but notice how much of Dr. Kloha’s concern and passion is about what the issues are doing to the faith of lay people. He treats the impact on lay people as relevant and important, so I will offer comment from a lay perspective.



### **3. Issues and Conclusions about the Paper**

This part gives my layman’s conclusion and issues regarding the paper.

I should be transparent about, as they say, “Where I’m coming from” as I approached this matter. I grew up in the American Lutheran Church when it had a formal *quia* subscription

to the Book of Concord. During the same era as the Seminex walkout in Missouri, the ALC was wound up in the same controversies about Scripture. We just did not have a notable, galvanizing event like the walkout. In the outcome, overall Missouri succeeded while the ALC failed. Defection from the doctrine of Scripture resulted in the destruction of my beloved ALC. Nearly everything you see wrong in the successor body, the ELCA, stems from that.

I am in Missouri now because of its strong commitment to the Lutheran confessions. But every now and again we see symptoms in Missouri that could indicate a disease like what destroyed the ALC. When that happens, I take special interest because I do not want to go through another synodical destruction.

Before the issue about Dr. Kloha arose, *Brothers of John the Steadfast* published a series of articles by me concerning the heretical views of Scripture being taught by Rev. Dr. Matthew Becker. He was rostered as an ordained minister in the LCMS, teaching at Valparaiso University, and preaching in a congregation. The articles were:

- [Synodical Defection from Scripture](#), February 16, 2015
- [Dr. Becker's Ever Shrinking Word of God](#), May 19, 2015
- [Dr. Becker's Ever Shrinking Word of God \(Part 2\)](#), May 21, 2015
- [Dr. Becker's Ever Shrinking Word of God \(Part 3\)](#), May 25, 2015
- [More on the Becker Situation](#), July 2, 2015
- [Charm, Politics, Waiting Games, and the Vanishing Gospel](#), July 3, 2015

As a delegate from my congregation, I went to the 2015 convention of the Montana District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod with the intent purpose of promoting action to rectify the problem of Dr. Becker's heretical writings about Scripture.

When a preliminary and provisional draft of Dr. Kloha's paper was leaked, it looked like it *could be* a symptom of the same illness as ruined the ALC and as infected Dr. Becker's heresy. Some apparently qualified people all but said that heresy was being taught at the seminary. That alarm bothered me.

On December 5, 2013 at 10:27 a.m., I sent an email to Dr. Kloha asking him a question about his paper. Imagine how that had to look on his end. My email plopped into his inbox out of left field. He and I never had met, nor had we ever spoken or corresponded before. And I am nobody in the synod. But, later the same day, he replied. It was apparent that the leaked version was preliminary and provisional. After receiving his reply, I promised to keep it in confidence. What he said satisfied me partly, but not completely. I told him I did

not think his reply would be enough for his entire readership.

As things have developed, some — I say, some — of the people who spoke about the leaked draft jumped farther than Evel Knievel to monstrous conclusions.

When what is apparently the final version of the paper was published as a chapter in a book in Germany, I ordered a copy and waited with anticipation for it to be shipped across the pond.

For the sake of further transparency, as I read the chapter, I came to it in a tension between two impulses:

- I am wary of textual criticism of Scripture.
- I try to confine my reading of someone's writing to its purport.

Some notable textual critics have made the enterprise suspect. Some of them postulate that the church dishonestly corrupted the text of the New Testament. For example, they say that during the Christological controversies, the church messed with the text to protect church dogma.

What pretends to be only bias against the church and its corruption of the text really is prejudice against Christ. First, they deny the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation, and then they counter-mess with the Greek text (assuming the church ever did mess with it, which I do not believe) to protect their anti-Christian commitment.

Without the Incarnation, there is no atonement. Thousands of people have been crucified, and without the Incarnation, Jesus is just one more. Without the Incarnation, there is no justification. At the altar, we do not receive the true body and blood of Christ. We do not receive what his blood was shed for, the forgiveness of sins. Everything collapses, and the rubble falls into a sink hole.

Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. [1 John 4:2-3]

I do not want to turn over control of the text to Antichrist.

Besides, I tend to have a catechetical response to issues like this. I read Luther's explanation of the First Article, and I cannot feature the Father giving me clothing and shoes, but not his Word in the Bible in my hands. I cannot feature Jesus Christ giving me his body and blood, but not his Word. I cannot feature the Holy Spirit keeping me and the whole Christian church on earth in the true faith without giving me his Word. The Bible is God's

gift to me. I am naïve like that. Catechetical ally, Luther encourages such naivety.

At the same time, I try to confine my reading of someone's writing to its purport. One of the most chronic causes of unnecessary disagreement is to interpret what someone says beyond its purport, and then dispute something the person did not say. We do have literary devices for saying things without saying them. So, I do not constraint the purport for artful dodgers. I count those devices as locating a proposition within the purport.

With that tension between wariness of textual criticism and constraining reading to an author's purport, I read the chapter. When I had gotten through it once, I had not found any false teaching. I read it again, taking notes. Still did not find any false teaching. Reading it a third time, I made a sketchy outline of the chapter. That did not identify any false teaching. I concluded that if any false teaching is there, it is too slippery for me to detect. But I did not sense any slipperiness, either.

Not everyone doing textual criticism brings a heretical prejudice to the task. Dr. Kloha is not known to have any heretical views.

Overall, the discovery of new manuscripts has been remarkably reaffirming of Scripture. It is possible to do textual criticism well for the good of the church.

Dr. Kloha's discussion of textual criticism that is happening simply reports what other people are doing. While affirming the inspiration and authority of the New Testament, he says our way of accounting for the text is not standing up to new challenges, and we need to add a new, Lutheran way of doing it. Then he proposes one way, and so far as I can see, it fits into orthodox Lutheran theology, by an analogy to *homologoumena* and *antilegomena*.

Then the *Convention Workbook 2016* was published. It had two overtures about Dr. Kloha's paper. So I wrote to the Editor of *Brothers of John the Steadfast* proposing this series of articles. I said, "I have not identified anything unorthodox in Kloha's paper." The Editor signaled for me to go ahead. This was before the first edition of *Today's Business* was published.

It is comforting that Dr. Kloha met with Synodical President, Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, Seminary President, Rev. Dr. Dale A. Meyer, and Rev. Dr. Daniel Preus. What President Harrison reported to the Regents of the seminary reflects well on all of them for the way they handled the matter. The report is that there is no false doctrine in the final paper. I have confidence in President Harrison and Rev. Preus. I am not implying anything negative about Dr. Meyer. I just happens that I never have met him and have read little of his writings.

Having said that I find no false doctrine in the paper, I do have some critiques of it. Let me

make plain that now I am leaving the subject of true and false teaching and moving on to something different.

My critiques relate to:

- Dr. Kloha's assessment of the impact of textual criticism on laity.
- The prospect for good impact of his proposed solution on laity.

Dr. Kloha exhibits great concern and passion about what the issues of textual criticism are doing to the faith of lay people. That is nice to see in an academic paper.

It is sad how many of my friends seem to have been drawn away to unbelief by History Channel programs about the Bible, and by some of the other things Dr. Kloha mentions. For example, I have had a friend spend hundred dollars on mail order materials attacking the inspiration and authority of Scripture, including on grounds of manuscript variations and church corruption. He became an evangelist of the attack, and sought to get his family, friends, and acquaintances into it.

But in deeper conversation with friends like that, I have found that people seize upon the criticisms of the transmission of the text opportunistically after they already do not want to believe the Bible for other reasons.

The vogue reasons these days are desires for universalism, and if we cannot have that, then at least give us annihilationism. Before they ever heard of textual criticism, they rejected the Law's condemnation of sin with its threat of hell, or they rejected the Gospel's proclamation of forgiveness in Christ based on his cross. They already wanted an untormented destiny aside from the cross, and the History Channel merely lets them back fill their desires with rational-sounding reasons that set hell and the cross aside.

But my critique is only anecdotal and limited to my small range of experience. Lay people do this, you know. Maybe this should be a topic of legitimate research.

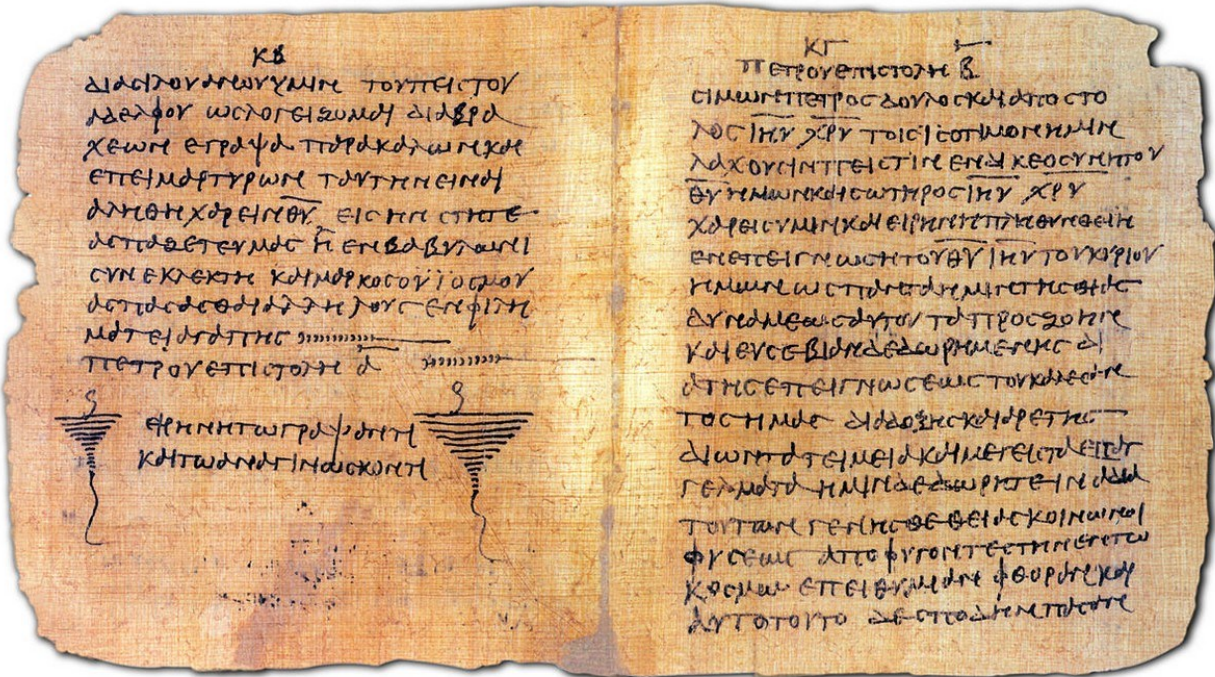
I question the prospect of an analogy between textual variations and *antilegomena* of whole books being helpful with lay people. Among theologians, pastors, and academics, it might work quite well. But lay people are a different kettle of fish.

Many lay people never have heard of *antilegomena*. So, we are going to reassure them about the inspiration and authority of Scripture by telling them not to worry about this word or phrase that we now are calling *antilegomena*, because that is just like Hebrews being *antilegomena*. Won't many of them say, "Wait, what? You mean not only are we unsure of the Word at this location where a word or phrase is uncertain, but that's okay because already many whole books are uncertain?" You'll answer, "Well, yes. Isn't that reassuring?"



Won't they ask, "Which books?" You will answer, "Hebrews, James, 2nd Peter, 2nd John, 3rd John, Jude, and Revelation." I question the effect of salving a small wound by inflicting a bigger one.

One final thought. Since all this textual criticism takes place well out of the view of lay people, and we do not know who the people doing it are or what they believe about Christ, sin, and salvation, it is not necessarily a bad idea to have at least one of our own guys in there, studying what is going on and talking about it. Maybe we should have several of our own guys in there. Then we would not have to take just one such person's word.



#### 4. Post-Convention Report

The two overtures were assigned to Floor Committee 4, "Life Together." Like all floor committees, Committee 4 met before the convention to consider overtures assigned to it. As a result of its consideration, the committee placed both overtures about Dr. Kloha's paper into Resolution 4-07, titled "To Respectfully Decline Overtures." Original *Today's Business*, p. 68. This meant that unless something more happened, those overtures would not be reported to the floor of the convention.

The day before the opening of the convention, the floor committees held open meetings where practically anyone could speak to any matter assigned to them. Committee 4 held its open meeting from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. Even a person who is not a member of an LCMS congregation and who publicly opposes Dr. Kloha attended.



The room was more than large enough for those who attended. The location was well advertised, and the location was easy to find. The committee was seated at a table at the front. The doors were standing open. People could and did walk in and out as they pleased. The chair recognized anyone who raised their hand to speak. There was no announced time limit for each person to speak. Various committee members responded to questions and comments. When any person who already had spoken raised his or her hand again, the chair called on that person to speak again. I never detected anything suggesting or creating an atmosphere of limiting debate, comments, or questions. The interaction between commenters and the committee was engaging. Committee members asked some commenters follow-up questions and noted recommendations commenters made. Even with strong opinions on differing sides of the Kloha overtures, throughout the discussion, all participants were kindly and respectful to one another in a manner well-fitting to a meeting of a committee called, “Life Together.”

There were a few who wanted either the two resolutions taken off the declined overtures resolution and reported to the floor or some other action by which Dr. Kloha would be called upon “to explain himself.”

In contrast to my sense of satisfaction with the committee’s procedure and tone was my disappointment with something about most — but not all — of those who spoke against Dr. Kloha: *They had not read his final, published paper!*

Several things made it plain that they had not read it. One of their complaints was that the paper is not available. (It was, but that was their complaint.) They spoke about historical-critical method and higher criticism, even though Dr. Kloha’s paper is in no way promoting either of those. They made other statements that gave away a lack of information about the content of the paper. Several said they had not seen the final paper.

Part way through the hearing, and after most of the negative things about his paper had been said, Dr. Kloha entered the room. The chair recognized and introduced him. He made himself available to answer questions either to the meeting or to individuals afterwards. Following the meeting, he engaged with numerous people. He continued this type of engagement throughout the convention.

The main points of discussion in the open meeting were:

- The unavailability of the paper.
- That Dr. Kloha should explain himself
- Who said the Magnificat, Mary or Elizabeth?

Let us look at each of these in turn.

My sense of the discussion was that the issue of availability was laid to rest. The publication of the book containing the paper as a chapter was mentioned, and everyone could see that Dr. Kloha was carrying a copy of the book. The committee recognized that it would be helpful for the whole convention to know that the paper is published. In the original version of Resolution 4-07, the committee stated the reason for declining the two overtures as, “Already addressed by President of Synod and President of Concordia Seminary.” The committee amended the resolution to add to the reason for declining the Kloha overtures, saying, “and by publication of the author’s fully revised paper.” Resolution 4-07A, *Monday’s Today’s Business*, Issue 3, p. 352.

Sure, you have got to pay \$38 for the book. It is an academic book. That is not a high price for an academic book. It is as available as any academic book. It can be bought through Amazon and other common outlets.

As to explaining himself, Dr. Kloha has been doing that for more than two and a half years since internet outbreak of the controversy in November 2013.

*First*, he continued engaging in the normal academic process by which his paper was revised and refined by his constantly explaining himself within the academic world. A list of presentations he gave to district pastors’ conferences, theological professors’ conferences, theological symposia, and a lay conference is in the endnote.<sup>1</sup>

*Second*, he published the final version of the paper, in which he fully explains himself.

*Third*, he responded to the congregations who submitted the overtures. Overture 4-24 was submitted by Grace Lutheran Church of San Mateo, California. On May 2, 2016, Dr. Kloha wrote to the voters’ assembly of that congregation. He provided the congregation *gratis* with a copy of the book. He provided a print copy of a piece he wrote that responded to a *Newsweek* article on the topic. His piece was published by the LCMS *Reporter* online in January 2015: “[Commentary on ‘News’week on the Bible.](#)” He provided a copy of an essay that he delivered on the topic at the Lutheran Concerns Association conference in Ft. Wayne, Indiana in January 2015.

Overture 4-23 was submitted by Salem Lutheran Church of Taylorsville, North Carolina. On May 3, 2016, Dr. Kloha wrote to the voters’ assembly of that congregation. The letter is 7 pages and addresses overture 4-23 point by point. He provided an internet link to a list of dozens of presentations he had given, both to pastors’ conferences and to lay conferences, numerous essays and reviews he had published, and widely distributed Bible study video projects in which he had participated that all confess the inspiration and sole authority of the Scriptures. He provided his *curriculum vitae* and the same materials that he provided to Grace Lutheran Church.

*Fourth*, Dr. Kloha responded to the invitation of Lutheran Concerns Association and wrote a paper specifically for their conference to address their concerns. “[Manuscripts and Misquoting, Inspiration and Apologetics](#),” 2015 Lutheran Concerns Association Annual Conference, Ft. Wayne, IN, Jan. 19, 2015.

*Fifth*, he met with the president of the synod, the president of the seminary, and the first vice president of the synod. When the article was fully revised, they determined that it contained no false teaching. They reported that conclusion to the regents. The report to the regents was published.

*Sixth*, on May 4, 2016, Dr. Kloha wrote to the secretary of the synod, with copies to the president of Concordia Seminary, the president of the LCMS, the first vice president of the LCMS, the chairman of the board of regents, the president of the Missouri district, and the office of secretary of the synod. He enclosed all the same materials as he provided to the two congregations along with copies of his letters to the congregations.

*Seventh*, there have been many who have written to Dr. Kloha. I first wrote to Dr. Kloha on December 5, 2013, and he answered me the same day. He should not have to explain himself to me, but he did. At the convention, readers of my previous articles talked to me about Dr. Kloha responding to them.

*Eighth*, as reported in the comments by one of the members of Committee 4, Dr. Kloha made himself available to the May 2016 floor committee hearing.

Following the open committee meeting, my meeting Dr. Kloha in person at the convention, and talking with many delegates about the paper, the matter of the Magnificat, Mary, and Elizabeth was the sole remaining problem that needed to be explored. That is something people kept mentioning. It has a symbolic character. Lay people feel that we own the Magnificat, partly because we use it liturgically. It raises a reaction almost like flag burning does.

The question is, why is it said that perhaps Elizabeth spoke or sang the Magnificat? Is it for reasons of historical critical method? Does it arise from higher criticism? Are we standing below the text or are we standing above it?

Before leaving the convention, I spoke with someone who had put that exact question to Dr. Kloha. Dr. Kloha answered the question directly and emailed to the questioner documents about the question. That made it easy for me to ask for those same documents. After reading the information, I conclude that in this matter, Dr. Kloha is standing below the text. The issue arises from the text. It is not being put upon the text.

The question of whether Luke 1:46 reads Μαριάμ or Ἐλισάβετ is presented in the

manuscripts and early church evidence themselves.

Let's see if I can make this plain. The following is *not* the case:

All manuscripts and early church quotations of or discussion about the text say that Mary is the one who said the Magnificat, but for historical or other reasons outside the text, an argument is made that the text must be mistaken, and a non-textual argument is made for saying it was Elizabeth.

That would be standing above the text. We cannot tolerate that.

Instead, this *is* the case:

Some manuscripts themselves say Elizabeth, and some early church writings that quote or discuss the verse say Elizabeth. So, the reason for someone making an argument that it could have been Elizabeth is the text, or early church evidence of the text where the verse is quoted or discussed.

That is not standing above the text. That addresses an issue of what the text itself originally said.

For my part, I am sure Mary is the one, and the manuscripts and early church writings to the contrary are mistaken. But see, that right there is the matter about which textual criticism concerns itself. There are manuscript mistakes. When the manuscripts themselves disagree, and when early church quotations or discussions of the text at a point of manuscript disagreement also disagree, we are not rebelling against Scripture. We're just trying to find out which manuscript version is Scripture and which one is the mistake.

We shouldn't be too put off by the word criticism in the phrase "textual criticism." We should not lump it in with other things that have that word in their names, like historical critical method or higher criticism. Unlike those things, in textual criticism, the basis of the criticism is the manuscripts themselves and early church evidence. The basis of criticism is not something outside the Bible that would be used to criticize the Bible. Textual criticism done rightly honors the Word of God by taking care to know what the Word says.

Having said that, I continue to view textual criticism as something on which we must maintain a steady, vigilant watch. It is something that needs to be done, but it would be easy to do it badly. The picture that comes to mind is walking the edge of a razor blade. The edge is so thin and sharp that it would be easy to slice off on the wrong side of the blade. But this paper by Dr. Kloha does not do that, and it is about high time he gained wide acceptance of this fact.

Let's keep watching what Dr. Kloha says, since textual criticism is a tricky area, but when we have concerns, let's treat him like a brother.

## επίλογος

After the convention, three more events happened.

1. *Christian News* published extensively suggesting that Dr. Kloha's views were heretical and saying that some, such as myself, either were incompetent or naïve.
2. Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, Distinguished Research Professor of Philosophy at Concordia University Wisconsin and Dr. Kloha debated about the philosophies of Biblical textual criticism on October 15th, 2016 at Concordia University-Chicago in River Forest, Illinois. The debate was live-streamed.
3. Concordia Seminary [announced](#) on June 27, 2017 that Concordia Seminary, St. Louis announced today that Dr. Jeff Kloha, provost and professor of exegetical theology, had accepted a position as director of Collections Operations at [Museum of the Bible](#) effective late July 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> "Text and Authority: Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Ongoing Revisions of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*," Day of Exegetical Reflection, Concordia Seminary, May 8, 2014.

"Text and Authority: Theological and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Ongoing Revisions of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*," LCMS Theology Professors Conference, Concordia University, St. Paul, May 27-29, 2014.

"The Text of the New Testament." New England and Atlantic Districts Fall Pastoral Conference, Hartford, CN, October 27-28, 2014.

"Manuscripts and Misquoting, Inspiration and Apologetics," 2015 Lutheran Concerns Association Annual Conference, Ft. Wayne, IN, Jan. 19, 2015.

"Manuscripts and Texts of the New Testament: A Case Study on the Textual Tradition of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35," 30th Annual Symposium on Exegetical Theology, Concordia Theological Seminary, Ft. Wayne, IN, Jan. 20-21, 2015.

"Text and Authority: The Origins and Reliability of the New Testament," Minnesota South District Pastors Conference, Mankato, MN, Oct. 26, 2015.