

Kloha versus Montgomery: A Tale of Two Different Bibles

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The debate was titled “Textual and Literary Judgments on the Biblical Text—What Happens to the Lutheran Commitment to Scriptural Inerrancy?” In this title the word “Lutheran” was a bit parochial. The debate was really directed at all Christians, but Lutherans rarely see themselves as spokesmen for the broader Christian community. It should have been titled: “Is Manuscript Evidence Disproving Inerrancy of the Bible?”

It is difficult to summarize what actually took place. Within a period of little more than three hours both presenters spoke from detailed 20-page-plus papers, gave 15 minute rebuttals, and then addressed written questions from the audience. They were analyzing and responding to hundreds of pages of prior information, including Kloha’s 719-page dissertation (which this writer read).

Those who watch the full debate online, without reading the controverted material, may have difficulty following the issues the speakers were addressing and the nuances of their arguments. Doctor Kloha’s attempt to avoid addressing the topic of inerrancy makes it even more difficult.

The question and answer session gave some clarity to what was really taking place. It was Dr. Jeffery Kloha, the exegete/technician, versus Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, the systematician/logician/philosopher. Kloha was the fox, and Montgomery was the hound.

In the final analysis Kloha does not understand or at least

comprehend the implications of what he is saying. He repeatedly accused Montgomery of not understanding him, to which Montgomery replied, “No, it is you who does not understand me.”

I asked a 34-year-old layman with a Ph.D. in engineering, who was sitting near me, what he thought he just heard. He said Kloha showed us fragments from obscure manuscripts and talked about how involved the process is when attempting to piece together the New Testament. Montgomery, on the other hand, told us how reliable the text is based on excellent manuscripts, which are historic evidence for what we believe about the Bible.

For myself, someone who has studied variant readings in 9 different Greek texts for the past 30-plus years, I was fascinated to hear and watch Kloha’s presentation. He is picking around the hidden edges of manuscript research. His obscure comment about Semitism in Revelation was absolutely correct, and of far more significance than he realizes. However, his methodology, thoroughgoing eclecticism, which values all ancient manuscripts of the New Testament as equals, is a disaster. For example, this methodology taken to its extreme, as Kloha does, concludes that Elizabeth spoke the Magnificat in Luke chapter 1 instead of Mary, because a few Latin minuscules say Elizabeth. He makes all variants equal, thus blurring the lines between poor versus good manuscripts and exceptions versus the majority. Kloha is then free to choose any error in a manuscript as the original reading.

Kloha cannot hide his obsession with corruption in the text, a word he uses in his dissertation to describe 1 Corinthians 178 times. There is no certainty. He is always starting at the beginning and gives no assurance when he will arrive at the correct meaning of the New Testament. The text becomes the unreachable star.

Montgomery's tone, demeanor, body language, and humor, showed he enjoyed the debate process, while Kloha was evasive, guarded, defensive, and annoyed at anyone who challenged his noble quest for truth. Any evangelistic zeal for the text was hidden by his technical details and obscure terminology. He didn't take the offensive or promote the practicality of his work for the church, except to attack Montgomery's qualifications to challenge him.

Kloha spent so much time explaining his craft; he made sure he did not have enough time to address the subject of inerrancy, the main point of the debate. After 42 minutes, my first thought was, "Where is the debate?" Even the 24-page paper he handed, out doesn't address inerrancy until the last 2½ pages. It appeared he did not want to address the subject of inerrancy for an online-video audience. In fact, one could come to the conclusion that his presentation was designed as a potential job interview.

Montgomery, on the other hand, a brilliant writer at age 85, who spoke with eloquence and fire in his belly, was on the attack. By the eighth line of his paper he stated, "Our problem is with the philosophy of textual criticism he espouses and its implications for the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy." Now, after 45 minutes, the debate had finally started.

Montgomery, and advocate for the text, gave a magnificent presentation of the beauty, perspicuity, clarity, and certainty of the Bible. At one point he advised his audience to forget the commentaries because the Bible is better.

After hearing them speak, if I were going to recruit men for the ministry, I would start recruiting car salesmen. We need pastors who are going to sell me the text, sell me on Law and Gospel, sell me the pew, sell me the church, and convince me why I won't be happy without them. Only the Holy Spirit creates faith with the text, but let's not have the clergy drag anchor. As a car

salesman Kloha would point out every design flaw, every smudge in the paint, and every report, no matter who wrote it, of problems with the car. What a shame seminary students do not get to hear Montgomery, one of the world's most educated men, speak. Of course he is a walking untamed encyclopedia of the LCMS's apostate history from the 60's and 70's.

Kloha repeatedly said that Montgomery doesn't understand him and even referred to Montgomery as crazy. Montgomery has three earned doctorates, including a master's degree in New Testament, and years of experience teaching Greek at the graduate level. It appeared that Kloha wished Montgomery didn't understand him.

Again and again Montgomery criticized those who say the Bible is the word of God, without saying why it is inspired, or how it is inspired. He said we could hear the same thing from Moslems, Mormons, and others. He thought that one of the reasons so many Lutheran churches aren't growing is because they are being taught fideism, that is, the Bible is the word of God because we say so. (Fideism, from the Latin "fides" or "faith," is the view that religious belief depends on faith or revelation, rather than reason, intellect or natural theology.) His accusation was that Kloha had turned the phrase, "The Bible is the word of God," into a mantra without definition. At the same time, Kloha's thoroughgoing eclecticism destructs the text to the point that one can't be sure what to believe.

Montgomery accused Kloha of making the determination as to which part of the Bible one could believe and how it should be believed the duty of the church. Montgomery quoted Kloha as follows:

"Writes Kloha: 'How, then is it decided which reading is apostolic and has been received as such by the church? The church has been and continues to be led by the Spirit into all truth as it hears ever again the Word. And the church has always

taken the greatest care to ensure that what it teaches and preaches is indeed apostolic. That work continues today, in light of new evidence and historical study. . . . [T]o speak of a single act of inspiration . . . leaves us vulnerable . . . God works in history. The Spirit created the church.”

Montgomery concluded that this is nothing more than Catholicism and that Kloha has killed the Reformation’s “Scripture alone.”

Montgomery compared Kloha’s claim of inerrancy to that of Dr. Arthur Carl Piepkorn. “To be sure, one can redefine ‘inerrancy’—to mean, say, ‘effective and moving’—doing in every instance ‘what God wants it to do.’ This is precisely how the Seminex professors handled the matter. They never outrightly denied the inerrancy of the Bible; they merely downplayed it at best and redefined it at worst (example: Arthur Carl Piepkorn).”

At one point Montgomery caught Kloha holding a public and a private opinion on who spoke the Magnificat in Luke chapter 1, Mary or Elizabeth. Kloha said when he preached in a church or spoke to Bible classes he would say Mary spoke the Magnificat, but when he was with professionals and writing to professionals he would say Elizabeth. Thus Kloha’s claim of a correct understanding of the text is based on himself, depending on the context in which he speaks. This is clinical analysis without personal conviction, because one never knows when a new manuscript will change one’s opinion on any issue.

Montgomery wrote:

“‘Professor’ is, etymologically, ‘one who professes’ something. A seminary professor, above all, should be presenting, stressing, and reinforcing his students’ confidence in Holy Scripture—not offering new and original viewpoints that do exactly the opposite. Our entire culture pressures the church and its clergy to give up confidence in God’s inerrant Word. Sadly, our

Lutheran seminaries offer little or no meaningful answer and little, if any, serious apologetics for the truth of the faith once delivered to the saints. This is scandalous, and declining church membership is often but a reflection of inadequate seminary instruction.”

Montgomery summarizes Kloha’s view on inerrancy as follows:

“I believe that the Bible is inerrant because the Holy Spirit guides the church across the centuries toward solid textual authority; de facto errors in the text or higher critical analyses do not therefore upset my belief in biblical inerrancy.”

Notice, in the above, the church is guided toward textual authority, but has yet to arrive at its goal. There is no point to giving more quotes from Montgomery’s paper. It is a must—read for any Christian. Montgomery regularly addressed what he believes is the answer for declining church attendance and the solution. Stop teaching laypeople to be fideists, who repeat mantras, and start teaching them the basis for everything they believe.

Montgomery’s recall off the top of his head for events and quotations 40 and 50 years ago was astonishing to the audience and devastating to Kloha. He gives a lot of hope to our culture traumatized by the prospect of Alzheimer’s. Just saying what drug or vitamin he is taking would enrich a major pharmaceutical company. What is his secret?