

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

דְּבַר יְהוָה
ὁ λόγος
τοῦ Θεοῦ

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Contents

Preface	4
Abbreviations	4
I. Inspiration and the Writers of Scripture	5
A. Inspiration and Revelation	5
B. Inspiration and Sources	6
C. Inspiration and the Act of Writing the Scriptures	7
D. Inspiration and the Writers of Biblical Literature	8
E. Inspiration and the Biblical Writings	8
F. Inspiration and Literary Forms	9
G. Inspiration and the Authorship of Biblical Books	9
II. Inspiration and History	10
A. Inspiration and Inerrancy	10
B. Inspiration and Historical Records in the Bible	11
C. Inspiration and the Meaning of Historical Events	12
III. Inspiration and Biblical Authority	12
A. Inspiration and the Unity of Scripture	12
B. Inspiration and the Authority of Scripture	14
C. Inspiration and the Gospel	15
D. Inspiration and Saving Faith	16
E. Inspiration and Doctrinal Formulations	17
IV. Inspiration and Canonicity	17
Conclusion	18
Notes	19

Preface

In response to Resolutions 3-16, 3-17, and 3-19 of the 1962 convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at Cleveland, Ohio,¹ the Commission on Theology and Church Relations produced "A Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy." This document presented two positions relative to these topics together with an evaluation of each and a thesis-like statement of the doctrine under discussion which offered some conclusions that seemed justified by the Commission's studies.

After the Commission had received and studied reactions to the above named document, it published another report in the form of a single, positive treatment of the subject entitled "Revision of the Study Document on Revelation, Inspiration, and Inerrancy."

Subsequent conventions of the Synod continued to adopt resolutions which called for further study of the inspiration of the Scriptures and related subjects.² The Commission, therefore, prepared the document herewith offered to the Synod with the prayer that it may be useful in resolving some of the questions which have been raised in recent years about the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, authorship, canonicity, and unity of the Sacred Writings. May this document encourage the kind of fraternal discussion that will with the aid of the Holy Spirit promote concord and reconciliation in the Synod.

Abbreviations

All citations of the Lutheran Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord*, edited by T. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), except when noted to the contrary. The following abbreviations have been used:

Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession

LC Large Catechism

Scriptural quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

I. Inspiration and the Writers of Scripture

A. Inspiration and Revelation

"Inspiration" and "revelation" are terms which designate very closely related spiritual realities. According to 1 Cor. 2:9-13 both refer to an operation of the Holy Spirit; both are involved in imparting to man the knowledge of God and His saving counsels; both are necessary for our enlightenment "that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God."

But "inspiration" and "revelation" are not completely coextensive terms. Revelation can occur without inspiration; inspiration can occur without revelation.

The term "revelation" denotes every disclosure that God has given to men of His being, will, purposes, and acts whether this be through *general* revelation in the things which He has made and in His continuing providence, or through *special* revelation as in theophanies, visions, and dreams, in the Word of the Lord that came to the prophets for the instruction of His people, or in the incarnation of His Son.

The term "inspiration" denotes the guidance of the Holy Spirit under which the Biblical authors *recorded* what God had revealed to them about the mysteries of His being and the meaning of His mighty acts in human history for man's salvation and under which they *wrote* concerning any other subject, even if it was about a matter of which they had knowledge apart from revelation (e. g., that Josiah was killed at Megiddo, that Demas deserted Paul, that Eutychus fell out of a window).

Apokalupsis (revelatio) means the drawing back of a veil to disclose hidden things; *theopneustos (inspiratus)* refers to that which is breathed into, infused. In theology these terms are used to express the truth that the Holy Spirit inspired the writings.

When holy men were speaking about the mysteries of God's being, of His eternal purposes, and of His actions in human history, then both revelation and inspiration were involved. 2 Peter 1:20-21 teaches that no prophecy in the Scriptures about the power and coming of God's Son into human history is a matter of some human being's private interpretation of what God was doing, but holy men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Note how revelation and inspiration are related in 1 Cor. 2:9-13: the Holy Spirit *reveals* the mysteries of God's grace and *teaches the words* in which the mystery is spoken.

However, inspiration is not *always* inseparably associated with revelation in the Scriptures. While revelation is frequently accompanied by a command to write down what was seen and heard (Ex. 34:27; Deut. 31:9; Is. 8:1; Jer. 30:2; 36:2; Hab. 2:2; Rev. 1:11 et al.), there were occasions when there was revelation without such a command (Gen. 28:10-15; Luke 2:1-14). Conversely, revelation is not *always* associated with inspiration. The prophets and apostles wrote of many things of which they had knowledge apart from revelation. St. Luke, for instance, says that he compiled his narrative on the basis of information delivered by eyewitnesses of the events he records. (Luke 1:1-4)

It was by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he did not know whether he had baptized anyone else besides the household of Stephanus (1 Cor. 1:16); by inspiration of the Holy Spirit he included in his Second Epistle to Timothy the plea to come soon and bring along the cloak, books, and parchments that he had left with Carpus at Troas (2 Tim. 4:9, 13); by inspiration he volunteered his personal opinion about the advisability of getting married in times of persecution (1 Cor. 7:25-26). But no revelation was needed for him to know that his memory failed him about how many people he had baptized in Corinth, or to know that he wanted his cloak and books, or to know it was his opinion that in view of the impending distress it might be better not to get married.

While inspiration is predicated of "*all Scripture*" (2 Tim. 3:16), the sacred writers speak of revelation only in connection with supernatural disclosure of divine mysteries and secret counsels concerning which man could otherwise have no knowledge. (Matt. 11:25-27; 16:17; Luke 2:26; Rom. 1:17; 1 Cor. 2:10; Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:12; Gal. 1:12; Rev. 1:1)

From the standpoint of the Biblical *authors*, then, it is possible to distinguish between revelation and inspiration in that they wrote some things by inspiration on the basis of revelation, and some things by inspiration alone without need of supernatural disclosure. It is useless for us, however, to whom their writings have come, to attempt to draw a sharp line between what *we* have received through that operation of the Holy Spirit called inspiration and the operation called revelation, for to *us* all the inspired writings are revelatory. Apart from the inspired Scriptures we have no other revelation of God, of His will, and of His redemptive acts in human history which can make us wise unto salvation and which is profitable for teaching, reproof, restoration, and training (2 Tim. 3:15-16). And the Scriptures do not acknowledge any other revelation that can save and instruct us if we refuse to hear them. (Luke 16:31)

B. Inspiration and Sources

As Luke 1:1-4 clearly indicates, some of the material incorporated in this Gospel was derived from sources to which Luke had access when he undertook to "write an orderly account" for Theophilus. Luke's

words suggest that two kinds of sources were in existence before he began to write his Gospel. Eyewitnesses had delivered *oral* traditions on the basis of which "many" had compiled *written* narratives. Other Scriptures also make it evident that Biblical authors had sources upon which they drew in producing their writings (Num. 21:14; Josh. 10:13; 1 Sam. 10:25; 1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29; 2 Chron. 9:29 et al.). Since these sources are not available to us, we have no knowledge of them beyond the references to them in the Scriptures, but these references are sufficient to establish that they did exist.

The use of sources by Biblical authors does not militate against the teaching that they wrote by inspiration. Such sources existed, and the sacred writers used them as they were led by the Spirit. It would seem highly improbable that there would have been no traditions and no records of the sayings and deeds of Jesus prior to the composition of the Gospels contained in the New Testament.

Another question has to do with the Holy Spirit's activity relative to precanonical sources. When Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with His disciples, He said, "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). After Pentecost the Holy Spirit was present in the Christian community to guide it into all truth (John 16:13) and to bestow all the gifts that the church needed to fulfill the commission given to it by Christ to preach the Gospel in all the world.

The promise of John 14:26 included the Holy Spirit's presence to preserve and empower the church's witness to Christ even before the Christian message was committed to writing. Inspiration of the Biblical writings does not preclude the Holy Spirit's influence in preserving the traditions prior to the composition of the Biblical books.

C. Inspiration and the Act of Writing the Scriptures

Inspiration is a mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit connected with the writing of the Sacred Scriptures, irrespective of whether the authors obtained knowledge concerning the things of which they wrote by revelation or by research. Referring to Scriptures with which Timothy had been acquainted from childhood, the apostle Paul says that they were all inspired by God, i. e., God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:15-16). St. Peter affirms the inspiration of the Old Testament when he says that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). About apostolic Scriptures the apostle Paul says that they impart what had been revealed "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit." (1 Cor. 2:13)

2 Peter 1:21 and 1 Cor. 2:13 represent both prophets and apostles as "speaking" (*lalein*) by inspiration. This must not be understood as referring only to their *oral* utterances so as to exclude their *written* words. The apostle Paul thought of himself as "speaking" to his readers in his letters (Rom. 7:1; 1 Cor. 9:8; 2 Cor. 12:19), and 2 Peter 3:16 refers to things about which St. Paul "speaks" in epistles. The Biblical data

do not warrant limiting inspiration to prophetic and apostolic *oral* proclamation. Prophets and apostles “spoke” as they were moved by the Holy Ghost also when they were *writing* the Biblical books in which God has preserved their message for all times to be the foundation on which the church is built (Eph. 2:20). 1 John 1:3-4 and 2 Thess. 2:15 clearly indicate that the apostles made no distinction between that which they proclaimed by word of mouth and that which they wrote.

D. Inspiration and the *Writers of Biblical Literature*

Nothing in the Holy Scriptures indicates that when God chose human beings to be His instruments through whom He spoke and wrote His Word to men, He used them in such a way that they were deprived of their individuality and identity. The Holy Spirit took men as they had been shaped by all their circumstances, cultural influences, educational opportunities, and natural capacities and placed them into His service to speak “from God.” (2 Peter 1:21)

When inspiring the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit did not work through men as though they were lifeless machines (e. g., a tape recorder), but He employed them in such a way as to leave room for the real influence of each writer’s own temperament, endowments, interests, purposes, perspective—and even limitations (e. g., Paul’s lapse of memory, 1 Cor. 1:16. See also Luke’s purpose and research, Luke 1:1-4). By inspiration holy men spoke from God in a human language, made up of human words, subject to human principles of grammar and syntax, employing human literary devices or else their speech and writing would have been unintelligible. (Cf. Paul’s estimate of the value of supernatural utterances in 1 Cor. 14.)

The Holy Spirit did not give the Biblical writers a heavenly vocabulary, a celestial grammar, or divine attributes, such as omniscience. Through men of human capacities the Holy Spirit spoke divine truth in human idiom.

E. Inspiration and the *Biblical Writings*

Since inspiration was not a mechanical process akin to dictation, the Scriptures in many ways bear the marks of their human authorship. Literary style varies from book to book and even accounts of the same event by different writers frequently are not completely alike in perspective, wording, emphasis, or the number of details provided. Indeed, the great freedom which the Holy Spirit allowed the human authors in selecting materials, quoting sources, arranging their accounts, interpreting events, and applying what they record to the life of God’s people creates problems for which there is no easy solution.

Nevertheless, inspiration is the operation of the Holy Spirit which makes the words of Scripture *God’s Word* and assures that through all the rich variety found in the Scriptures God speaks His eternal and immutable truth to us.

F. Inspiration and Literary Forms

Included in the rich variety found in the Scriptures are the several literary types (genres) employed by the sacred authors. The Holy Spirit moved the Biblical writers to make use of almost every literary device there is in order to communicate God's Word to man. With the exception of myth, saga, and legend (in the sense in which these terms are usually understood by literary and historical critics) there are in the Bible many types of literature, including at least one that does not occur in other literature, namely, the gospel form which is unique to the New Testament.

Besides the obvious types of prose and poetry many other forms of literature are easily identifiable in the Holy Scriptures. There are historical narratives, prophetic oracles and apostolic proclamation, proverbs and parables, prayers and liturgical fragments, creeds and hymns, doctrinal and hortatory treatises addressed to congregations and letters written to individuals, laments and dirges, sermons and speeches, and even such secular instruments as legal contracts*, political treaties, and royal edicts.

The doctrine that *all* Scripture is God-breathed implies that the Holy Spirit moved the sacred authors to speak from God through *all* of the kinds of literature contained in the Bible, and that a Biblical pericope must first of all be analyzed in terms of its formal structure and character if the interpretation of a given passage is to be consistent with the type of literature it is.

G. Inspiration and the Authorship of Biblical Books

For the Scriptures to commend themselves to God's people as His inspired Word, it was not necessary that in every case the authorship of a Biblical book be known or that the book itself indicate who its author was. Some books both in the Old and the New Testaments give us no direct evidence pertaining to their authorship, and even in some cases where the author is mentioned by name, as, for instance, James and Jude, the exact identity of these men is difficult to determine.

When an inspired writing, however, testifies to its own authorship, or when one inspired writing identifies the author of another inspired writing, the inspired witness of the Scriptures must be accepted. There is nothing in the New Testament, for instance, to suggest that Jesus' view of the authorship of the Pentateuch, of Isaiah, of Daniel differed from that of His contemporaries. All the New Testament evidence indicates that Jesus agreed with the Jews of His day in affirming the Mosaic, Isaianic, and Danielic authorship of the books involved. Once this fact is acknowledged, the issue of the authorship of these Old Testament books is settled. It amounts to rejection of Christ's word and the witness of inspired Scriptures to call this matter into question.

II. Inspiration and History

A. Inspiration and Inerrancy

Even though there are differences and variety in the Sacred Writings which sometimes perplex us because we can find no harmonization for them that satisfies human reason, faith confesses the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. Since the inerrancy of the Scriptures is a matter of *faith*, it is by definition a doctrine which is believed solely on the basis of the witness of the Scriptures concerning themselves and not on the basis of empirical verification.

1. This is *not* to say that in *no* case is the inerrancy of the Scriptures demonstrable by extra-Biblical evidence. The Scriptures, for instance, report *historical events* through which God worked out His saving purposes. Since these events occurred on the plane of human history, they are to that extent susceptible of investigation and even of verification by historical research. The Christian faith does not relegate the acts of God for man's redemption to the arena of super-history so as to detach them from the realm of reality open to examination by the historian. While the Biblical witness to what *God* was doing in history is not verifiable or unverifiable by the techniques of historical research, Christians gladly submit the Scriptures to investigation with the full confidence that whenever the extra-Biblical evidence is correctly read and understood it will vindicate the complete reliability of the Biblical records relative to that dimension of the events which *is* subject to human examination.

2. This *is* to say that *faith* in the inerrancy of the Scriptures does not rely on corroboration of Biblical truth by empirical evidence—faith holds to the inerrancy of the Scriptures even when there is no extra-Biblical substantiation and even when other sources appear to be in conflict with the Scriptures. Luther explained that he used writers of history in such a way that while he did not disregard them, he did not permit them to induce him to contradict the Scriptures. In the Scriptures *God* speaks. Historians make mistakes.³

Faith affirms that God could speak His Word of Truth even through men whose knowledge of nature and history apart from direct revelation was partial and limited. Faith affirms that even in the presence of difficulties which human reason may regard as deficiencies, we have, nevertheless, in the Scriptures God's totally reliable Word which cannot mislead and deceive us.

"None of the natural limitations which belong to the human mind even when under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost can impair the authority of the Bible or the inerrancy of the Word of God; for Holy Scripture is the book of divine truth which transcends everything called truth by the wise men of this world (1 Cor. 1:17 ff., 27; Col. 2:8) and is therefore able to make us 'wise unto salvation' (2 Tim. 3:15)." ⁴

Inspiration was not mechanical dictation but rather an operation of the Holy Spirit that allowed a function to each author's individuality

in writing the Scriptures. Therefore the predication of inerrancy to the Bible does not imply that when the New Testament reproduces and applies Old Testament statements this must always occur by means of verbatim quotations, or that there must be verbal correspondence between parallel accounts of the same event wherever they are found either in the Old or the New Testament.

Each writer inerrantly imparted God's truth as the Holy Spirit moved him to do so in his own way, from his own perspective, and for his own purposes. Far from impugning the veracity of the Scriptures this multidimensional application of whatsoever was spoken aforetime and this multidimensional view of events reported serves to impart more fully the truth which God reveals for the edification of His people. The Biblical conception of inspiration does not see these differences as errors, but as inspired variety which we should recognize with thanksgiving and study prayerfully imploring the Spirit's help so that we may receive *all* the instruction He wishes to impart.⁵

B. Inspiration and Historical Records in the Bible

The Holy Scriptures do not purport to be a textbook of universal history offering an exhaustive account of the history of all nations and peoples from the beginning of time up to the various periods when the Biblical books were written. The Bible is selective in the history that it reports, recording only those events and developments in general history, and especially in the history of God's people, which serve to show that God is the Lord of history and that in His steadfast faithfulness He always remembered His covenant made with the fathers to carry out His redemptive purpose in human history.

The history that the Bible does report is of vital significance for the Christian faith. If it were the purpose of the Bible merely to inculcate some eternal principles or universal truths for men to observe in their quest for blessedness, then it would make no difference whether the stories used to illustrate the principles and truths were pure fabrications or factual reports of real events.

The Bible, however, was written to bear witness to the action of God *in human history* to accomplish the redemption of fallen mankind. If Biblical historical records are unreliable or even false, then God's saving actions in history are called into question too. The Christian faith rests so squarely on God's actions in human history, centering in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, that if Biblical historical records are false, our *faith* is left without a foundation. (1 Cor. 15:17)

Working with the presuppositions and canons of their craft in order to account for and reconstruct events in history, secular historians are able to discern and take into account only the *secondary* causes in the historical process. By observation of factors at work in the historical process now and by the application of the principle of analogy historians may be able to formulate some "laws of history" operative at the level

of *their* investigation of past events. But faith knows that behind the secondary causes discernable to the historian there is the author and Lord of history who has given us in His Word a truthful record of *His* mighty acts.

C. Inspiration and the *Meaning of Historical Events*

Without the writings of men who spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, human beings would be left to their own resources to speculate about the meaning of history or to wonder, indeed, if it has any meaning at all (Ap IV, 167). Without the inspired Scriptures how could we know the significance of Israel's history or of the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth? A knowledge of the history recorded in the Scriptures is of no benefit unless we understand the *purpose* of the history (Ap IV, 51). In the Scriptures the report of events is accompanied by an explanatory word from which alone we can learn that in all the confusion that characterizes human history God was carrying out His saving purposes.

If the Old Testament is not the Word of the God who knows the end from the beginning (Is. 46:10), then it is simply a piece of human nationalistic propaganda that attempts to ascribe cosmic significance to the history of an obscure ancient people and does not deserve serious consideration. If Old Testament claims about what God was doing in Israel's history are a matter of *human* interpretation of Israel's history, they are arrogant nonsense. But we must know this first of all that what the Old Testament says about the meaning of Israel's history is *not* a matter of one's own interpretation because what the Old Testament teaches never came from the impulse of man, but holy men spoke *from God* as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21)

III. Inspiration and Biblical Authority

A. Inspiration and the *Unity of Scripture*

The unity of the Scriptures is *Christological*.

Jesus said that the Old Testament testifies of Him (John 5:39) and that Moses wrote of Him (John 5:46). In the parable of the householder (Matt. 21:33-46) He cited Ps. 118:22-23 as applying to Himself. In Mark 14:27 He refers to Himself as the subject of Zech. 13:7. He went up to Jerusalem that everything written of the Son of Man in the prophets might be fulfilled in Him (Luke 18:31-33). Beginning at Moses and all the prophets He expounded to the disciples on the Emmaus road the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:27). In a post-resurrection appearance to His startled and frightened disciples He comforted them by assuring them that it was He whom they saw and not a spirit, and then He explained that everything that had happened to Him took place in order to fulfill what was written about Him in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms. (Luke 24:36-48)

Also the apostles and evangelists understood the Old Testament as witnessing to Christ. Peter identified Jesus as the prophet of whom Moses wrote in Deut. 18:15, 18-19 (Acts 3:20-22), and to Cornelius he testified that "to him [Jesus of Nazareth] all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43). Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian from Is. 53. Paul preached Christ from Pss. 2 and 16 and Is. 55 (Acts 13: 32-37). The last thing recorded in the Book of Acts about Paul's ministry is that he tried to convince the Jews about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the prophets. (Acts 28:23)

The New Testament, too, witnesses to Jesus. John's Gospel was written that men might believe that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). Paul preached Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). Peter proclaimed that God made Jesus both Lord and Christ. (Acts 2:22-36)

The unity of the Scriptures consists in this that from Genesis (3:15) to Revelation (22:16) they testify to Jesus, the Christ of God, through whom came grace and truth.

The unity of the Scriptures is *theological*. It is the triune and only God who reveals Himself in both Testaments. While a certain progression is discernable in the revelation that God gave of Himself and of His saving actions in history when earlier Scriptures are compared with later Scriptures, nevertheless there are in the Scriptures no conflicting and contradictory conceptions of God and of His ways with men. God's revelation of Himself in the Scriptures, though varying in fullness from age to age, is always perfectly consistent with itself.

The unity of the Scriptures is *doctrinal*. Throughout the Scriptures, wherever such topics are treated whether as the specific subject of discussion or only incidentally mentioned, the same doctrine is taught concerning creation, anthropology, justification, sacraments, church, the end of the world, resurrection of the dead, judgment, eternal life, eternal death, or any other article of the Christian faith.

The unity of the Scriptures results from the fact that the witness to Jesus in both the Old and the New Testaments was inspired by the same Spirit. The prophets predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory by the Spirit of Christ within them; the apostles preached the good news through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven (1 Pet. 1:10-12). Because the same Spirit, whose office it is to glorify Christ (John 16:14) and reveal the mind of God (1 Cor. 2:10-11), spoke through prophets and apostles, there is complete unity not only in their witness to all that God purposed and performed for the salvation of sinners through His Son, but with respect to everything they spoke from God.

The unity which results from the inspiration of the prophetic and apostolic writings is the basic presupposition of the hermeneutical principle that the Scriptures interpret the Scriptures. Denial of the inspired unity of the Scriptures renders this principle inapplicable and inoperative. If the Scriptures were merely the writings of human beings who are separated not only by centuries but by radical differences of viewpoint,

they could not be used to interpret each other. Such writings, even when they speak about the same subject, do so from entirely different perspectives and from within different frames of reference so that each writing must be interpreted solely on its *own* terms and not from an alien vantage point.

The principle that Scripture interprets Scripture means that passages of Scripture which treat of the *same subject* explain each other. This principle does not mean that what the Bible teaches about the way to salvation, for instance, may be used as a criterion to justify some minimal understanding of what the Bible says about creation. It is an abuse of this principle when Paul's statement that men and women participate equally in grace is used to interpret (or interpret away!) what he says about the *social* relationship of man and woman based on the orders of creation.

B. Inspiration and the Authority of Scripture

Post-Reformation Lutheran theologians not only distinguished between the causative authority and the normative authority of the Scriptures, but they also very carefully explained the close relationship between these two aspects of Scriptural authority. The power to create saving faith which is inherent in the Scriptures, because the Holy Spirit operates through their witness to Christ (the Gospel), the dogmatists called *causative* authority. The power of the Scriptures to regulate doctrine in the church by working acceptance of their teachings the dogmatists regarded as a result of the causative authority and called it *normative* authority. Both causative and normative authority belong to the Scriptures simply because they are *God's Word* through which the Holy Spirit works to produce obedience to the Gospel and to all the other articles of faith contained in the Scriptures.

"Such is the efficacy of the Word, whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, that it is bound never to be without fruit For these words are not inoperative or dead, but creative, living words" (LC I, 100, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 609). "It has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do [since it has all the virtue and power of God comprised in it]." ("*Es hat und vermag alles, was Gottes ist*"; "*omnem Dei virtutem et potentiam in se habet comprehensam*.") (LC IV, 17, *Concordia Triglotta*, p. 736)

The twofold authority of the Scriptures derives from the operation of the Holy Spirit connected with the writing of the Scriptures (inspiration), since it is by reason of this operation of the Spirit that the Biblical word is God's Word, which speaks with God's own authority whether men acknowledge it or not. However, the authority which the Scriptures exercise in the church, both causative and normative, results not from the bare fact that they are inspired, but rather from the operation of the Holy Spirit *through* the Scriptures by which He turns men from unbelief to faith in Christ and leads them to recognize, confess, and obey the Scriptures as the Word of God in all that they teach.

Nevertheless, an indispensable role must be ascribed to inspiration with respect to the normative authority of the Scriptures for doctrine and practice in the church. Great significance attaches to the fact that the Bible is inspired when determining what it teaches on a given point because by inspiration the Holy Spirit taught the very words best suited to express divine truth. The words that the Holy Spirit taught in the languages in which the Scriptures were originally written are the foundation of doctrine. In determining Biblical teaching we must work with the words the Holy Spirit has given us. In this sense, it is inspiration that makes the words of the Holy Scriptures normative for theology. (See Sections C and E of part III for the importance of inspired terms.)

When Lutheran theologians speak of the Spirit's operation associated with the *writing* of the Scriptures, they use the term "inspiration"; when they speak of the Spirit's operation *through* the Scriptures as the Word of God to produce acceptance of and obedience to Scriptural teachings, they use the term "divine efficacy." On the one hand, therefore, it is a confusion of the relationship between inspiration and Biblical authority to say that *inspiration* of the written Word pertains to the effective *power* of the Scriptures to bring men and women to salvation through the Gospel. On the other hand, however, it should be noted that while the authority of the Scriptures must be inseparably linked to their inspiration, this ought not to be done in such a way as to fail to take into account the operation of the Holy Spirit *through* the Scriptures in working *acceptance* of their teachings.

The bare assertion of the Holy Spirit's operation connected with the *writing* of the Scriptures does not move men to obey the Word; it is the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures that leads men to obey the Word in *all* that it teaches. Inspiration explains how we got the Scriptures; authority explains *why we ought to* and *do* believe the Scriptures. We *ought* to believe the Scriptures because they are *God's Word*; we *do* believe the Scriptures because as *God's Word* they *work effectively* in us to enable us to believe.

Inspiration pertains to the *writing* of the Scriptures; authority pertains to the *power* of Scriptures to create faith and to regulate the confession of the church by working acceptance of their teachings.

C. Inspiration and the Gospel

By inspiration the Biblical authors were given the very words best suited to express the spiritual truths they imparted in their writings. St. Paul affirms this particularly with respect to his proclamation of the "secret and hidden wisdom of God; which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Cor. 2:7). He reminds the Corinthians "in what terms" he preached the Gospel to them and admonishes them to hold fast to the Gospel just as they had received it, for he delivered to them what he himself had received (1 Cor. 15:1-4) not from man, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:11-12)

If we hold fast to the terms in which the Scriptures teach the Gos-

pel, our Gospel will be the proclamation that God forgives sin on account of the substitutionary life and death of Jesus Christ (Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 2:20; 3:13). If we use terms with meaning other than those given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit to express what God has done in Christ for our salvation, we are not imparting the Gospel revealed in the Scriptures but a "different gospel," which is not "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-7). There is only one Gospel.

The inspired Scriptures impart the Gospel without any distortion or any corruption because the Holy Spirit provided the terms for expressing the mystery of God's grace in Christ. The inspired Scriptures, then, provide us not merely with a model to guide us in our attempts to speak about God's redemptive purposes in a way that we regard as relevant to human needs as the world understands them. The Scriptures provide us with a *norm* for preaching the Gospel from which we dare not depart without invoking upon ourselves the apostolic curse. (Gal. 1:8-9)

D. Inspiration and Saving Faith

The inspiration of the Scriptures is an article of faith which Christians believe because the Scriptures have the inherent power to commend themselves to men for what they claim to be and are, namely, the Word of God. The Scriptures commend themselves to men as the Word of God just as apostolic preaching did, namely, because it worked effectively in them. (See 1 Thess. 2:13.) For Christians, then, the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures is a matter of great importance, and they steadfastly confess that the Scriptures are the inspired Word of God over against everything that would call this article of faith into question.

Christians, however, also know and believe what the inspired Scriptures teach about the creation of saving faith, or faith that trusts in the merits of Christ for salvation. Such faith is created by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3) through the Gospel (Rom. 1:16; 10:17). The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, not by reason of the fact that it comes to us in inspired Scriptures, but because the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel as His instrument to enable men to confess that Christ is Lord.

For *the man of God* (i. e., for one who is already a believer) the inspired Scriptures are profitable to equip him for every good work by teaching, reproving, correcting, and training him. The Scriptures *save* a man because they are *able* to make him wise unto salvation through faith (2 Tim. 3:15-16). They save because they are *able* to make wise (bestow faith); they are profitable for edifying and nurturing those who already have faith because believers know them to be God's inspired Word.

Faith in the Gospel of God's grace toward sinners in Christ Jesus does not result from a prior conviction about the inspiration of the Scriptures in which the Gospel is proclaimed. First faith is wrought by the Gospel, and then faith recognizes the Scriptures as the very Word

of God profitable for teaching. The worship that faith accords to God includes believing everything laid down and written in His Word. (Acts 24:14)

E. Inspiration and Doctrinal Formulations

While inspiration is in no way analogous to dictation, the Scriptures do teach that the Holy Spirit "taught" the words which the sacred writers used to express the content of Christian doctrine. In 1 Cor. 2:13 where the apostle Paul says that what the Holy Spirit revealed he imparted in *words* taught by *the Spirit*, he adds a participial phrase which can only be understood to mean that the Spirit provided terms suited to the subject matter. (John 14:26; 16:13)

Biblical doctrinal formulations do not, therefore, represent mere human attempts to press language into the service of expressing divine truth. While the Biblical writers used terms current in the everyday parlance of their times, Biblical doctrinal formulations are not on that account culturally conditioned in the sense that they are provisional or tentative; in Spirit-taught words they express what God has revealed in a way that remains permanently valid and is for all times the only normative way of talking about the topic they treat. For this reason the letters to Timothy make repeated references to the use of sound (healthy) words in imparting Christian teaching. (1 Tim. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; cf. 2 Tim. 4:3)

Inspiration gives the assurance that in the Bible we have sound doctrine imparted in Spirit-taught words, that the Biblical doctrinal formulations express the content of revelation in terms that dare not be discarded even when the range and function of language in theology is a matter of much discussion as it is at present.

IV. Inspiration and Canonicity

God used the church to gather and preserve the holy writings in which He willed to give to mankind His saving Word until the end of the time. The role of the church in the formulation of canon was not active but passive. The church did not create the canon when it sought to determine on the basis of certain criteria that it set up, which books were authentic and which were not. For example, the church did not on the basis of empirical evidence which satisfied it that a book was inspired proceed to authenticate the books which make up the Bible.

The role of the church in the formulation of the canon was passive in that the church served merely as the community in which the Sacred Writings authenticated *themselves* by their inherent power to convince God's people that they are His Word. A Biblical book did not become authentic because the church accepted it; the church accepted it because it was authentic and commended itself to the church as an inspired, prophetic, or apostolic writing. God led the church to recognize and

preserve certain writings as His Word because they speak with prophetic and apostolic authority and are the vehicles of divine power calling sinners to repentance and to faith in the Christ to whom they bear witness.

During the period of early church history when the apostolic writings were commending themselves to the church and being recognized by Christians as God's inspired Word, it happened that the authenticity of some New Testament books was questioned. These books, however, have maintained their place in the canon, and the distinction between writings universally accepted and writings that were spoken against is no longer a pressing issue or a matter of major concern for the church today.

The theoretical possibility that a hitherto lost and unknown prophetic or apostolic writing might by God's providence be restored to the church has sometimes been discussed. While this possibility must be acknowledged, it would seem that until such a writing makes its appearance, the question is purely academic and has no real significance for the church. The church will not speculate about *additional* Sacred Scriptures, but will thank God for those which He has given us because they are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Throughout its history only prophetic and apostolic writings (or writings of men intimately associated with the apostles) have authenticated themselves to the church as canonical. This fact precludes the possibility that the writings of later Christians will be included among the canonical books because the offices of prophet and apostle no longer exist in the church.

Conclusion

Whether the sacred authors obtained knowledge of the things concerning which they wrote by revelation or whether God led them to other sources from which they received information, everything that is recorded in the Scriptures was written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Inspiration is supernatural guidance which, while it did not deprive the Biblical writers of their individuality and identity, nevertheless makes the Scriptures in their totality the Word of God.

Because the Scriptures are the Word of God, faith holds them to be inerrant even in the presence of some problems for which there is no explanation that satisfies human reason. As the Word of God the Scriptures speak with God's own authority and have the power to create faith in the Savior to whom they witness and to regulate the confession of the church by working acceptance of all that they teach.

In the Scriptures God has given us a record of His mighty acts in human history together with an explanatory Word apart from which we could not know that through all the confusion that characterizes the flow of events God was working out His eternal counsels for man's salvation.

When through the Gospel proclaimed in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit calls sinners to faith in Jesus Christ, they recognize the Scriptures as God's Word characterized by complete unity with respect to all that God has revealed for our salvation and instruction.

NOTES

1. *Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, Cleveland, 1962, Resolutions 3-16, 3-17, and 3-19, pp. 104–106.
2. *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, New York, 1967, Resolution 2-22, p. 93. See also *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod*, New Orleans, 1973, Minutes, Session 16, p. 46.
3. St. Louis Edition, XIV, 491.
4. *Theses of Agreement*, "Theses on Scripture and Inspiration," adopted by the conventions of the merging churches of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia in 1956 and 1959. The "Theses on Scripture and Inspiration" were reprinted and distributed by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations in "Statements From The Lutheran Church of Australia," 1973, pp. 6–7.
5. Robert Preus, "Notes on the Inerrancy of Scripture," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXVIII (June 1967), 363–375.