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## The Lutheran Doctrine of the "Autopistia" of Holy Scripture

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EDITORIAL NOTE: This essay, like the one on Christ's royal office in the March issue, was presented at the Free Conference of the American and European Theologians at Spandau-Berlin. The over-all topic of the conference was: "The Living Word of Christ and the Response of the Congregation." The topic for the fourth day was: "The Word of God and the Holy Scriptures, the Doctrine of Inspiration." The German essayist, Dr. Helmut Echternach, was asked to discuss the following topic: "The Word of God in its perspicuity, authority, sufficiency, infallibility, objectivity, and in its collative and effective power, since Christ is there speaking and acting." Dr. J. T. Mueller has translated this article for the readers of our journal. The task of translating was extremely difficult, partly because the essayist moves in abstract terminology, especially in the first section, and partly because his style is rather compressed. The essayist approaches the doctrine of the inerrancy and the inspiration of the Bible in an arresting manner, and the entire presentation is a valuable contribution to Apologetics and *Dogmengeschichte*. The translator and the editorial committee are aware of the fact that some statements in the article are not entirely clear to the American reader, that others may seem rather novel, and that some may even require correction. Nevertheless, we present the article *in toto*, because it contains so much challenging and refreshing material in support of the orthodox Lutheran theologians' position concerning the Bible's self-attestation, or *autopistia*.

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THIS doctrine of classical Lutheran theology is becoming very important today in connection with the discussion of the authority of Scripture and the Confessions. Stated briefly its immediate scope in its *formal* aspect is that Holy Scripture requires no other argument to prove itself the inerrant divine truth than the evidence which it bears within itself and with which it confronts the Church and the individual as the living Word of the living God, that is to say, as the Word which has life in itself and awakens life. In its *material* aspect it declares that it needs no other interpretation than that which it itself represents and offers. From neither the

formal nor the material point of view is the understanding of Scripture dependent on any other factor, such as the official church interpretation (Romanism), or mystical illumination, or logical proof, or arguments based on reason, or the results of scientific research.

# I

## THE FORMAL SIGNIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINE

The formal significance of the doctrine is both positive and negative. The negative import, in the 17th century, was chiefly the principle directed against Romanism, that the authority of Scripture does not rest upon the Church or the respective decisions of church councils, but that inversely the Church rests upon the authority of Scripture. This means, in its application to problems which concern Protestantism today, that the authority of Scripture is not a dogma beside others, the object of theological discussion, the result of "systematic" speculation or of historical investigation, but the axiomatic substratum previous to all discussion, the confrontation of Church and science.

This new consideration of the *autopistia* thus adds clarity to the traditional doctrine of inspiration, for it removes from it a misunderstanding which has been connected with it ever since the early days of Rationalism and has time and again given rise to the stricture that the doctrine of inspiration was designed as an argument to prove the authority, infallibility, and divinity of Scripture. Against the doctrine of inspiration, so misunderstood, there were voiced the objections of Rationalism, just as they are being voiced today. These center essentially in two arguments.

The first is that similar doctrines of inspiration exist also in other religions. Inspiration, for instance, is predicated in wide areas of the texts of the Veda, the sacred writings of the later Hindu religions, the Koran, the utterances of seers and oracles, the mantic scripts, and in fact more or less of all sacred texts of every religion, and that indeed not in its modified form of real, fundamental, or personal inspiration, but of verbal inspiration.

The second argument concerns the human side of Scripture, about which ever since Reimarus unspeakably much has been said, though nothing really decisive. Despite some promising attempts by dialectic theology, neither the relation of the divine word to the human,

nor its relevance to the distinctions "true-false," and "absolute-relative," has been thought through.

These two objections cannot be answered as long as the doctrine of inspiration is being misunderstood in the way depicted above. In that case two other objections of still greater weight might be added.

The first argument is that any authority which first must be proved or be motivated otherwise is no authority at all. Authority does not tolerate any "why"; it demands acquiescence and obedience. Such a limitation of critical reflection in the face of truth cannot be the upshot of thinking. Truth in that case would not be genuine and could be revoked at any time. A proof of inspiration would be tantamount to replying to the question: "Why must I believe the Bible?" and what would be one of insubordination. For such a query there is no other answer than the silence of God; it reveals by its very nature that God is silent.

The other argument is that Scripture cannot be supported by any dogma, that is, by any constituent part of ecclesiastical teaching, for Scripture supports the Church, and not vice versa.

But what, then, is the real import of the doctrine of inspiration?

Before answering this question, let me first state a few prolegomena. The dogma of inspiration is, as every other dogma, a part of the confession, that is, of the Church's glorifying, adoring response to the Word of God. It is the grateful attestation of that which the Church has experienced from the very beginning in connection with Scripture, namely, that here she finds herself addressed directly by her Lord. In Scripture God speaks, and in its confession the Church replies. Only in this dialog does truth live, or tabernacle, on earth. He who looks for proofs, whether for the reality of revelation or for individual doctrines, demonstrates by this very fact that he lives outside this dialog and views the Church only from the perspective of an observer.

Viewed in the light of the confession, the dogma of inspiration therefore most certainly deserves a pre-eminent place. If every single statement of the confession is a particular reply to the Word of God, the doctrine of inspiration is the total response. It is the clamp around the confession. If it is removed, the whole confession fails.

But what, then, is the real purport of inspiration? If the sense

of inspiration were merely the basic fact that Scripture is inspired, it would not yet predicate anything special concerning the Bible,<sup>1</sup> for inspiration is the characteristic of every intellectual creation. The more productive the human mind is, the more convincingly does it sense at all times how there were forced upon it thoughts from a transcendent sphere. The more original it is, the greater its receptivity! Its supreme activity is at the same time its sheerest passivity. The less it creates and the more it merely reproduces, the less it is aware of this fact. Now, then, this clarifies in a very striking manner the background from which originated the attacks that since the 17th century were commonly made upon the doctrine of inspiration. It is the cramped principle of a "mere reproductiveness," or the cramped unawareness of the essence of intellection.<sup>2</sup>

But with inspiration in this wider sense the question of its truth or falsehood is not yet decided, for there is such a thing as demonic inspiration. The *Zarathustra* of Nietzsche, for example, indicates such inspiration page by page as does hardly any other book. Over against this sort of inspiration, the ecclesiastical doctrine of inspiration declares that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit and not by any spirits. The doctrine thus proves itself a genuine expression of faith, a *fiducia evangelica*, a trust in the merciful, redeeming real presence and the thankful acceptance of divine truth.

A brief historical retrospect may show that this is not a subsequent explanation, but the original import of the doctrine.

As is well known, the doctrine of inspiration is not an invention of Lutheran orthodoxy, though time and again this is averred both orally and in writing, but a part of the ancient Confession of the Church. Apart from the common relevant Scripture passages, it was asserted by the apologists of the second century, and it has remained the almost uncontroverted *consensus ecclesiae* until the beginning of the Enlightenment,<sup>3</sup> affected neither by other doctrinal controversies nor by confessional lines. Ancient theology had to address Hellenic thought, for which it was axiomatic that man could perceive the voice of the deity only by inspiration and could know of it only in that way. The seer and the oracle were always regarded as inspired, just as all alleged sacred texts and finally also the poems of Homer, Hesiod, and others. The fact that also other religions — basically perhaps all of them — ascribe their knowledge

to inspiration, proves that they preserved a more original and right-ful conception of the nature of perception, i. e., they recognized its essentially passive character. It may be "primitive," but "primitive" means "original." To this passive conception of thinking, Hellenism was especially susceptible, since, on the one hand, Platonism regarded all cognition as the reflection of transcendent realities and, on the other, Stoicism recognized in all cognition the *Logos spermatikos*. Hence, it was the task of the Church of the second century to attest to men not *that* Holy Scripture is inspired, but only *by whom*.

Nevertheless, there remains a most weighty distinction. According to pagan thought, inspiration means the total exclusion of personality and so indicates a concealed demonic background. This may be recognized more fully at times, but in all cases the trend can be perceived, most obviously perhaps in the Delphic oracle and in the manifestations of intoxicated, mystic ecstasy. At this point the Dionysiac-chthonian abyss begins to show itself, which threatens to devour the human. The belief in inspiration in its pagan form was brought into the Church by Montanism, which regarded it as ecstatic. I believe that the Apologists repudiate this ecstatic conception of inspiration in unmistakable terms. The well-known illustration of Justin Martyr and Hippolytus, according to which the Holy Spirit influenced the sacred writers of Scripture as the plectrum moves the zither, expresses the fact that the instrument through the divine employment comes to a full realization of its nature and purpose of existence. Athenagoras expressed the same truth by the illustration of a flautist. A little later Irenaeus and Origen so formulated the doctrine of inspiration as it has remained up to the 18th century, that is to say, as purely passive, but definitely excluding the ecstatic. Thus Irenaeus writes with complete candor about the stylistic peculiarities of Luke and his research work.

This answers the first objection of rationalism, namely, the argument from analogous or similar doctrines outside Biblical revelation. What paganism here teaches, is, as in other points, not really an untruth, but something much more insidious, namely, a half-truth, or rather a cankered, demonized verity, which thrives on its hidden kernel of truth and through this may live for ages, while downright untruths as a rule pass away very rapidly. From the level of this

"primitive," "original" knowledge of the passive character of all thinking the Christian belief in inspiration emerges, clarifying the ethnic half-truths by its own content of truth.

Viewed from this angle, the modern objection to the doctrine of inspiration manifests itself as an egregious superficiality. Whence stem ideas if they are not inspired? Must we perhaps look for their origin in the chemical processes of the brain? Or in the complexes of the subconscious? It is nevertheless most important to discover the background of this superficiality, for every platitude is a demonic obfuscation of the postulates underlying all thinking. In the background we find manifested the following presuppositions of intellection, though not consciously expressed: The first is that thought is conceived by man himself. This, however, contradicts every form of experience, for throughout the world men do not beget thoughts, but thoughts produce men. Thoughts are forces. In the second place, this prevailing objection is fortuitous and so not authoritative, it being conditioned on historical or psychological factors. If the first statement reveals the latent *hybris* of rationalizing man, the second manifests his hidden desperation.

Both theories rest upon the principle of the severance of intellection and being, which dominates Occidental thought ever since the decay of scholasticism. Contrary to this line of argument, man's knowledge concerning the passivity of intellection and inspiration, no matter whether the latter be divine or demonic, involves a unity which Heidegger again envisioned, though by way of different perspectives, as the intimate alliance of all cognition to the objectivity of reality.

This may suffice to clarify the negative import of *autopistia* in its formal sense. The rebuttal of all arguments against inspiration brings to our view the genuine confessional character of Scriptural authority; and the doctrine of inspiration, mistaken for an argument, manifests itself as a true proposition of faith, or as trust in the merciful presence of the Lord.

To express and to define more precisely this confessional character is the positive purport of our proposition. We might express it thus: Scripture supplies for its authority its own proof by creating faith. It is only when we take seriously the present tense in this statement that we give expression to the meaning of Scriptural *autopistia*; for

Scripture has not merely attested itself once and for all as the divine inspired truth, but it keeps on proving itself to be such. Faith is always a new event, always new grace, always a new miracle. It is always a presence before the presence of God. To give expression to this thought might be the purpose of distinguishing between internal and external evidences (*criteria interna et externa*).

The latter evidences (*criteria externa*), such as the fulfillment of prophecy, the majesty of the Biblical teachings, their attestation by means of miracles, the ageless continuance of Scripture, the victorious dominance of Christianity, the consensus of the Church, and others, produce, according to the teaching of our orthodox teachers, only a human assurance or a historic faith. It is manifestly the scope of these expressions clearly to define the distinction between human assurance and saving faith and so to demonstrate the improbability and also the miraculous character of the latter.

But, then, what is human assurance, and what is the purport of the external proofs? John Gerhard and Hollaz have stressed their apologetic value, without, however, erasing the demarcation between knowing and believing. They say that the *criteria externa* draw attention to the unique character of the mysteries of faith, which transcend all earthly laws and relations, so that, though unable to convert "the heathen, atheists, and Epicureans," they may nevertheless demonstrate the possibility of the divine miracles of Scripture and with that the area where the supernatural impinges upon the natural, as also the obvious captivity of all men in the cosmic immanence, and all this to shatter their rebellious self-confidence and to induce them to think, read, and meditate.<sup>4</sup>

It certainly would be wrong to pass lightly over the *criteria externa* of orthodox theology or even to visualize in them the first germs of rationalism. One does not become a rationalist until he addresses them as evidences of saving faith. On the contrary, the external proofs have a twofold significance.

In the first place, they accomplished what apologetics is able to do in general. Thus they arouse the unbeliever out of the security of his self-deification and so may create a breach, enabling the divine Word, should this be God's will, to penetrate into the heart. Again, they assist the believer against his doubts and trials, supporting him in his fight against what is anti-Christian in his own nature. Such



doubts, though commonly stemming from logical short circuits and half-baked notions, may, nevertheless, become most distressing. But they can be met with arguments which are more securely anchored than the arguments and reasonings of infidelity, even though they are not strictly cogent and absolutely conclusive.

As far more important, however, I regard the second function of the external proofs. Pointing out the area of the miracles, they contribute very much toward visualizing the fact, the reality, or the incarnation of divine truth. For this reason, as a rule only a Calvinizing, rationalizing, and idealizing theology, spurning the fact of the Incarnation, can ignore the external proofs or even misinterpret their existence and classification as a rationalization. They belong to the visible divine manifestations in the world, though unconditionally they can be known as such only by the light of faith. Only he can truly perceive miracles in whom the miracle of illumination has been realized. Miracles are not arguments, yet they afford occasion and cause to glorify God.

To the *criteria externa* in this sense we may count also the proofs of Inspiration which occur in Scripture itself. By these I mean not only the constant stress on the divine command to witness, from the *ne'um Jahwe* of the Prophets to such well-known Scripture passages as 2 Tim. 3:16 and 2 Pet. 1:21, but also the overwhelming revelation which confronts us in all parts of the Bible that the sacred witnesses had to speak and could not do otherwise. Jeremiah thus says: "His Word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jer. 20:9). The Apostles declare: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). There are many more such passages in the Bible. No rational argument can prove to an unbeliever that we are dealing here with a radically different "must" than that of fanaticism; for to the believer they are an overwhelming witness for the mighty power of divine revelation. Only he will acknowledge that the Spirit of God speaks and moves in whom the same Spirit dwells. That is the significance of the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

In this witness of the Holy Ghost classical Lutheran theology recognizes the proper source of the assurance that Scripture is the divine truth. At the same time orthodox theology declares in a most convincing manner that this witness is not a psychic experience, pos-

sibly of an emotional nature. If it were, then indeed it would belong to the classification of external proofs, would serve as an argument, and would place the authority of Scripture into the class of cognizable objects which require proof, are subject to discussion, and are essentially subject to doubt. On the contrary, the testimony of the Holy Ghost is really nothing else than the perception of what the internal and external proofs indicate, namely, the miracle of miracles, which enables us to recognize all miracles, the gracious gift of the *fides divina*, which lies beyond all argumentation.<sup>5</sup> Hollaz<sup>6</sup> enumerates the following internal proofs: "The majesty of God witnessing concerning Himself in the Sacred Volume; the simplicity and dignity of the Biblical style; the sublimity of the divine mysteries which Scripture sets forth; the truth of all that Scripture says; the sanctity of all precepts contained in Holy Scripture; the sufficiency of Holy Scripture for salvation."

At first sight this classification may not appear as very convincing. Genuine propositions of faith are without doubt the last three. They are facts of faith, which are evident only to those that believe, but then become absolutely convincing and serve as bearers of the real presence. Theirs is the undoubted right to be classified among the internal proofs. But what about the first three, especially the second? Is there an essential difference between them and the external proofs? Let us bear in mind what is meant by this formulation. If the first statement would not mean any more than the Bible's own awareness of its speaking by way of inspiration, it would express nothing else than the claim of the sacred writers that Scripture is inspired, which we have already considered.

But it is evident that the words "the majesty of God witnessing" obviously express more. They predicate not only the fact claimed by the sacred writers concerning the direct address by God in their own time, but God's address today, which indeed is indirect, but nevertheless real. God's majesty, which here and now speaks out of the text is the primary, and really, the only *criterium internum*.

With "simplicity and dignity" of style, Hollaz manifestly does not mean rhetorical devices of a formal nature, but their very absence, that is to say, the absence of any attempts to render intelligible that which is said by formal or material means, by suggestions or arguments.<sup>7</sup> The sacred text foregoes any attempts to

clarify itself to the reader and to gain his assent. This distinguishes the Bible from all other books and addresses in the world and leaves the reader only the alternative either to believe or to be offended. The "simplicity and dignity" means what present-day theologians denominate the "disguisedness" of Revelation. Thus Jesus speaks in parables in order not to be understood. (Cf. Matt. 13:10-17.) St. Paul does not witness as everybody else does. He employs the arts of eloquence, but "not with enticing words of man's wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:4). Every book and every thought in the world depends on the assent of men for its validity. Only what Scripture says is true before and independent of every human "Yes" or "No."

The third internal proof, the "sublimity of divine mysteries" in Scripture, expresses the same thing in its material aspect. Sublimity is not a relative property, but denotes that the teachings of Scripture are "mysteries," which are "inaccessible and concealed to human reason as long as it is left to itself."<sup>8</sup>

All these internal proofs, as said before, are really only paraphrases of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, which means that Scripture as the Word of God can be known only through faith, the gift of the Holy Ghost. However, since, according to the sense of the Reformers, faith is basically assurance of salvation, or the sinner's trust in the promised divine grace, it means that Scripture can be recognized as God's Word only if it is read in the light of the polarity of Law and Gospel. The Lutheran *Schriftprinzip* (*principium cognoscendi*) had its inception in the depths of repentance; it is the necessary expression of one's status between wrath and grace. Whoever perceives in Scripture the threatening, punitive sword of God, as did Luther, or "the thunderbolt of Moses," knows the dreadful conviction, not open to any discussion, that God is here speaking. And again, to whom, as to Luther in his "tower experience," Scripture becomes the saving life line, which keeps him from sinking down into the abyss of despair, knows too, with an absolute assurance of faith, that it is God Himself who is here upholding him. Every form of doubt would here be absurd. Its denouement would be immediate: as *hybris* over against the Law; as *desperatio* over against the Gospel.

Every doubt concerning the authority of Scripture is only the symptomatic result of considering it outside the polarity of Law

and Gospel. Such mingling of Law and Gospel always occurs when the one is unduly stressed to the neglect of the other. Calvinism invariably has viewed the Bible primarily as a normative code of laws. It thus failed to see the proper scope of the Gospel and so became the way-preparer of rationalism. Thus when the propositions of faith were no longer recognized as Gospel, or as promises of salvation, when the question was no longer: "*May* I believe?" but: "*Must* I believe?" Scripture had lost its genuine authority. And since, in consequence, the voice of God was no longer heard in Scripture, the doctrines of inspiration and of the Biblical *autopistia* could only appear as assumptions without proof.

But there has occurred also the default in the other direction. Lutheranism especially is tempted no longer to view the Gospel from the perspective of the Prodigal Son. To such as are tempted in this way the Gospel message must appear as a strange, unprovable metaphysical hypothesis, and they are in danger of succumbing to doubt.

*Autopistia*, then, in its formal-positive sense, is the undebatable authority of Scripture, which can be perceived only when the Word of God is being read according to the dialectic of Law and Gospel. It is well known that Luther regarded the mingling of Law and Gospel as the essence of abysmal trials, and in view of later developments this indeed proved itself more than prophetic. Since Lutheranism represents the divine truth in its pure form, it is in far greater danger at this point than are other denominations. Truth ever remains a miracle that cannot be disposed of; it is always a new event out of eternity. The Church is a miracle in every eventuality in which it finds realization. A miracle is the conviction that the Bible is God's Word. And it is the purport of the doctrine of Scripture's *autopistia*, or of Holy Scripture in its formal aspect, to clarify the view toward this miracle.

## II

### THE MATERIAL SIGNIFICATION OF THE DOCTRINE

The same may be said of the doctrine of the *autopistia* in its material signification. Every comprehension of Scripture is an actual divine miracle. Also here the clear representation of this miracle demands the exclusion of all interfering factors. At the time

of the Reformation this meant the rejection of all official ecclesiastical interpretation and of tradition. Today it means the repudiation of all obfuscations on the part of science. It remains, however, just as important for Lutheran theology to avoid the opposite deviation, namely, that of a bare Biblicism, which needs must end in subjectivism and rationalism. The objectivism of official ecclesiastical interpretation and the subjectivism of a bare Biblicism veil in like manner the mystery of the Church as God's continuous new miracle. The latter way has become that of sectarianism and in part also of Calvinism in consequence of the latter's lack of stress on the Confessions. "There is dread in these footprints!"

Primarily, however, not the individual confronts Scripture, but the Church. To express this inexpressible thought and to keep also here the truth in balance, which is possible only as a miracle, is the sense of the *affectiones Scripturae Sacrae*, that is, of its properties or affections, "by means of which Holy Scripture, differing radically from all other books, imparts the divine truth." In numbering and classifying these properties, our dogmaticians do not observe uniformity. We shall here treat only the most important aspects of the doctrine.

### *The Perspicuity of Scripture*

At this point there comes to view very clearly the Reformation's bi-frontal position, behind which the balance of truth is concealed. On the one hand, it had to preclude every interfering factor, while, on the other hand, it was obliged to preserve the mystery and divine grace involved in all Christian knowledge. The fact that the representatives of orthodoxy did not always speak uniformly on this point and that in part their formulations were not always adequate, shows how earnestly they fought for the doctrine. In fact, the very impossibility of achieving an absolutely satisfactory formulation shows that truth was on their side. Baier's formulation, for instance, according to which Scripture is intelligible to all men, does not sufficiently safeguard it against Biblicism and rationalism. "Every person who knows the language, is of average intelligence, and pays sufficient attention to the meaning of the words can grasp their sense so far as it is necessary for him to know it for his salvation; he is able to embrace the chief parts of the doctrine with a simple apprehension of the mind."<sup>9</sup> It must be observed, however, that

he applies the words "every person" only to such as are baptized and to whom salvation has been promised. Heathen and Moham-medans do not come within the scope of this discussion.

John Gerhard endeavors very seriously to define the narrow way which here leads past the abysses of Romanism and rationalism. To the doctrine of Scriptural perspicuity he adds a special chapter on the "Interpretation of Scripture," which takes up about twenty folio pages. It sets forth the theme: "The Holy Spirit as the Author of Scripture is also its supreme and authoritative Interpreter."<sup>10</sup> According to John Gerhard, this association of Spirit and Scripture is overlooked not only by the sectarians and the rationalists, the Arminians and Socinians of his day, but above all by the Romanists. "The basic error of their entire system is that they separate the revelation of the Holy Spirit from the words of Scripture. The voice and teaching of the Holy Spirit resounds in the very words of Scripture, and it is not to be carried into Scripture from somewhere else, but it is to be drawn from and to be heard in it."<sup>11</sup> According to this correlation, the key to Scripture lies at all times in the hands of God.

From Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* Gerhard takes over the distinction between internal and external clearness.<sup>12</sup> But apart from its disguisedness in general, Scripture contains both clear and obscure passages. It is perspicuous in so far as in it everything can be perceived which is necessary for salvation. Other matters are expressed more obscurely and hence are more difficult to understand.<sup>13</sup>

From Christopher Agricola, Gerhard adopts the distinction between elementary and more sublime matters, of mystic and terminological things.<sup>14</sup> "This continuing obscurity is absolutely necessary to remind us of the fact that in Scripture we deal with God, and it should move us to ardent prayer, incite our zeal, dispel our indolence, quicken our reverence for the divine truth, mortify our arrogance, and compel us to respect the pastoral office instituted by God."<sup>15</sup> The last viewpoint is of special importance to John Gerhard, for in its office of the interpretation and preaching of the Word the Church appears in its proper scope as the place where the miracle of the divine word is realized.<sup>16</sup> Again, the miracle manifests itself in the Church's Confessions, especially in the Apostles' Creed, which as the *regula fidei*, gleaned from the clearest

passages of Scripture,<sup>17</sup> must remain the norm of all exegesis. John Gerhard does not regard this as being in contradiction to the *sola Scriptura*. Scripture, interpreted according to the "rule of faith," is the judge of all theological controversies.<sup>18</sup> This does not mean to him any subordination of Scripture to the Confessions in the sense of Calixtus or Grundtvig. That conclusion was first drawn when theologians began to doubt the contents of Scripture. However, out of the discussion has come greater clarity with respect to the problems of exegesis, as, for example, the interpretation of allegory, typology, and others, which Gerhard endeavors to solve by lengthy and thorough investigations, and always with the proper stress on the literal sense, so greatly emphasized by the Reformers.<sup>19</sup>

Gerhard's attacks were directed in the main against Romanism. On the one hand, this specific orientation brings to view the problem of the authority of the Church, but at the same time it prevents him from going into detail on the question. Toward the close of orthodox theology, at the time of Hollaz (d. 1713), the situation had changed entirely. Whatever is written against Romanism now is stated by way of a conventional and comprehensive summary. Now the expositions are directed against the rising rationalism, as represented by Arminianism and Socinianism. As a result, the doctrine of the Church recedes, and that of the mystery comes to the fore. It might almost be taken as rationalism when Hollaz explains the words of Scripture as "so very perspicuous that they can easily be understood by a person who is docile, attentive, free from preconceived notions and prejudices . . . experienced."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the mere terminology might here, just as in Baier, deceive the reader concerning what the author really means, for behind the first three demands, especially behind the "freedom from preconceived notions," which is meant in a very real sense, there is concealed the prerequisite of a believing, humble audition and reception.

In addition, this unbroken perspicuity is related, not to the mysteries (*res*), but merely to the expressions (*verba*); for Hollaz continues: "We must distinguish between the perspicuity of the words and the intelligibility of the matters (*res*). The matters, most forcefully set forth in the Scriptures, are unintelligible, for they are mysteries, which can be known neither from the immediate terms in which they are comprehended, nor from other principles, which by

their very nature are intelligible."<sup>21</sup> Again, according to Hollaz, the perspicuity is gradual; it is greater in the New Testament than in the Old Testament, and also different. Above all, it is not absolute, but mediate, namely, in so far as it is dependent on the *regula fidei* of the Church. This mediate perspicuity is conditioned on "prayer, illumination, knowledge of the languages, attentive consideration of expressions, the scope, the antecedent and consequent contexts, and the elimination of preconceived notions."<sup>22</sup> How very existentially this is meant is patent from what follows: "... expulsion . . . of perverse emotions such as vainglory, envy, arrogance."<sup>23</sup> The disguisedness of Scripture demands of the interpreter the greatest aptitude and preparation. Nevertheless, all his efforts can amount to no more than to patient, confiding waiting for the miracle of illumination. As Gerhard at the beginning of the era of orthodox theology, so Hollaz at its conclusion declares the Holy Spirit to be the best and authentic interpreter of Scripture.

The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture, according to the ancient Lutheran theology, suggests three challenging questions for present-day theologians.

In the first place, does not every critical investigation, in particular, every elimination of a text as spurious or as a disturbing "interpolation," above all every argument from the viewpoint of the content, presuppose an absolute perspicuity, which, according to the classical doctrine of our Church, does not exist? Even a text that appears as "disturbing" or "magical" or "mythical," could it perhaps appear as such only for the reason that in a given case we deal with a mystery? or perhaps also, to mention just this, because preconceived notions are standing in the way?

In the second place, is the complete comprehension of a text ever a settled matter? Could not a text, because its interpretation is never final, teach the Church different things at various times? Is it perhaps true that only the whole Church of all lands and all times is able to grasp Scripture in its fullest sense? This question was never propounded by orthodox theology as a topic for discussion, but it follows as a result of its inquiries, especially those concerning the knowledge of the Bible's nature as a mystery.

The constant reference to the "Primary Author" and the totality of Scripture places all exegesis, ecclesiastical and secular, vis-à-vis



the question of principle: Is it properly the scope of exegesis to investigate what the author really meant at the time of the writing? Is it really possible to answer this, essentially psychological, question? Or should exegesis interpret the communicated thought, which perhaps was known to the writer at his time only in a very partial way, but can be recognized today much more lucidly since it has been clarified by its historic fulfillment? Is it, for example, of decisive importance whether a certain Psalm was intended to be Messianic or not, or is the real scope of interpretation the Israelitic hope for a king appointed to be typical of the King of Kings? For philological interpretation, for example, it might be less important to ask whether Virgil's fourth eclogue was conceived by him as messianic than whether or not there might be concealed in the figure or idea any compelling power to relate it to the mystery of the divine incarnation. Must the philologist interpret the "soul" of men in the past, or the *logos* that was dynamic in it? The expression "philology," which etymologically means "love for the word," might point very strongly in the direction of the latter.

### *The Sufficiency of Scripture*

The second of the attributes by which Lutheran orthodoxy endeavors to define the miracle of the divine Word is that of Biblical sufficiency. Some of the classic Lutheran dogmaticians, such as Gerhard and Quenstedt, identify this concept with that of perfection, while Hollaz subordinates sufficiency to perfection and so divides the concept of perfection into three parts. Scripture is perfect first with regard to the canon, for no inspired book which God designed for the continuous use by the Church has been lost. Again, Scripture is perfect with regard to its presentation: for the text contains no error, not even an error which crept in by mistake. Finally, Scripture is perfect with regard to its purpose, for it sets forth sufficiently all doctrines and moral precepts which men must know for their eternal salvation.<sup>24</sup> In my opinion the concept of perfection in this wider sense would include also infallibility and everything else that might be predicated of Scripture. It is therefore better to employ the more narrow concept sufficiency. Also at this point Lutheran theology writes from the viewpoint of its bi-frontal position (against Romanism and rationalism), which in the final analysis is only an expression of the balanced nature of truth.

The tendency against Rome which the concept expresses is obvious and may have been the primary determining factor when it was formulated. A more detailed discussion of this attribute is superfluous. But two emphases should be treated because of their informative value and importance.

The first is an explanation of the distinction made on the basis of John 16:12, the *locus classicus* of traditional theology. It runs like this: Here the Savior does not speak of new revelations, differing from those which He Himself has taught, but of the constantly deepening interpretation and the always increasing knowledge concerning the doctrine of Christ.<sup>25</sup> This means, in my opinion, that the understanding of the doctrine is always progressive and never completed. For this reason, the Church dare not receive any new doctrine,<sup>26</sup> but the old is always being newly given and so ever more thoroughly unfolded. The Church receives no new revelations, but it progresses in the understanding of those which she has once received. She grows, so to speak, in strata of interpretation like the layers of an ancient city.

The question whether the Church has authority to fix the canon apparently leaves only the alternatives, either, here as in general, to subordinate Scripture to the teaching function of the Church, or, as in modern Protestant theology, to refer the fixing of the canon to the area of the accidental. Hollaz offers a solution which avoids both errors: "The divine character of the canonical books is recognized by their power to change the hearts, communicated to them by the concurring Holy Spirit."<sup>27</sup> In the first place, this characterizes the respective decisions of the church councils as merely declaratory. In the second place, it represents the knowledge concerning the canonicity of Scripture as one specifically mediated by faith. Historical tradition may indeed support the genuineness of the Biblical books, but it constitutes an argument only of probability, not one of infallibility.<sup>28</sup> The same is true of the more recent results of Old and New Testament scientific research. In the same manner Hollaz evaluates the witness of the Church concerning the divine origin of Scripture in general. He writes: "We readily receive the testimony of the Church concerning the divinity of Scripture as a weighty argument, but not as absolute and final."<sup>29</sup>

Of like importance is the definition in the other direction against Calvinism, rationalism, and sectarianism, which fail properly to

emphasize the Confessions. Quenstedt here makes the distinction between relative and absolute perfection. He writes: "Scripture, which is perfect only in the first sense, does not contain all divine and supernatural things that might be known, but only those that are necessary for salvation."<sup>30</sup> In the same way, Hollaz characterizes the perfection of Scripture as "final",<sup>31</sup> while at the same time he distinguishes between articles of faith, including fundamental ones, which Scripture sets forth expressly and explicitly, and others, which it teaches only according to the sense, or essentially, or according to the matter and principle, though these may be derived from Scripture by easy, proximate, manifest, and necessary ratiocination.<sup>32</sup>

From this presentation the confession appears, especially for Hollaz with his bi-frontal position against rationalism and Romanism, as a weighty factor, as is also the matter of tradition. In the relative attitude in which this is possible from the viewpoint of the Reformation, Hollaz here accepts, essentially as do the older dogmatists, ritualistic historical, and witness-bearing traditions. Of the last he says: "Especially the witness-bearing traditions we regard highly, and with Chemnitz we renounce those who devise opinions not accepting witnesses at any time in the Church, as do Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists, and others."<sup>33</sup> The added illustrations of Servetus, Campanus, and the Anabaptist show that he supports such vital doctrines as those of the Trinity and Infant Baptism by the witness-bearing traditions. He declines to accept those doctrinal traditions which in Scripture are neither set forth in express words nor can be deduced from it by unanswerable conclusions and so be inserted.<sup>34</sup> The fact that he does not refer the doctrine of the Trinity to the doctrinal traditions in this special sense, proves that he has in mind only such dogmas as are not clearly taught in Scripture.

With that the demarcation against Biblicism is sufficiently defined, as is also at this point the balance of truth. Applied to our own time, the significance of this definition might be expressed in the following questions: Can the doctrine of the Church be deduced by an immediate exegesis from the New Testament? Is it in that case the function of dogmatics merely to systematize somewhat the results of exegetical study? Or must the faith of the Church orient itself — at least every five years — to the changing verdicts of such study? Should perhaps the Lutheran Church yield to the occasional

demands of Calvinistic rationalism to re-examine critically its doctrine concerning the Lord's Supper and exegetically to determine anew the meaning of the words of institution? Or, and only so may these absurd deductions be avoided, does the faith of the Church confront the changing results of scientific research with such timeless independence that it can never be corrected by it, though indeed it can receive from it a deepening and enriching? Is the confession of the Church, then, a reality by its own right, drawn from Scripture and yet confronting Scripture as a *regula fidei*? Sensing this fact most keenly, the advocates of orthodoxy have occasionally spoken of an inspiration of the Confessions, though they have carefully distinguished this kind of inspiration from that of Scripture.<sup>35</sup> A reference might be made here to the author's essay in the *Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* of February 15, 1951. The result of this study was indicated already at the beginning of this lecture, where we said: Scripture and Confession are correlated to each other as address and response. The divine truth tabernacles on earth only in this dialog, in which God through Scripture speaks to the Church and the Church answers the Lord's address with praise and adoration. This dialog is the genuine area of the truth upon earth to which the Church is restricted. She is therefore in the denominational milieu the place where the pure truth finds its realization. However, this is not always realized, but only divinely promised, and may even become a very dangerous prerogative.

To preserve the dialog equilibrium of Scripture and the Confessions surpasses all human possibilities and demands therefore at all times the actual miracle of the Church. Wherever the correlation is lost, there needs must appear again and again the two deviations exemplified by Romanism and Calvinism, that is to say, either the overemphasis of the confession, which in that case is misunderstood as an unprovable metaphysical premise and so is subject to doubt, or to Biblicism. In the latter instance the interpretation of Scripture is not a matter of the Church, but of the individual, who is bound to no rule of faith at all, and that ultimately means of reason. The result of the first is corruption of doctrine; that of the latter is the destruction of the authority of Scripture, and this for the obvious reason that with the repudiation of the rule of faith the unity of Scripture is lost and so also the

Word in the plentitude of words. Since in that case with the confession there is lost also the joyous adoration wrought by the Gospel, the Bible ultimately becomes a legal code and the Gospel a dogma or a prescribed doctrine, and both become an easy prey to criticism. In every exegesis that is not bound to the confession, from Socinus on to the present day, there occurs what we read in Luke 4:30: "He, passing through the midst of them, went His way."

The Lutheran principle concerning the confession thus appraises the question of truth involved in the Romanist principle of tradition and corrects its error. The grain of truth in this principle is that here the entire Church speaks, which alone has the call to interpret the Bible. The difference lies in one's orientation to the Word. In the first place, while the concept of tradition places the word of the Church parallel to the divine Word, the concept of Confession conceives it as an answer to the Word of God. Secondly, there is also the difference of preserving the distinction between the Word of God and that of man. Lastly, there is the difference of preserving the actual "address nature" of the divine Word and so that of the miraculous nature of the Church.

### *The Infallibility of Scripture*

The third property of Scripture is its infallibility, which takes us to the very core of modern theological discussion. The current problems concerning this doctrine were almost entirely unknown to Lutheran Orthodoxy. The infallibility of Scripture was the consensus of the Church irrespective of denominational affiliations until long after A. D. 1700. The sparse criticism advanced by Arminian, Socinian, and Cartesian objectors, and carefully catalogued by Hollaz, concerns hardly more than a few divergencies regarding Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.<sup>36</sup> Now, however, the situation has radically changed. After the major offensive of rationalism it was regarded ca. 1920 as self-evident that the records of Scripture are "first of all human documents adapted to the times of their composition," and that it is the special task of our enlightened generation to distill from these the basic transcendent truth. The fact that in this way the world got to hear just what it wanted to hear, namely, such things as were in conformity with our era's popular philosophy, or world view, was not at all regarded as objectionable, but rather as confirming the correctness of the approach.

Dialectic theology was the first to voice its objection to this procedure and to stress the truth, which had almost been forgotten, that the Word of God is to be heard in the Word of God. This is the great contribution of dialectical theology. The execution of this attempt, however, in my opinion was not successful. In his *Prolegomena* Barth makes it the task of theology "to harmonize the undeniably human fallibility of the Biblical records with the infallibility of the Word of God" (cf. p. 346). In his *Dogmatik* Barth develops the following paradox to the nth power: "According to their testimony, they (the sacred writers) could err in every word, and they actually *have erred in every word* (italics in the original), yet according to the same record of Scripture, justified and sanctified alone by grace, they have spoken by their very fallible, human word — the Word of God" (I, 2, p. 587). I must confess that I cannot follow Barth in this dialectic *saltomortale*. The process of his reasoning seems to be this: All human thinking and speaking as such is in every word defective and errant. It can be true only through justification and sanctification; for truth is beyond all words, just as far beyond as is the body of Christ above the consecrated host. This specifically Calvinistic thought is found in Barth's reasoning also in other places, as, for example, when he determines the relation of Christianity to ethnic religions as follows: "The Christian religion in its historic form, as a formulation of doctrine, life, and order can as such not be the one in which truth is inherent" (I, 2, p. 375). "True religion, Church, and Christianity are such *only* (italics in the original) because of the 'nevertheless' (paradox) of grace in the midst of absurdity, wrongness, and falsehood" (*ibid.*, p. 377). The Christian religion, according to Barth, is the area of truth only through divine creation (he means continued creation), forgiveness of sins, and sanctification (*ibid.*, p. 380ff.). In these expressions Lutheran theology can only see the extreme deduction of the *extra Calvinisticum* (God's operation outside the means of grace), and the principle that "the finite is not capable of the infinite," substantiates its fundamental relation to the doctrine of the bifurcate predestination. In contrast to Calvinism, Lutheran theology will emphasize the truth entrusted to her. The real presence of God in the host, conceived by trustful faith, discloses the view to the mystery of the incarnation which takes place everywhere in the Church, as, for example, in the liturgy,

the pastoral office, the dogma, its special concrete teachings, in the Bible, in its actual concrete words,<sup>87</sup> and finally also in the signs and wonders of which she witnesses. Lutheran theology therefore cannot follow the Barthian alternative; she must fight for the truth in the actual concrete Word with inescapable seriousness.<sup>88</sup>

The attempt made by dialectic theology to solve the problem, how Scripture is the Word of God, is frequently supported and illustrated by drawing a parallel between the human side of Scripture and the incarnation of God in Christ, in particular, with Christ's "form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). It is alleged that as Christ shared in every weakness of the flesh, so also the Apostles and the Prophets, in fact, the entire Bible. From this point of view every human element in Scripture, every error, every dependence on the prevalent world view of the respective period, which negative criticism pretends to find in the Bible is conceded without reservation. But is this line of reasoning correct? It would be if it were true that Christ's incarnation implied that He actually proclaimed errors and committed sins.

The parallel of the veiling of God in Christ and in the divine Word was first projected by Hamann,<sup>89</sup> and it is indeed a most suggestive thought, quite relevant to a solution of the problem of the human side of Scripture. To this end we must first inquire into the purport and essence of the Incarnation. It signified, apart from its soteriological purpose, which here does not come into consideration, the veiling of God, by which He appeared incognito. The fact that the Rabbi and Carpenter of Nazareth was at the same time God's Son could be known only by those who had experienced the miracle of divine illumination. Just so the truth in Scripture is deeply veiled, so very deeply indeed, that it can be known only by those whose eyes its Primary Author Himself has opened. That Scripture cannot be read "savingly" without the Holy Ghost, that in it not a single word can be spiritually understood without the actual divine miracle of illumination, is graphically demonstrated by the history of historical exegesis from Reimarus to Bultmann. At the same time this history is for all whose eyes are opened a striking proof of that which properly characterizes Scripture, namely, its divine inspiration. But its veiling is not tantamount to the supposition that Scripture contains errors.

Let us further orient ourselves to this fact by considering in

greater detail the veiling of God in Christ. In Jesus all Messianic prophecies were fulfilled, yet in such a way that no one could know this by his natural understanding. Who, for example, could recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the divine King of whom Psalm 72 speaks? Or who could see in Him the Prince of Peace predicted in Is. 9:6? Again, we ask: What was it that so consistently obscured the vision of the Jewish people that they finally could not do anything else than crucify Him whom they regarded as a Messianic pretender? Two factors come into consideration at this point: in the first place, the ossified later Jewish views concerning the Messiah, and that means the consistent attempt of men to compress God into the narrow scope of their own speculations and desires, which is a sin, indeed the sin of sins. As a second factor, however, we also must regard the terrific disguisedness of Old Testament prophecy itself, which in part appears to be so constituted that it seems to lead inescapably to misunderstanding. Both factors go back to the same source. Both signify that the veiling of God means divine judgment upon those that perish and divine grace upon the elect, so that here is the parting of ways.

However, wherein does the veiling of the prophetic predictions properly consist? Isaiah, Zechariah, and the Psalms do not predicate anything which in itself is wrong. They were overwhelmed by thoughts whose content, background, and consequences they could envision only to a very small extent. They and their contemporaries could perceive only the extreme frontal view of such terms as "king," "peace." All who clung to their external meaning and did not progress to their concealed content went astray. To this fact must be added the dialectic paradoxes by which truth is at times concealed, as for example, in the antithetical evaluation of the Temple ritual. The Bible is pervaded by a manifold dialectic, above all by the fundamental dialectic of Law and Gospel. To this must be added the constant change of situations, and so also of the scope of the divine address. Then, too, there must be considered here the utter lack of finality of all exegesis, for the Church is to understand Scripture progressively. Considering all this, the fateful fault, which barricaded the way of Jesus' contemporaries to Him, was that they read the Messianic prophecies in such a way as they were read centuries before His coming, but no longer then!

The incarnation of the Word in Scripture is of far greater sig-



nificance than is presupposed by those who constantly refer to the parallel of Christ's incarnation. It signifies the dialectic disguisedness of judgment and grace. It means that only God may dispose of the gift of truth, and that indeed at all times. It does not imply that the modern student of the Bible is superior to Scripture, but, on the contrary, that Scripture is so far superior to him as heaven is above the earth.<sup>40</sup>

Lutheran theology therefore dare not surrender the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture. It is not Scripture that stands accused before the bar of human judgment, but, on the contrary, man stands accused before the judgment seat of Scripture. It is not Scripture that waits for the absolving verdict of men, but vice versa. All critical objections are the necessary result of an attitude which views Scripture otherwise than from the polarity of Law and Gospel.

But how can the principle of this position be defended over against the two-hundred-year-old criticism and its battery of "established facts," from the Ptolemaic world view to the "ruminant" hare (Deut. 14:7)? Lutheran theologians at first were unaware of this problem; at the most they knew it only in its embryonic form. Nevertheless, we find a number of allusions to this problem which are of considerable importance.

In the first place, we refer once more to the concept of mediate perspicuity, which we have already treated. Every criticism and every doubt of Scripture stems from the notion of an absolute perspicuity, instinctively presupposed, because of the willful denial of the mystery of Scripture.

In the second place, it is worthy to note that orthodox theology also in later years declined to operate with a distinction between "real," "fundamental," or "personal" inspiration.<sup>41</sup> Lutheran theology did this, on the one hand, realizing that the fixing of boundaries at this point is arbitrary and that in this case men finally would hear only their own and their contemporaries' voice. But also with regard to particular Scripture statements man under condemnation cannot act as a judge. It is only when the individual expression stands with an absolutely fixed meaning that he really is bound to the Word. Lutheran theology thus seems to have surmised that if the process of reduction is once begun, there is no way to stop it.

Lutheran theology, however, refused to surrender its doctrine of

inspiration also for another reason. It was aware of the heinousness of false doctrine, something the moderns have lost. In the seventeenth century, error was not regarded as an ethically indifferent human inadequacy—a view which the moderns owe to positivism—but as a serious menace to humanity, coming from the "father of lies." The seventeenth century still knew something of "being constrained by truth" and of the moral implications of religious knowledge. It therefore recognized that both in the secular and in the ecclesiastical realm every error is blasphemy and soul-murder.

Lutheran orthodoxy—up to Hollaz and in positive theology far into the nineteenth century—sought the way out of this difficulty by harmonization. That this does not suffice to answer all questions which arise at this point is no longer a matter of doubt. Nevertheless, these endeavors are not without significance. They show that many Scripture statements which are said to be contradictory or offensive can be explained in some other way, and that it is finally a matter of attitude and prejudice which interpretation is chosen in a given case. In the final analysis most objections originate in the negative will of a person. It is, for example, accepted as quite axiomatic that when a historical assertion in Scripture deviates from extra-Biblical historical sources, the latter is obviously correct. But why? So also when Biblical and pagan texts or thoughts are similar to each other, then of course it is Scripture which borrowed from the pagan source. But why? Finally, the seriousness and zeal of our orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians in seeking satisfactory explanations of Biblical difficulties—though we may not always agree with their attempts at solution—supplies impressive proof how greatly they were concerned, not about the abstract truth itself behind the Biblical texts and facts, but rather about its concreteness, the proximity and presence of the truth, and the incarnation of the Holy. Even the letter of Scripture was sacred to them because they esteemed it as the bearer of the Holy. So, lastly, there lies in their seriousness and zeal a powerful expression of their faith in the "First Author" of the Bible, which no objection could shake.

The Augsburg Confession affords us an important suggestion when in its explanation of the Apostolic conjunction at the Jerusalem Council it declares: "For in this decree we must perpetually

consider what the aim of the Gospel is" — in this case to avoid offense.<sup>42</sup> It seems to me that here we have the key to explain whatever in Scripture may appear to us as contingent on time. Everything in Scripture has its *perpetua voluntas*, and so it is addressed also to us. The leading question in every interpretation must be: "What does the text say to us today?" It is only in this way that ours is the attitude of obedient hearing. Only those who feel themselves addressed by what Scripture says, be it either a demand of the Law or a gracious Gospel promise, are really listening to the Word of God. The question, for example, is not whether the Ptolemaic world view is correct or not, but what Scripture means to tell us by it, as, for example, that the world is finite and that man occupies a central position in the universe.

The laws of the Old Testament forbidding certain foods no doubt served the purpose of preventing the adoption of mythological concepts. In this way, for example, I could well explain what Scripture says of the hare that chews the cud. So considered, also the variant readings and similar matters become meaningful, for they might, for example, express the different aspects of a thought or unfold a thought in its dialectic meaning, as in the well-known variant in Rom. 5:1. Any exegesis which approaches Scripture guided by the leading question: "What does the text say to us today?" and not with the curiosity of a research student, but with joyous readiness to listen obediently, will hear everywhere in it the voice of God. And this all the more clearly, the more exegesis remains aware of the fact that there is no absolute perspicuity, that only divine grace can open our understanding, and probably will always unfold only a very small part of what lies veiled in the text.

This, however, does not mean that we should be indifferent to facts presented in the text. We have experienced whither the exclusive emphasis on the *kerygma* will lead. "The Word was made flesh"; and to the body of truth belongs the actual event. Only the actual occurrence attests the truth of the *kerygma*. Thus the factual event of the Resurrection distinguishes it definitely from the resurrection myths of the cult of Adonis and Osiris. The fact is always the bearer of the *kerygma* and its promises. But the fact is understood only when we consider it in the light of its meaning. Let me clarify this by a striking illustration. It would, for example, be

hardly helpful, when telling the story of Balaam's ass to a modern skeptic, merely to stress the bare fact. Only when we understand the meaning of the text will the fact stated prove itself as divine truth. This means that here as elsewhere the scope of the text concerns the polarity of Law and Gospel, as for example, that a person may sink lower than a beast, or that while an animal may indeed be vicious, a man may become God's inveterate enemy; or it may point indirectly to the deliverance of the creature according to Rom. 8:19.

But here the objection might be raised: "Will this not open the door to subjective arbitrariness?" Should the question not rather be: "What is written?" To these queries I reply as follows:

In the first place, when we deal with passages that are clear, both questions coincide with regard to their scope. But there are other kinds of passages, and, in addition, there are the variant readings. Then, too, many parts of the Bible have been understood in various ways at various times, as, for example, Canticles, a number of Psalms, and the Book of Daniel. It would certainly be unjustifiable presumption disdainfully to brush aside the medieval exposition of the Psalms. Who knows what depths of doctrine generations to come will not discover in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians or in St. John's Revelation?

In the second place, the *regula fidei* serves as a measure against misinterpretation. Whatever is in agreement with the Apostolic Confession, as also the Lutheran Confessions, can certainly not contradict Scripture in the totality of its teaching. Whether or not, or also how closely within this general scope, the meaning of certain passages has been fully reproduced, is, like all interpretation of Scripture, in the final analysis a matter of grace and prayer and cannot be known with finality, though it is accepted by faith. To sum up: The infallibility of Scripture manifests itself to the believing reader who approaches it with willingness to hear and to respond.

### *The Authority, Efficacy, and Perfection of Scripture*

There remains little to be said of the other properties which orthodox theology has classified among the Scriptural attributes. Also these, such as the authority, the efficacy, and the perfection

of Scripture, serve to define Lutheran doctrine in opposition to rationalism and Romanism. The proper scope of these concepts is to relate all teachings of Scripture to the plan of salvation. The understanding of divine truth is a work of grace and works salvation; hence it takes place only in the *ecclesia*, where the living Word of God is actuated. It is the error of both classes of opponents (Romanists and rationalists) that they know only one criterion of knowledge, and this is detached from the divine operation and also from man's existential reality as also from the totality of his existence.<sup>43</sup>

Lutheran orthodoxy regards the authority of Scripture as rooted in its efficacy.<sup>44</sup> The Latin expression *auctoritas*, in general, denotes much more than does our modern term "authority." *Auctoritas*, for example, does not have the legalistic connotation of "authority." It denotes etymologically the "authorship," the source of an operation, and so approximates the meaning of the Greek *exousia*. But to relate all things to the divine operation means, in the theology of the Reformers, to relate them to the divine events of salvation. For this reason the authority of Scripture is rooted in its functional character as a means of grace. All who have experienced the condemning and saving functions of Scripture in the sense of 2 Tim. 3:16 are convinced of its divine inspiration with an unshakable conviction that requires no proof.<sup>45</sup>

Just so also the perfection of Scripture is understood as its absolute completeness, "so that there are no articles of faith or moral precepts which a person on his way to eternal life must know or do that are not contained in it, be they either expressly stated in so many words or implied according to their sense with reference both to the matter and the meaning."<sup>46</sup> In this respect the perfection of Scripture coincides with its sufficiency. It not only excludes the co-ordination of Scripture and tradition, but it also means that if by any chance a hitherto unknown Epistle of St. Paul were to be discovered, it could be accepted only as apocryphal. This is true for the reason that only probable evidence could be offered for its genuineness, and no proof could be advanced that the Apostle in that case spoke officially as an "Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." But there is another and weightier reason, namely, that it is impossible that the Church should have been deprived in

the past of any doctrine necessary for salvation. Lastly also, there is the fact that the Church cannot receive anything new, but is only granted constant new understanding of the old truth.

Through this special application of the perfection of Scripture as a matter of belief and because of its urgency, Scriptural perfection applies to all particulars, such as the tradition of the text, its integrity, its intactness and completeness, and the like.<sup>47</sup> What Hollaz with apologetic detail here expounds, and that half a century before Reimarus, may not satisfy theologians today. But the underlying problem remains to this day and should incite us to new study of the first principle of exegesis. I believe that all problems at this point will find their solution when we learn anew from our orthodox dogmaticians the paramount lesson of viewing Scripture as a means of salvation and to study it with perfect willingness to hear and to respond. That means that in reading it, we always keep before us the "rule of faith" and have in mind the question: "What is it the text would tell us?"

To sum up: We might formulate the scope of the *autopistia* as follows: Scripture is full of the real presence of the Lord. It is His body, just as the consecrated bread is His body. It requires no proof, but only an obedient, adoring response, just as the real presence of the Lord in the bread and wine and in the Church is recognized only by those who believingly obey and offer thanksgiving. For this reason the ancient Confessions do not contain any doctrine of Scripture and its authority. It is the axiomatic presupposition and the foundation of all theology and can therefore not stand as a separate dogma beside the others. Only the Formula of Concord speaks expressly of the authority of Scripture, yet not as special *locus*, for that would make everything wrong from the outset, but merely by way of preface and in words which excellently express the meaning of the *autopistia*: "First, then, we receive and embrace with our whole heart the Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged."<sup>48</sup> The chief words in this statement, taken in their fullest significance, express all that the *autopistia* denotes: "We receive and embrace."

## REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES

1. For the following compare my book *Verborgene Wahrheit*, p. 130.
2. The objection might be raised that "inspiration" here denotes what psychology would call the invasion of the subconscious into the realm of the conscious. Against this thought, I believe that theology should exercise some caution over against the concept of the subconscious in its present extended application; for it signifies quite the same as what Scripture designates as "demons," or "spirits," and so renders it discernible as a trans-subjective reality. Therefore the inclusion of this sphere in the subconscious specifies this as a perilous de-dangerizing and so as a veiling of the human situation. It means, moreover, that the good and the evil within our ethical consciousness become unclothed and so an inadmissible limitation of man's responsibility. Is perhaps the psychological conception of man the final, most sublimated and cunning form of his objectivization?
3. Contradictory expressions before A. D. 1700 hardly number more than the digits of the hand. I might mention, for example, Agobard of Lyons in the 9th century, Abelard in the 12th, and later the Arminians.
4. Cp. Hollaz, *Examen Theologicum Acroamaticum*, Prol. III, 1741, p. 117.
5. John Gerhard writes: "Scripture itself and the Holy Spirit through Scripture most brilliantly witnesses concerning itself." And Quenstedt declares: "The final reason, by and because of which we believe with a divine and infallible trust that the Word of God is the Word of God, is the very intrinsic and effective power of the divine Word and the testimony and sealing of the Holy Spirit, who speaks in Scripture."
6. Cp. *Examen*, Prol. III, Qu. 30; p. 117 ff.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
8. *Ibid.*, III, p. 119.
9. Quoted from *Hutterus Redivivus*, Ed. 8; p. 112 Al.
10. *Loci* I, p. 58.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 54. Note 6; V, p. 12.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 88 f.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 112 ff.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
19. Solomon Glassius (d. 1656) treats these problems very thoroughly in his *Philologia Sacra*, which appeared in 1623. He distinguishes between the literal and the mystic sense; the latter again he divides into the typical sense, the allegorical sense (referring to a mystery, or a spiritual doctrine), and the parabolical sense.
20. *Prol.* III. Qu. 46 p. 160.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, Qu. 40, p. 185.
25. *Ibid.*, Qu. 30, p. 187.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
29. *Ibid.*, Qu. 51, p. 193.

30. *Systema* I, p. 102.
31. *Ibid.*, *Qu.* 50, p. 185.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 185 *sq.*
33. *Prol.* III. *Qu.* 51, p. 189f.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
35. *Ibid.*, *Qu.* 27, p. 60.
36. *Ibid.*, *Qu.* 18, p. 94ff.
37. Belief in the incarnation is the proper Lutheran motivation of the doctrine of inspiration. The Reformed motivation is the evaluation of the Bible as the absolute and binding legal code.
38. Also the well-meant attempt of Karl Girgensohn in his work "The Inspiration of Holy Scripture (2d ed., 1926), with its sharp distinction of the "verbal inspiration" and "pneumatic inspiration," in my opinion, does not get us anywhere. "The Bible is fallible in all that is human" (p. 64), while in the 'pneumatic' area it is infallible (p. 66). But who can apply this distinction?
39. "It belongs to the unity of divine revelation that the Spirit of God humiliates Himself and divests Himself of His divine majesty through the human pen of the human writers just as did the Son of God through the form of a servant and as the entire creation is a work of the greatest divine humility." From this *kenosis* and veiling, however, Hamann in no wise draws the conclusion that there are human errors in Scripture. On the contrary, the veiling lies in the language as such. From this point of view the veiling appears to us in its whole twilight obscurity. It is the "mother of reason and revelation, its Alpha and Omega. It is the two-edged sword for truth and falsehood." It is the "ghost" behind which pure truth conceals itself. Hamann thus has in mind not the dialectic of the Biblical language *per se*.
40. This perhaps does away with the second rationalistic argument, namely, the offense given by the "human weakness of Scripture." Those who reject the mystery of Christ's incarnation will fail to accept also the incarnation of God in the Word.
41. *Systema*, I, 241.
42. Art. XVIII, 66.
43. So far as the relation of the authority of Scripture and the Church is concerned, it was the concern of the Reformers not to solve the involved correlation, but rather to replace the Romanistic, juridical concept of the Church with one that is charismatic and brings to light the Biblical and early Christian concept of the Church as the arena of the mighty salvation deeds of God and the epitome of all miracles. At this point the objective of the Reformers was recognized by Heidegger, especially in his critical review of pre-Socratic philosophy.
44. Hollaz, *Prol.* III. *Qu.* 33, p. 130.
45. Gerhard, *Loci* I, p. 15f.
46. Hollaz, *Prol.* III. *Qu.* 50, p. 185.
47. Cp. Hollaz, *Prol.* III. *Qu.* 41, p. 143ff. To what degree this question was regarded as a fundamental matter, and answered from the most weighty point of view, is shown by a statement such as this: "That the Greek text of the New Testament was not corrupted by any treachery of heretics, appears from the fact that the Church is perpetually founded upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, and just as the foundation is firm and immovable, so also is the Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15).
48. *Formula Concordiae*. Sol. Decl., 3 *Triglotta*, p. 851.