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Ein Prediger muss nicht allein weiden, also dass er die Schafe unterweise, wie sie rechte Christen sollen sein, sondern auch daneben den Wölfen wehren, dass sie die Schafe nicht angreifen und mit falscher Lehre verfuehren und Irrtum einfuehren.

Luther

Es ist kein Ding, das die Leute mehr bei der Kirche behaelt denn die gute Predigt. — *Apologie*, Art. 24

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? — 1 Cor. 14:8

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The Right and Wrong of Private Judgment

(Conclusion)

"O ye theologians, what are you doing? Think ye that it is a trifling matter when the sublime Majesty forbids you to teach things that do not proceed from the mouth of the Lord and are something else than God's Word? It is not a thresher or herdsman who is here speaking" (Luther XIX:821). When men prefer those things that originate in their own minds to those that proceed out of the mouth of the Lord, they are doing an evil thing. We shall discuss this matter under four heads.

1. *Mén who set their private judgment over God's Revelation commit the crime of lese majesty.* "Where God has spoken, the right of private judgment ceases. 2 Cor. 10:5; Deut. 4:2; 2 Cor. 2:17." (E. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p.1.) In His holy temple God alone may speak; He alone can reveal the divine truths; let no man presume to speak for Him. And when the Lord has spoken, let all men keep silence before Him; let no man presume to criticize His Word. When the sublime Majesty proclaims: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord!" (Jer. 22:29), shall the people say: Let us hear, Lord, what Thou sayest, and we shall decide how much of it can be accepted by us? God demands of us unquestioning acceptance of His Word; and they who question the veracity of Scripture and the fitness of its teachings commit the *crimen laesae maiestatis divinae*. Men are treating the King of Kings with disrespect when they want His proclamations issued as "subject to the approval of my subjects." The proper respect of our Lord and God inspires words like these: "God's Word will not stand trifling. If you cannot understand it, uncover your head before it. Es ist mit Gottes Wort nicht zu

scherzen. Kannst du es nicht verstehen, so zeuch den Hut vor ihm ab. Es leidet keinen Schimpf, noch keine menschliche Deutung, sondern es ist lauter Ernst und will geehrt und verhalten sein. Derhalben huete dich beileibe, dass du nicht mit deinem Duenkel drein fallest" (Luther VI:873). Do they honor God who feel free to criticize Scripture and even to ridicule some of its statements? They are treating God like a cowherd.

God declares that His Word is perfect (Ps. 19:7), and when men ridicule "a religion of authority which assumes that God must reveal Himself to us in a way which admits of no possible mistake" (Strachan), they commit lese majesty. They doubt the truth of God's own declaration. They claim the right to disregard His instructions at their pleasure.

The Lord has established Holy Scripture as the sole authority in religion. "To the Law and to the Testimony!" (Is. 8:20.) There is no appeal from Scripture to a higher court. This is the fundamental law in the Christian land. Luther bowed to this law. "In Holy Scripture we must find the judgment as to whether a certain teaching is right or wrong. . . . When you have a decision of Scripture, you need not look for any further decision" (III:593). Walther bowed to this law. "When we have found what Scripture teaches on any point, we must say: Now the matter is settled; I shall not listen when men start their 'but's' and 'however's'; for me the discussion is closed. Holy Scripture is the Alpha and Omega of all saving truth. There is no appeal from Scripture to a higher court" (*Proceedings Synodical Conference*, 1884, p. 49). And when men set out to establish a higher court and declare that "the community of believers is the ultimate authority, its moral and religious consciousness the last appeal" (Ladd), that "the final appeal is made to the Christian consciousness," not to a book "mechanically inspired" (Delk), that "faith and its testimony is the ultimate court of appeal" (Leckie), they are nullifying the Constitution of the Christian land. They are guilty of high treason.

"The doctrine of the virgin birth is Biblical." Our reverence and fear of the divine Majesty, who wrote the Bible, keeps us from casting doubt upon this Biblical doctrine. But there are men who, after declaring that "the doctrine of the virgin birth is Biblical" (see preceding article), proceed to inveigh against it, declaring that it cannot stand before the bar of their private judgment. Is that a *crimen laesae maiestatis divinae* or not?

It was the archrebel who said: "Yea, hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1.) He it is who instigates men to bring any statement of Scripture before the bar of their private judgment and to say: Yea, is this and that word of Scripture indeed the word of God?—Proclaiming *this* right of private judgment is stirring up rebellion

in the Christian land against the Sovereign Lord.⁴⁰⁾ It would depose the Lord and place—man upon the throne. These men are claiming an authority which belongs to the Lord alone. If we assume the right to judge Scripture, “we are necessarily claiming for ourselves the divine authority which we deny to Scripture. . . . In the Church human opinion is placed in the seat of authority” (Pieper, *Christliche Dogmatik*, I, p. 68).⁴¹⁾ Do the moderns indeed

40) Men may deny that in judging Scripture they are committing the high crime of judging God, because in their judgment Scripture is not the Word of God. We shall have to repeat what we said before this: in denying or doubting that Scripture is God's own Word they are denying or doubting the truth of God's own declaration, God's declaration that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The further plea that one cannot know that it is God's voice unless the matter has been submitted to some scientific or moral test cannot avail them. The proof that in any given instance God is speaking is the fact of His speaking. When God spoke to Adam, Adam did not say: How can I know that it is the Lord speaking? When He appeared to Moses, Moses did not ask the Lord to identify Himself. God is His own witness. And when men plead that before they can accept God's witness that the Holy Bible is His Word they must apply certain tests to that witness, they convict themselves of the *crimen laesae maiestatis divinae*; they ask God to get some creature to vouch for Him.

Another matter: every false teacher subjects Scripture to his private judgment and virtually sets himself above God. There are those among the errorists who sincerely and heartily abominate the wicked claim that Scripture occasionally errs and needs to be set right by men. But in order to justify their false teaching, they change the meaning of the pertinent Scripture texts and make them express their private ideas. The procedure is thus described by Luther: “Scripture is made to conform to their opinion and understanding and must submit to being bent and fitted to their notions.” (The entire passage reads: “Es ist ein schluepfrig Ding um die Ketzter, man kann sie schwerlich halten, und sind leichtfertig in goettlicher Schrift zu handeln. Das macht alles, dass sie ihr Gutduenkel in die Schrift tragen, und die Schrift muss sich nach ihrem Kopf und Verstande richten, beugen und lenken lassen. . . . Es ist mit Gottes Wort nicht zu scherzen. Kannst du es nicht verstehen, so zeuch den Hut vor ihm ab.” VI:872 f.) But this is a species of the wrong use of private judgment. These men say: Scripture cannot, in our judgment, mean what the plain words say. But that is making man the judge of Scripture. It is a *crimen laesae maiestatis divinae*. It is telling God that He cannot express Himself clearly. And it is tampering with the sacrosanct words of the Sublime Majesty.

41) The entire statement reads: “Here it is *aut*—*aut*. Either we receive the Scripture as the very Word of God, and, taking our doctrine from Scripture, the sole source and norm of theology, teach *doctrinam divinam*, or we deny that Scripture is the infallible Word of God, distinguish in it between truth and error, and teach out of our own ego ‘the visions of our own heart.’ The divine authority which we deny to Scripture we are necessarily claiming for ourselves, our own human mind. We are adrift on the sea of subjectivism. In the Church human opinion is placed in the seat of authority. Our theology is no longer theocentric. It has become anthropocentric. . . . When modern theologians designate the use of Scripture as source and norm of the Christian doctrine as ‘intellectualism,’ as ‘letter-worship,’ etc., and speak of a ‘paper Pope,’ and make instead of Scripture the ‘experience’ of the theologian the source and norm of the Christian doctrine, their aim is—consciously or unconsciously or semiconsciously—to establish in God's Church the

make man the authority in religion, his authority overruling that of Scripture? They say so themselves. Schleiermacher demands that "the religious consciousness retain its autonomy" and remain "the controlling principle." (See preceding article.) R. H. Strachan declares for "the autonomy of the individual personality" (*The Authority of Christian Experience*, p.19). John Oman says: "Christ's appeal was never in the last resort to Scripture, but to the hearts of living men. . . . He encourages His disciples to rise above the rule of authorities and to investigate till each is his own authority" (*Vision and Authority*, pp.103,188). And D. E. Adams, a Congregationalist minister, wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1926: "The final basis of religious authority for you is yourself, your mind working on all that has come down in the religious tradition of Christianity, and selecting and making your own those things which satisfy the requirements of your intelligence, of your moral judgment, of your spiritual hunger. . . . The basis of religious society is shifting from the Bible to the individual. . . . We have come to the point where each man must decide for himself, in the light of his own best knowledge and experience, what there is in that Book, what there is in the Church, what there is in the Christian faith, that is valid for him, in the light of science, in the light of his own best moral judgment, in the light of that little spark of the divine which God has lighted in his soul." (See C. G. Trumbull, *Prophecy's Light on Today*, p. 92.) Walther was certainly not misrepresenting these men when he said: "The Bible is nearly everywhere treated like the fables of Aesop. When you begin later to compare the old with the modern theologians, you will see that I have not exaggerated. Science has been placed on the throne, and theology is made to sit at its feet and await the orders of philosophy" (*Law and Gospel*, p. 235). The moderns are indeed making man and his religious notions the final authority, whose approval Scripture must await before it can become authoritative.

But since God has invested Scripture with His own authority, these men are committing lese majesty. They are setting themselves above God. "Abgoettischer, verleugneter Christ" is the

product of their own spirit as the supreme authority. The divine authority that they deny to Scripture is actually granted to the ego of the theologians. What Luther said of the Pope and his discrediting of Scripture applies here, too: "They are saying this thing only to lead us away from Scripture and to make themselves our masters, in order that we might believe their dream sermons" (V:334 f).—A remark by the way: When the moderns use the disparaging term "paper Pope," they indicate that they will submit to no kind of pope. That is fine. But let them ponder what Luther somewhere said: "I am more afraid of my own heart than of the Pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope—Self."

term Luther applies in this connection (XVII:2213). E. Brunner describes the situation thus: "The modern man wants to have a God; but he wants a God who speaks to him privately and who speaks to him not from without but only from within, so that it is possible to identify God and self. He does not want God as authority but as immanent principle, a God who is the same as the innermost depths of the ego. That is the reason why the Bible is so much disliked. . . . The real breakdown of Biblical faith in our modern time is not caused by science, but by modern philosophy; by the fact that the modern man does not want to acknowledge any authority outside of himself" (*The Word and The World*, pp. 91, 105). The situation calls for the sharp language Dr. Pieper uses: "Accordingly modern theology regards as imperative the flight out of Scripture into the 'pious self-consciousness of the theologizing subject.' Final result: all theologians who practice theology in this manner have actually become as God, yes, *superior* to God, for they even know what of God's Word is good and what is evil. It is of a piece with what happened when Satan practiced his first deception" (*op. cit.*, I, p. 663).

A word on the pride and presumption of the spirit which dares to exercise authority over Scripture. It is a small matter that these men look with contempt on the old theologians who were content to sit as catechumens and pupils at the feet of the Prophets and Apostles; in those days, they say, theology was in its infancy — we have attained the stature of "full-grown men." (See preceding article.) But it is not a small matter when men pretend to a better knowledge of secular and religious matters than Jesus had.⁴²⁾

42) R. H. Strachan: "The demand even for an infallible Christ, in the sense that He reveals to us a special body of truth beyond the reach of inquiry or intellectual reconstruction . . . is simply to deny that the idea of evolution is applicable to the Christian faith. It is to deny the right of free enquiry" (*op. cit.*, p. 199). Edwin Lewis: "The apocalyptic view of things, which became so important a part of late Jewish and early Christian thought, involves both an angelology and a demonology. . . . Jesus Himself accepted this view along with His acceptance of much else of the thought of his time" (*A New Heaven and a New Earth*, p. 91 f.). H. E. Fosdick: "The Master never faced in His own experience a national problem such as Belgium met when the Prussians crossed the border. . . . The fact is that Jesus did not directly face our modern question about war; they were not His problems, and to press a legalistic interpretation of special texts as though they were, is a misuse of the Gospel." (Quoted in *The Christian Century*, Dec. 6, 1936.) A. C. Knudson, in *The Principles of Christian Ethics*, p. 158: "Jesus shared the apocalyptic hope of His day, and in not a few instances His moral judgment was no doubt colored by this fact. . . . He spoke and acted as a man of His own day, and this makes it impossible for us to accept either His teaching or His example as an infallible guide in dealing with the concrete problems of our time." C. H. Dodd: "We need not doubt that Jesus as He is represented shared the views of His contemporaries regarding the authorship of books in the Old Testament or the phenomena of demon possession — views which we could not accept without violence to our

It is not a small matter when they boast that they can produce a better Bible than Jesus gave us through His Prophets and Apostles. It is Luciferian pride when men say that "the word of Revelation" is acceptable only after it has passed "the test of the common religious conscience" and that "when we obey this word, we are obeying *our own higher selves*" (J. H. Leckie, *Authority in Religion*, pp.127,131). When men refuse to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ and consent not to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is because they are puffed up with the self-conceit of Satan (2 Cor.10:5; 11:3; 1 Tim.6:3 f.). Speaking of "the enthusiasts, *i. e.*, spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word and explain and stretch it at their pleasure," the Smalcald Articles say: "All this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit" (*Triglotta*, p.495).⁴³ I. M. Haldeman describes the Luciferian self-conceit thus: "Modernism teaches that the Bible is a framework of shifting thought forms. . . . Here and there in the book are evidences, not that the truth came down from God to man, but that man awoke to the truth in himself. . . . To think of confining a man to a book of unequal values as the only source of contact with, and knowledge of, God is too childish a concept for the twentieth century. The truth is (according to Modernism) man of today has altogether outgrown the Bible. It may have done for the infant state of the human mind, but to put the rising generation under its clamps and chains would be to restrict the mental growth of the human race, shrivel the future page of history to the record of pigmies and a backward

sense of truth" (*The Authority of the Bible*, p.237). Fr.Baumgaertel: "We know more concerning the origin of the Scriptures of Israel than the Jewish scribes and Jesus, who got the knowledge of these matters from them." (See *Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung*, Nov. 12, 1926.) — "We are impressed with the fact," the *Watchman-Examiner* would say (see preceding article), that the attitude of these men is "never that of humility"; they dare to assume the "pontifical" attitude even towards Jesus.

43) H.Sasse: "Schleiermacher: 'Every sacred Scripture is but a mausoleum of religion. . . . He does not have religion who believes in a sacred Scripture, but rather he who does not need one and could make one if he so desired.' This whole religion of modern culture (which already existed at that time in the form of the 'Enthusiasts') is rejected in the Augsburg Confession. Luther himself, in his own inimitable fashion, made the rejection even clearer. It sounds as if he had Schleiermacher's *Speeches* and all the textbooks of the philosophy of religion which have appeared since then, together with the greater part of recent German 'evangelical' theology, in mind when he wrote these words in the Smalcald Articles: 'All this is the old devil and old serpent, etc. . . . Whatever without the Word and Sacraments is extolled as Spirit is the devil himself.'" (*Here We Stand*, p.46).

sweep of all the higher possibilities that lie in man. . . . If the Bible be accepted at all, it can be only as it comes under and responds to the imperial consciousness and experience in man" (*A King's Penknife*, p. 107 ff.). And James Bannerman sizes these men up correctly when he says: "The modern theologian comes to the Bible and sits over its contents in the attitude of a judge who is to decide for himself what in it is true and worthy to be believed and what is false and deserving to be corrected; not in the attitude of the disciple, who, within the limits of the inspired record, feels himself at Jesus' feet to receive every word that cometh out of His mouth. The assurance that the Bible is the Word of God, and not simply containing it in more or less of its human language, is one fitted to solemnize the soul with a holy fear and a devout submission to its declarations as the very utterances of God. The assurance, on the contrary, that the truths of revelation are mingled, in a manner unknown and indeterminate, with the defects of the record, is one which reverses the attitude and brings man as a master to sit in judgment on the Bible as summoned to his bar and bound to render up to him a confession of its errors and not a declaration of its one and authoritative truth." (See B. Manly, *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, p. 16.)⁴⁴⁾

44) It might be well to emphasize once more that the bar to which these men summon Scripture is the bar of their reason. Many of them say so in so many words. Thus F. C. Grant: "The Christian religion does not require anyone to go contrary to his own experience, i. e., not contrary to what in popular language is called 'reason,' or the conclusions we draw, the outlook we derive, from our experience. This has ever been God's way with man; else what was 'reason' for, which God implanted in us as a guide through the mazes of conflicting sense impressions and of opinions? . . . The argument: 'Holy Scripture is the infallible record of divine Revelation' is antiquated" (*The Living Church*, Nov. 11, 1933). O. L. Joseph: "If we are to escape the pitfalls of barren intellectualism and of prostrated emotionalism, we must recognize that reason and faith are the twin guides to truth. . . . The only course is to appeal to the testimony of evidence and to abide by a verdict that is approved by reason, conscience, and experience" (*Ringing Realities*, pp. 91, 216). A. C. Knudson: There are four sources of the Christian belief: "The Bible, the Church, natural reason, and Christian experience" (*The Doctrine of God*, pp. 175, 187). And when W. T. Manning says: "The Anglican Churches stand firmly for the essential principles for which Protestantism has borne its witness, individual responsibility, the right and duty of private judgment, the rights of reason, and the supreme authority of truth" (*The Reunion of Christendom*, p. 220), he would have us form our judgment in consultation with "reason." Others, again, do not mention "reason" in this connection, but make "the Christian consciousness" the judge of Scripture. However, any thinking of man which is not created and guided by Scripture is swayed and directed by natural reason. Dr. S. G. Craig well says: "By Christian consciousness is meant that we cannot be under obligation to accept anything in religion that is not real to this high tribunal, before which all cases in question must be brought. . . . Those who insist that the Christian consciousness, which is another phrase for the human reason, is the final court, do not seem to see that this is *venerated rationalism*, pure and

Here are "the very utterances of God"! And in Satanic impudence and self-conceit men treat them like the fables of Aesop, treat them as though a swineherd had spoken them.

What about the claim that the sacred gift of Christian liberty gives men the right to sit in judgment on Scripture? The moderns call upon men to break the shackles of the absolute authority of Holy Scripture, of "the doctrine of Bible Inerrancy and Plenary Inspiration . . . which exacts the submission of a slave" (J. H. Leckie; see preceding article). J. Oman will not "have doctrines drawn from Holy Writ like legal decisions from the Statute Book," for "this enslaving authority over man's mind and will Christ ever shunned" (*op. cit.*, pp. 126, 182). R. H. Strachan wants to rid the Church of "the slave mentality" which is produced by the idea of an "infallible Book" and declares: "The authority of which we are in quest clearly must be an authority which does not destroy our personal freedom" (*op. cit.*, pp. 16, 19). F. T. Woods will accept "the Bible as the rule of faith," as one of "the essentials of Protestantism," but insists also on these other essentials: "The right of private judgment within reasonable limits and freedom for Christian thought and inquiry." (See *The Reunion of Christendom*, p. 119.) And M. G. G. Sherer puts it into very strong language: "Christian liberty knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the shell and the content, between the chaff and the wheat, between the letter and the spirit. . . . Christian liberty does not fall into the sin of bibliolatry" (*Christian Liberty and Christian Unity*, p. 81). In the sacred name of Christian liberty these men inveigh against the "constraint of the free spirit of investigation." With Harnack they laud Luther who "protested against the authority of the letter of the Bible . . . who was free from every sort of bondage to the letter" (*What Is Chris-*

simple, and so must ultimately lead to the same goal" (*The Presbyterian*, Oct. 11, 1928). Dr. Pieper passes the same judgment: "When modern theologians make the 'regenerate ego' the principle of Christian knowledge and at the same time refuse to accept Scripture as the Word of God and the sole source and norm of theology, they are in reality placing the *natural* ego of man, the flesh, upon the seat of authority in the Church. It is plain, common *rationalism* masquerading as Christianity" (*op. cit.*, I, p. 242). "The man who appeals to conscience alone is in reality appealing to human reason" (*The Pastor's Monthly*, 1935, January, p. 42).

And now what inspires this rationalistic attitude? B. Manly: "It ministers to the pride of reason" (*op. cit.*, p. 16). Rationalism, in any of its forms, is the incarnation of the Luciferian pride. Hear the old rationalist Loeffler: "Our reason is manifestly God in us!" Hear President McGiffert of Union Theological Seminary: "Christ is essentially no more divine than we are!" (See C. G. Trumbull, *op. cit.*, p. 89.) And all rationalists pay—either consciously or unconsciously or semiconsciously—the same tribute to reason. It is "the proud, supercilious reason (hoffaertige ueberwitzige Vernunft)," "Satan's paramour" (Luther, X:1007; XX:232), that entices men to set their private judgment above the judgment of Scripture.

tianity? pp. 298, 312), and take up the campaign song of the old rationalists: "Hoert, ihr Herren, und lasst Euch sagen! Der Geist ist nicht mehr in Fesseln geschlagen. Gedenket an Luther, den Ehrenmann, der solche Freiheit Euch wiedergewann" (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung*, 19. Sept. 1930).

Is that Christian liberty? Did Christ die on the cross to gain for us the liberty to deal with His Bible as with a human book? Does Christ who said: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) give us "the liberty which knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the chaff and the wheat"? Do not attempt to hide the high crime of violating Christ's holy Book behind the holy name of Christian liberty.

True, God would have men enjoy religious liberty. The State is doing the right thing when it grants liberty of conscience, permitting the citizens to think and teach what they please on religious questions. God would have men jealously guard this right. Voltaire took the right position when he said: "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it." And on this point Luther is in hearty accord with Voltaire. "The civil government does not undertake to govern men's consciences; it deals only with temporal goods" (XIX:823). "Still I should not like to have them [the heavenly prophets] put in prison. . . . See also that our prince does not stain his hands with the blood of these new prophets." (XV:2606). "Secular magistrates must not interpose any prohibition as to what anyone wishes to teach or believe, be it Gospel or falsehood; it is enough that they forbid the teaching of revolt and disturbances" (XVI:50). But will any man argue that because the State grants—and should grant—liberty of conscience, God, too, has no authority over the conscience, but must grant men the right to accept and reject as much of the Bible as they choose? What is a virtue in the State becomes a crime when practiced in the Church.

But if God wants the State to respect the conscience and safeguard the rights of free men, will He Himself force the conscience and exact from His sons the obedience of slaves? The moderns say that God would not do that. And we say the same. The moderns make much of "personal freedom." So do we. So does God. Therefore God restores in His children the personal freedom that was lost through the Fall. When the moderns say that men who recognize the absolute authority of Scripture and feel bound by every word of it cannot enjoy personal freedom, they do not know the mind of the man who has come under the benign influence of the Word. The Word has won his heart, and he gives his joyous assent to it. At first he rebelled against the Word, but God changed the unwilling heart into a willing heart,

and he obeys the Word willingly, freely, gladly.⁴⁵⁾ When Scripture has convinced a man that it is God's Word, he no longer asks: Must I accept these statements? Hearing God speak in Scripture, his heart leaps for joy, and he treasures every single Scripture declaration. The word: "I am bound. I cannot escape it. The text stands there too mightily" (Luther XV:2050) is not the enforced acquiescence of a cringing slave, but the glad testimony of the child who loves and reveres his heavenly Father. Samuel's declaration: "Speak, for Thy servant heareth," was not exacted by force and compulsion, but expressed the fullest personal freedom. Here is Christian liberty! The "servants," "bond servants," "slaves" of God are God's freedmen, who have broken the dominion of their self-willed, rebellious flesh and its antagonism to God's Word; who have acquired the faculty of thinking divine thoughts and thank God that He has revealed His glorious thoughts to them in Holy Scripture; and who gladly make God's thoughts and words their own.⁴⁶⁾ Strachan wants an "authority which does not destroy our personal freedom," which leaves men free to accept as much of Scripture as they please. We thank God that in Holy Scripture He has given us an authority which restores our personal freedom.

What, then, about the claim that the sacred right of liberty

45) Pieper: "God indeed demands that man subject his intellect and will to God, but God brings this about by *illuminating*, through the power of the Holy Ghost in His Word, the intellect and so *changing* the will of man that from being unwilling he becomes willing (*ex nolente volens*)." "The advocates of Verbal Inspiration do not set up Scripture as a 'paper Pope,' demanding external subjection without inner conviction, but Scripture is to them a book which—just because it is God's own Word—itself works faith and *eo ipso* willing and joyous acceptance through the operation of the Holy Spirit inherent in it (*op. cit.*, I, p. 365; III, p. 83).

46) The moderns like to say that those who are bound by the Word of God do not do any thinking. *The Christian Century*, Feb. 22, 1933, makes this nasty slur: "A statement sent out by the Methodist board of education says that in the future the topics for use in the Epworth League—the Methodist young people's society—will not seek to raise questions but to give 'affirmations of faith with an increased biblical emphasis.' Of course, what this means in plain words is that the Methodists want to accustom their young people to swallowing without question what is handed out to them in the way of religious instruction. . . . Albert Schweitzer has a great passage in his new autobiography in which he says that the sin which lies at the basis of the disintegration of modern life is the sin of refusing to think; that civilization is being destroyed by the pressure to make all minds alike. It is evidently a lucky thing for Schweitzer that he is not trying to present his views to the Methodist young people's board of education." The truth of the matter is, of course, that the only worth-while thinking is being done by those who think God's thoughts after Him. The young people who study 2 Tim. 3:16 do a lot of thinking. They are kept busy suppressing the evil thoughts that this passage cannot be God's Word and, having grasped the truth that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, their hearts are leaping with thoughts of wonderment and thanksgiving.

gives men the right to sit in judgment on Scripture? It is the voice of rebellion against God. It asks men to free themselves of the delusion that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It sounds the slogan: All Scripture is subject to man's private judgment! And it is not only the agnostic Ingersoll who claimed the right to sit in judgment on Scripture. He said: "It is a question, first, of intellectual liberty and, after that, a question to be settled at the bar of human reason" (*Lectures*, p. 382). And now leaders in the Christian Church are saying the same thing! And it is not only the Modernist H. E. Fosdick who rails at "the naive acceptance of the Bible as of equal credibility in all its parts because mechanically inerrant" (*The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 273; see also pp. 30, 236). Conservative theologians speak the same language: "Christian liberty knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the chaff and the wheat."

A Church that assumes the right to judge Holy Scripture is in rebellion against the Lord of the Church. "A congregation which refuses to submit to the clear statements of Holy Scripture is a synagog of Satan, Rev. 3:9" (Walther, *Rechte Gestalt*, § 16).

2. *The exercise of the illegitimate right of private judgment is productive of false teaching.* This principle is the fecund mother of a great brood of heresies. In fact, every heresy and every doctrinal aberration, be it great or small, is the direct result of man's placing his private judgment above Scripture. "This is the beginning, middle, and end of all errors: men forsake the simple words of God; they feel that reason must have her say in the divine mysteries and set matters aright; just as Paul says of Eve, 2 Cor. 11:3, that Satan led her from the simplicity of God's Word into his subtlety" (Luther, XIX:1390). It cannot be otherwise; only when men continue in the words of Jesus shall they have the knowledge of the truth, John 8:31 f.; as soon as men follow their own thoughts, they fall into error. "Every human thought of divine things is an error" (Luther, XIX:1298). In every case that a man has changed Scripture to suit his own ideas he has produced a wicked error. And he will not stop at one error. If he has the right to modify one teaching of Scripture, what is to prevent him from casting overboard all of its teachings, including the very fundamentals of Christianity? Where did Ritschl stop after he had granted himself the right of "free investigation"? O. L. Joseph pronounces "the verdict approved by reason, conscience, and experience" that Jesus was a mere man ("The Jewish Christians elevated Jesus to the rank of equality with God, without in the least feeling that they weakened the unity of the divine personality. The Gentile Christians were nurtured in pagan polytheism, but with a new emphasis they exalted Jesus to the highest

position of deity. . . . Prayers were more frequently offered to Him than to God.") and that His work was "to focus attention on the culture of character and the performance of duty" (*op. cit.*, pp. 216, 174). The statement of the Episcopalian B. I. Bell that "it is a fundamental, indeed the basic, principle of Protestantism [as distinguished from Anglicanism] that each individual Christian's own soul is the first, last, and sufficient guide and authoritative judge about truth or falsity, wisdom or lack of wisdom, in matters of faith and morals" (see preceding article), continues: "It is true that at the time of the Reformation this principle of Protestantism did not at once appear in full flower. . . . So it went on, until nowadays every clear-thinking Protestant understands that he individually can and ought to follow his own inner spirit, accepting only those things as true and binding which happen to appeal to him. And so, in the year 1933, no less a person than the Rev. Dr. Carl S. Patton, moderator of the Congregational National Council, can say, and did say, as a matter of course, in an address delivered at the 125th anniversary of the foundation of Andover Seminary, that there are only two planks left in the creed of the intelligent and modern American Protestant: first, that there is some sort of a God; second, that Jesus, while not God, is man at man's best and therefore probably indeed very much like God. On everything else there is disagreement; and to all else, in the thinking of most Protestant theologians, there is considerable indifference. I, for one, respect Dr. Patton for saying that. It is the truth about Protestantism that he is telling." (See *The Christian Century*, Oct. 4, 1933.) Appealing to the right of private judgment, the apostate Protestants deny the chief truths of Christianity. Other men, appealing to the same right, denounce all religious thinking as an aberration of the human mind. We read in Clayton's book: "The path from Catholicism to private judgment . . . led on to skepticism and thence to the ultimate atheism so widespread and active in our day" (p. XV f.). Indeed, the atheist proclaims: There is no sort of God. And on the basis of the right of private judgment he is prepared to defend his article against any man.⁴⁷⁾ — A partial list of the aberrations and heresies

47) "The Unitarians are commonly regarded as carrying to the furthest point the doctrine of private judgment and the free conscience." Well, the Freethinkers carry it still farther. Ingersoll brought all questions to "the bar of human reason" and got a verdict in favor of agnosticism. Now, it would be interesting to witness a debate between the Unitarians, defending their article that there is some sort of God, and the spokesman for the National Infidel Society, the American Secular Union, and the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, defending the thesis that there is no God. Both appeal to reason. The debate would be interminable. And if the Unitarians appealed to the voice of conscience, the Freethinker would argue that

introduced into the Church by the theologians, liberal and conservative, who operate with the false right of private judgment, is given in *Reason or Revelation?* pp. 30 ff.; 61 f. The "religious consciousness of man" which is not created and controlled by Holy Scripture is capable only of producing perversions of the truth, and it has produced perversions of the worst kind.⁴⁸⁾

The "conservatives" deny *some* of the teachings of the Bible; the liberals, by the same right of private judgment, deny *most* of them. One naturally asks: What, then, draws the line between the conservatives and the liberals? We might say that it is only by accident that Hofman retained more Christian teachings than Ritschl. Let us rather say that it is only by the grace of God that a theologian who claims the right to reject the Vicarious Atonement does not claim the right to reject the deity of Christ. It is only God's wonderful grace that keeps him from applying the arrogated right of private judgment at all points. Left to himself, he would deny every teaching of Scripture.⁴⁹⁾ — "Alle Ketzerei ist daher ge-

"conscience" is a delusion, the product of priestcraft, etc., etc. Again the debate would be interminable. The Unitarian might, indeed, have a little the best of the argument, but the debate would never be conclusive. How would a debate between the "conservative" who stands for the right of private judgment and the Unitarian run? The conservative would have no show at all. The Unitarian would tell him: You change the Scripture teaching on the vicarious atonement because of the judgment of your "regenerate reason," your "Christian self-consciousness," etc.; why should I not change the Scripture teaching on the deity of Jesus and the Trinity because of my regenerate reason and Christian self-consciousness? The conservative would have no answer. The right-of-private-judgment conservatives are poor defenders of the Christian faith.

48) H. Kraemer: "In the domain of the religious consciousness man's possibilities and abilities shine in the lofty religions and the ethical systems that he has produced and tried to live by. The non-Christian world in the past and the present offers many illustrious examples." This statement is not correct, but note what follows: "His sin and his subjection to evil and to satanic forces, however, corrupt all his creations and achievements, even the sublimest, in the most vicious way. The mystic, who triumphantly realizes his essential oneness with God or the Divine, knowing himself in serene equanimity the supreme master of the universe and of destiny, and who by his marvelous feats of moral self-restraint and spiritual self-discipline offers a fascinating example of splendid humanity, commits in this sublime way the root sin of mankind, 'to be like God' (Gen. 3:5). . . . Hence the universal religious consciousness of man has everywhere produced also the most abhorrent and degrading filth that perverted human imagination and lust can beget. . . . The universal religious consciousness of man itself nowhere speaks this clear language (of 'Biblical realism, sin, guilt, loss, past recovery except by God Himself'), because it is confused and blinded by its inherent disharmony" (*The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, p. 113).

49) Concerning F. H. R. Frank's theology, which makes the Christian consciousness the source and norm of doctrine, Dr. Stoeckhardt says: "It is indeed a miracle that Frank's mill of reason did not grind *all* Christian dogmas to pieces, that Frank retains certain elements of the

flossen und ihren Ursprung gehabt, dass die Vernunft will die Heilige Schrift meistern und ueberkugeln" (Luther, VII:989).

All the world knows what havoc the misuse of private judgment has wrought in the field of doctrine. The liberals know it only too well. Recall the statement of the *Christian Century*, Nov. 30, 1938: "If the right of private judgment is granted, differences of opinion are inevitable. The truth is that Protestantism has always been a little fearful of the right of private judgment and has handled that principle gingerly and with grave doubts as to its workability." Lecky reports: "Reformed theology has found it true that private judgment is a dangerous instrument" (*op. cit.*, p. 47). The Catholics, too, know it. Clayton points it out again and again. And *America*, April 20, 1940, speaks of it thus: "Private judgment has failed. . . . It has resulted in the existence of countless warring and contradictory 'churches'. . . . To what a disastrous extent private judgment has watered down the doctrinal content of the Church of England was brought out graphically by the famous Report on Doctrine, which, after having been in process of preparation for fifteen years, was finally formulated in January, 1938. On the question whether the Virgin Birth is fact or myth, whether or not Our Lord's tomb was empty on Easter Day, and whether the Gospel miracles should be taken as history or imagery, there was such a conflict of opinion that the report did not even suggest an answer. The Report states: ' . . . Our greatest concern is with the liberty claimed by some accredited teachers to treat as open questions articles of faith universally received by the Church, a liberty carried to such a degree of license as to amount in certain cases to virtual denial of the Godhead of our Lord.' One would suppose that the results of four centuries of tug-of-war with the Bible, which has left only shreds of truth among the 'churches,' would have convinced those who hold the theory of private judgment of its absolute unworkability."⁵⁰ — What do the Neo-Protestants say to this indictment?

Christian truth. But for that his system is not responsible. It is due to an inconsistency. The danger always remains that future disciples of the master may apply the principles of his system consistently and do away with the entire revealed truth" (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1896, p. 74).

50) The cure proposed by the Catholics is as bad as, or worse than, the ill. *America* says: "In this world crisis it is the most evident duty of all advocates of private judgment to examine, without prejudice, the only possible alternative: the acceptance of infallible authority. . . . The remedy is the acceptance of the authority of the Pope." An article headed "A Wishful Protestant Looks at Catholicism," in the February 25, 1939, issue of *America*, says: "To the Protestant, every man's conscience is a sure guide for a life of virtue, but the most elementary psychology teaches that conscience is little more than a blend of desire plus the influence of the past. The Catholic need rely upon nothing within his own highly fallible spirit, but can rest his Faith upon the Church.

It does not move them deeply. In a manner they deplore this divergence of doctrine within the visible Church. For certain reasons they would like to have the churches reach some kind of unity. But the fact that all kinds of errors and heresies exist in the visible Church does not move them deeply. They are indifferent as regards doctrine. It is all too true what Canon Bell's article says: "To all else, in the thinking of most Protestant theologians, there is considerable indifference." There is much truth in what *America* says in the issue of April 20, 1940: "That this theory of private judgment is working toward the destruction of Christianity among non-Catholic Christians is evident to anyone who observes the spirit of indifference to all belief growing among Protestants. No [?] Protestant is startled when a man like Dr. Charles M. Sheldon, author of the best seller *In His Steps* states: 'Religion, as I have understood it, is simply putting the teachings of Christ to work in every part of life. . . . It is not greatly concerned any more with theological and doctrinal definitions.'" "I would be glad," said the Federal Council president Cadman, "to see a holiday given to all theological speculation for fifty years." "'A plague on all your doctrines,'" says Edwin Lewis, "is on occasion an understandable enough exclamation," and he speaks of "the Church's debt to heresy." (See *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, 1943, p. 396.) And *The Christian Century*, March 2, 1938, says: "No issue between the Churches can now be settled by the quotation of a biblical text, as our fathers used to assume. No issue will be settled by reference to an authoritarian standard, whether doctrinal or ecclesiastical. These rigidities of the past have given way to criteria which are vital and realistic, and therefore flexible and capable of a richer inclusiveness. We approach the old subjects of controversy in a new intellectual mood." These indifferentists have no horror of false doctrine. "Heresy" is for them an obsolete term. What does it matter, they say, if certain teachings are contrary to Scripture? They have little awe of Scripture and cannot understand why Luther should cry out: "O ye theologians, what are you doing? Think ye that it is a trifling

If the Protestant's conscience seems to tell him something that is at variance with what he hears in the Church, conscience is presumed to be right. The Protestant, then, cannot know the security of reliance upon some powers, some institution older, stronger than himself. . . . The priest need not rely upon his own authority, his own ingenuity. The answers to all questions have been accumulating for two thousand years, and he knows where to find them." This cure kills. It means the *sacrificium intellectus et conscientiae*. And adherence to the Pope does not deliver from the evils consequent upon man's setting his private judgment above Scripture. Recall Luther's word: "Mache nicht Artikel des Glaubens aus deinen Gedanken, wie der Greuel zu Rom tut" (XV: 1565).—Canon B. I. Bell's cure—place the Church in the seat of authority—is of the same nature as the Roman-Catholic cure.

matter when the sublime Majesty forbids you to teach things that do not proceed from the mouth of the Lord and are something else than God's Word?" Those are Lutheran scruples, they say.

But this indifferentism is the natural result of the false right of private judgment. While Luther is horrified when men dare to sweep aside any statement of Scripture, the modern Protestant declares: These men have a perfect right to do what they are doing; they are exercising their God-given right to set their private judgment against Scripture; you must not treat them as heretics.

We certainly did not say too much when we called this principle the fecund mother of heresies. We will add that as a good mother it does not disown but fosters and fondles them.

Examine, finally, the following pronouncement, delivered at the inauguration of S. S. Schmucker as professor at Gettysburg in 1826: "Hence, I charge you to exert yourself in convincing our students that the Augsburg Confession is a safe directory to determine upon matters of faith declared in the Lamb's Book. To a difference of opinion upon subjects of minor importance, by which different denominations of Christians have been brought into existence, we have no objections, provided the spirit of the Christ prevails. The visible Church is rather beautiful by such differences, as is a garden by flowers of variegated colors. But the different genera and species should be preserved, according to their peculiar nature. The right of private judgment Luther contended for, and hence the utmost liberality towards others should ever characterize the pastor of the Lutheran Church." (See *The Pastor's Monthly*, 1931, p. 268.) The argument for unionism is presented here *in optima forma*. Doctrinal differences of minor importance should not be divisive of church fellowship. The Lutherans teach the *gratia universalis*, and the Calvinists deny it; the Lutherans teach the *sola gratia*, and the Semipelagian, Arminian, synergistic churches, such as the Catholics and Methodists and others, deny it. But we should have no objections to these differences. For there is the right of private judgment! The Methodist is as much entitled to his opinion as is the Lutheran. Hence the Lutheran must practice the utmost liberality towards those of different faiths.—To be sure, if the right of private judgment in doctrinal matters is granted, the argument of the unionist is unassailable.—But is not every single Scripture teaching binding upon every Christian? Orrin G. Judd answers: "Private interpretation of the Scriptures necessarily involves the possibility of disagreement on some points that are not fundamental." (See *The Watchman-Examiner*, Dec. 9, 1943.) The argument is: What Scripture says on certain non-fundamental points—and "non-

fundamentals," as used by the unionists, covers a wide territory — is subject to private interpretation, and since your private interpretation cannot count for more than another man's private interpretation, divergent teaching on these points is not divisive of church fellowship. — To be sure, if the right of private interpretation is granted, the argument of the unionist is unassailable. No man's "*interpretation*" of Scripture is binding upon any other man. Unionism — the toleration of divergent teachings in the Church — thus has plain sailing.

It does encounter some difficulties, of course. *The Christian Century* of March 2, 1938, says: "We approach the old subjects of controversy in a new intellectual mood. True, this mood leads many to expect decisive solutions too hastily and easily, like the enthusiastic layman who asked his pastor on the latter's return from Edinburgh last summer: 'Did the churches agree to unite?' It is well that we should be cautioned against such superficial optimism." One of the things that prevent a speedy union on the unionistic basis is human prejudice. Every man likes his own notions better than those of the other man. And it takes time to overcome this prejudice. Therefore the caution against optimism. — But the unionist is not disheartened. He knows that this prejudice can be softened down. He is willing to wait, since he has gained the main point: the one thing that would effectually stop the unionistic advance has been removed; the principle that every Scripture statement and teaching is binding has broken down.

Is the fraudulent right of private judgment the fecund mother and tender nurse of error and heresy? The situation obtaining in the unionistic church bodies gives the answer.

3. *There can be no certainty of doctrine and no assurance of faith* where men operate with the illicit right of private judgment. The Church has fallen upon evil days. Writing in *The Presbyterian*, Dr. C. E. Macartney says: "Luther was a man sent of God, a world shaker, such as makes his appearance only a few times in the history of the world. The two great doctrines which he rediscovered and loosed upon the world were, first of all, the Scriptures as the final authority for the Christians and, second, justification by faith alone. . . . Today the Protestant Church stands in sore need of a re-emphasis and rediscovery of those two great Reformation propositions. When Luther said, 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. So help me God,' he was taking his stand upon the Scriptures. But where does the Protestant Church today stand as to the Scriptures? Does it stand anywhere? And when the authority of the Scriptures is gone, all we have is a vague 'I think so.' Human wisdom and speculation is a poor substitute for a 'Thus saith the Lord.'". . . (See CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL

MONTHLY, 1934, p. 398.) Luther preached with divine assurance. It was given him to preach after the way prescribed by St. Peter: "If any many speak, let him speak as the *oracles of God*." 1 Pet. 4:11. He says: "A preacher should boldly declare with St. Paul and all the Apostles and Prophets: '*Haec dixit Dominus*, God Himself hath said this.' *Et iterum*, 'In this sermon I have been an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ. Here it is not necessary, not even good, to ask for the forgiveness of sins. For it is God's Word, not mine, and so there can be no reason for His forgiving me; He can only confirm and praise what I have preached, saying: "Thou hast taught correctly, for I have spoken through thee, and the Word is Mine."'" Anyone who cannot say this of his preaching should quit preaching, for he must surely be lying and blaspheming God when he preaches" (XVII:1343). Knowing that Scripture is the Word of God, Luther stood on a firm rock, the "sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19), and this objective certainty created in him subjective certainty. Refusing to deal with his own thoughts, feelings, and speculations, but making the thoughts and words of Scripture his own, there was in him divine assurance. "This confidence I have in God through Christ that my doctrine and teaching is truly God's Word" (XII:839).

The moderns cannot have this divine assurance. For them there is no objective certainty. They deny that the words of the Bible are the very words of God. The fact, therefore, that the Bible makes a certain statement is no proof of the truth of it. The truth of it must be established otherwise. For them it is true only after it has passed the test of their private judgment. 2 Pet. 1:19 reads in their revised Bible: "We have a most unsure word of prophecy." We cannot rely on this or that particular passage till certain tests have demonstrated to our satisfaction that it is really God's word or till certain changes we have made as to its meaning make it fit to be received as God's word; it is not the word of Scripture but our interpretation of it that counts. As Dr. Pieper puts it: "In the Church of the Pope questions of faith are not decided by the Word of God, but by the word of man; men fix the meaning of Scripture. And here modern theology walks precisely in the footsteps of Rome, holding that the articles of faith must not be drawn out of Scripture itself, but out of the so-called faith-consciousness. According to this theological method the human interpretation of Scripture is the decisive factor. . . . Dass es nicht sowohl auf die Schrift selbst als auf die Auslegung derselben ankommt, ist ein Satz, den nicht nur die Papstkirche bekennt und praktiziert, sondern ein Satz, der auch die ganze moderne Theologie beherrscht, ja, der selbst fuer manchen ein-

faeltigen Christen zunaechst einen Schein der Wahrheit hat" (*Vor-traege*, p. 48 f.).

That means that the affirmation of the moderns is not: *Haec dixit Dominus*, but: *We say it*. The modern version of Augustine's axiom: "In ecclesia non valet: Hoc ego dico, hoc tu dicis, hoc ille dicit, sed: Haec dicit Dominus," reads: "In ecclesia valet: 'Hoc ego dico.'" People are asked to accept so much of Scripture as agrees with the "Christian consciousness," so much as has passed the censorship of private judgment.

And that means that the modern man cannot be absolutely certain of the truth of his preaching and his theology. All that he can offer in proof of it is his investigations, his feelings, his sense of the fitness of things — not God's declaration, but his own opinions. But all the world knows that the opinion of a mere human does not guarantee the truth of anything; a man may have the firmest conviction that he is right and still may be wrong. And so the man who relies upon his private judgment to fix the eternal truth can never be certain that he is absolutely right. His honesty will compel him to say: My judgment, based on my human understanding, investigation, and experimentation, is not the infallible judgment of God; I cannot say: *Haec dixit Dominus*. There are men who will at times declare that they have found the infallible Word of God hidden in the fallible word of Scripture, and are convinced that they can say: *Haec dixit Dominus*, and are ready to stake their life and salvation on this conviction. But in their sober moments they will confess that every judgment based on human reasoning and feeling is subject to doubt. Discussing "The Tests of Authority," a writer in *Christendom*, 1937, Summer, p. 433, says: "To give up either individual insight or group authority would be to renounce the high privilege of being human, for man has the unique dual capacity both to profit by the cumulative experience of the whole race and also to challenge boldly the authority of the whole past. The ability to make progress depends upon this dual functioning. We must recognize both demands, keeping up a tension which is helpful in both directions. It is especially important that the individual who finds himself in conflict with the authority of those who are worthy of respect keep courageously to the truth as he sees it, but he should do so in humility, and perhaps in sorrow, *well knowing that the chance of his being in the wrong is enormous.*" (Our italics.) The best that the modern preacher can say is: I think that I am telling the eternal truth; I am honestly convinced that I am speaking the Word of the Lord; but the only guaranty I can give is my human judgment. The man who stands on Scripture speaks in this wise: "I place over against all sentences of the fathers, men, angels, devils . . . solely

the Word of the eternal Majesty, the Gospel. . . . That is God's Word, not ours. Here I stand, here I stay, here I make my boast, here I triumph, here I defy the Papists, the Thomists, the Heinzists, Sophists, and all the gates of hell. God's Word is above all, the divine Majesty is on my side" (Luther XIX:337). The modern man, however, concludes his sermon and his theological essay with the affirmation: I guess I was right. This is the situation as portrayed by Dr. Macartney: "Those who have departed from faith in an infallible Bible have made desperate but utterly vain efforts to secure a suitable substitute and other standing ground. But as time goes by, the pathetic hopelessness of this effort is more manifest. Such catchwords as 'progressive revelation,' 'personal experience,' 'devotion to the truth,' etc., are one by one being cast into the discard. Modernism and Liberalism, by the confession of their own adherents, are terribly bankrupt, nothing but 'cracked cisterns,' into which men lower in vain their vessels for the water of life. There is no possible substitute for an inspired Bible. No one can preach with the power and influence of him who draws a sword bathed in heaven and who goes into the pulpit with a 'Thus saith the Lord' back of him. . . ." (Quoted in L. Boettner, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 81.) The preacher who subjects Scripture to his private judgment finds himself in the terrible situation that he must tell his congregation at the close of the service: I gave you the best that was in me, but the chance of my being in the wrong is enormous.

Such a preacher should not be permitted to occupy a Christian pulpit. "He should quit preaching," said Luther. For he cannot create divine assurance in his hearers. They may think he is right, and they may think he is wrong. And if they are convinced that he is right, it is purely a human conviction. Dr. Bell's article calls attention to this point. "In consequence upon this principle (that in matters of religion there is and can be no authority save the authority resident in the individual soul of a Christian believer), every true, thoroughgoing Protestant minister is at liberty to believe anything, and teach anything, which he himself happens to think correct, and to disbelieve anything and fail to teach anything which he does not happen to like. When we listen to a Protestant minister preach, it is the minister himself who is the authority. It is one man talking on the basis of one man's understanding. But we Episcopalians are aware that it is unsafe to follow any one man. We know too much modern psychology to trust any individual very far. He may be mistaken. . . ." There can be no certainty of belief where the minister asks you to accept a certain teaching not because Scripture says so but because he says so. Nor will it do for you to say that you will not, of course,

accept any doctrine on another man's say-so, but that you accept it because it agrees with your own reason, research, and feeling. — Do not say that! Do not say that the other man may be mistaken but you yourself never. No, no, in matters of faith we need the assurance which only God's own Word can give. It is a desperate situation. We want to know, we want to be divinely sure of our faith. "‘Know’ is the important word: men and women long to ‘know,’ not merely that belief in God is probable and reasonable, but to ‘know’ God Himself." Thus M. Coleman in *Faith Under Fire*, p. 8. We want to *know* that our Christian doctrine is God's own doctrine. But now this same Coleman tells his people: "So many people imagine that the Bible being the word of God means that God, as it were, wrote it Himself. . . . In the Bible we shall expect to find not only God's truth, which is always eternally true, but also man's sometimes erring ways of expressing truth" (p. 48). What is the result? The man who believes the Bible only after he himself has corrected it will never "know" the saving doctrine, know it with divine assurance. The moderns have created a desperate situation. "Religion without certainty is religion without strength." Thus J. H. Leckie. But what results when men, as Leckie advises them to do, find "the ideal organ of authority in religion in the 'religious consciousness' "? Let Leckie himself state the results: "There is much confusion and a great unrest. . . . Perhaps this state of uncertainty, of varied and doubtful answers, is a necessity of the time. It may be that the Church must even wander a while in the desert; it may be that the word of reconciliation cannot be spoken till the thought and research of this age have performed their perfect work . . ." (*op. cit.*, pp. 54, 64, 76, 81).

And where there is no certainty of doctrine, there is no assurance of faith, in fact, no faith at all, for faith is assurance. The assurance which the anxious sinner needs is given only through God's own word and declaration. His heart is at rest when the sweet Gospel promises and all the glorious teachings of the Bible come to him with a "Thus saith the Lord." If they had no better guaranty than the "I think so" of a poor human, they would be worthless for producing and sustaining faith. We cannot base our faith on the assurances of a mere man. "Nur Gottes Wort gibt Gewissheit. . . . Soweit Gottes Wort geht, so weit hat wahrer Glaube statt."⁵¹ John 3:16 is God's word, and when the modern

51) Walther's entire statement reads: "There is no appeal from Scripture to a higher court. . . . Any teaching that is not taken directly from God's Word can only create doubt. The Word of God alone produces certainty. The affirmations of reason are met by the doubts and denials of reason. — True faith can exist only in relation to God's Word. When men have no direct Word of God for their belief, there is not

or even the modernist employs this passage, the power to create and sustain faith operates. But when he, in discussing this passage, tells people that nobody knows whether it is really God's word, that certain investigations and tests are necessary to establish its trustworthiness, he is creating uncertainty, doubt, unbelief, and faith begins to waver. And his subsequent affirmation: I think it is God's word, cannot furnish the ground for faith. "Ohne die volle und ganze Autoritaet der Heiligen Schrift hat die Predigt keine zur glaeubigen Annahme noetigende Kraft."⁵² — The message of the outright modernist cannot produce and sustain faith. In the words of Macartney: "Modernism and Liberalism are nothing but 'cracked cisterns,' into which men lower in vain their vessels for the water of life. . . . No man can preach with the power and influence of him who goes into the pulpit with a 'Thus saith the Lord' back of him. . . . When man faces the overwhelming facts of sin, passion, pain, sorrow, death, and the beyond-death, the glib and easy phrases of current Modernism and flippant Liberalism are found to be nothing but a broken reed. Therefore he who preaches historic Christianity and takes his stand upon a divine revelation has, amid the storms and confusions and dark-

faith, but only illusion, which may, indeed, assume the form of fanatical conviction. . . . Divine assurance is produced by the Word alone" (*Proceedings, Synodical Conference, 1884, p. 49 f.*). "Walther says in his treatise *Die lutherische Lehre von der Rechtfertigung*, p. 69: 'Modern Christianity is no longer satisfied to rest on God's bare Word. Men refuse to believe till they feel grace in their hearts. They want to base their faith on their experience [on their regenerate ego, the Christian consciousness]. But that is—mark it well!—making shipwreck of faith.'" (Pieper, *op. cit.*, III, p. 257.)

52) *Kirchenblatt*, 25. Maerz, 1944: "Die Untergrabung der Autoritaet der Heiligen Schrift liegt besonders in der ungluecklichen Redensart, dass in der Heiligen Schrift Gottes Wort sei; darnach ist es jedem ueberlassen, was er nun fuer Gottes Wort will gelten lassen. Die, welche damit umgehen, die Heilige Schrift von den sogenannten Vorstellungen und Anschauungen der Zeit, in der die heiligen Schriftsteller lebten, zu entkleiden, gehen oft so weit, dass eben nur das duerre Knochengerippe ihrer eigenen Ideen uebrigbleibt. Ohne die volle und ganze Autoritaet der Heiligen Schrift hat die Predigt keine Grundlage und keine zur glaeubigen Annahme noetigende Kraft. Sie soll und darf eben nur eine Verkuendigung dessen sein, was Gott der Herr durch den Mund der Propheten und Apostel geredet hat. Daher stammt die Verwuestung der Kirche und der Verfall der Gemeinden, dass unter der Herrschaft des Rationalismus (Vernunftreligion) in Schulen und Kirchen das Ansehen der Heiligen Schrift gruendlich untergraben ist und dass man die dumm und einfaeltig gescholten hat, die noch daran glauben, weil es so geschrieben steht. Der Geistliche ist nicht darum, weil er den Chorrock anhat und auf der Kanzel steht, berechtigt, den Clauben zu fordern an das, was er sagt, sondern nur darum, weil er redet, was ihm Gott in seinem heiligen Wort befohlen hat. . . . Kornelius und sein Haus hoerten aus dem Munde des heiligen Apostels nicht Menschenwort, sondern Gottes Wort, und daher empfieng er mit den Seinen die Gabe des Heiligen Geistes. . . . Buechner in *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben eines Landpfarrers*."

ness of our present day, an incomparable position. . . . There are not wanting signs today that men will return to Holy Scripture, to drink again the Water of Life and strengthen their souls with the Bread of Life, and that a prodigal Church, sick of the husks of the far country, will return to its Father's house" (*l. cit.*). And those "conservatives" who will not present the words of Holy Scripture as the very words of God, even though they retain portions of the saving truth, treat their people in the same way. They offer these truths as validated by their own authority. They are handing the distressed sinner a broken reed to support him. They turn the Bread of Life, as much as lies in them, into husks.

4. O ye theologians, who have placed private judgment in the seat of authority, *what have you done to the Church?* The churches which are under your domination no longer have the Bible. The Bible still lies upon the pulpit. But not only has the meaning of many of its teachings and statements been changed, but every single one of its statements and teachings has been divested of its divine authority. Their Bible is to all intents and purposes a purely human book. A fearful thing has happened to the Church. By suppressing the God-given right of private judgment the Pope has trained his people to see in the Bible not what God says, but what the Pope says. And after Luther restored the Bible to Christendom, the modern Protestants trained their people to treat it like the fables of Aesop. The Pope and the moderns want God's people to do without God's Book!

Again, and in consequence of the evil principle of private judgment, the Church has been torn asunder. The visible Church presents a sorry spectacle. The various divisions of Christendom do not dwell together as brethren. They cannot. There is no common doctrine, no common faith. And so there is no united testimony for the truth. Whenever the voice of truth is raised, there is murmuring and dissent on all sides. God would not have it so. His invisible Church is one, and He would have the visible Church to be one, all speaking the same thing, perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). And He has made full provision for this unity of His Church. He has given her one Bible and has put this Bible into "such a form that the knowledge of the truth is not only possible, but that straying from the truth is impossible as long as we continue in the words of Scripture, as Christ clearly testifies, when in John 8 He *guarantees* us the knowledge of the truth if we continue in His Word" (Pieper, *op. cit.*, I, p. 186).⁵³ But this godly and blessed unity

53) Harnack, in a way, says about the same. Dealing with the Catholic objection "that if every man has warrant to decide what the 'true understanding' of the Gospel is and in this respect is bound to

cannot be established and maintained where men assume the right to put their own interpretation on any and every statement and teaching of Scripture. It is an evil business. The Church is disturbed by bitter controversies, and her glorious work is woefully hampered. The heathen are offended at this state of affairs, God's people grieve over it, and Satan rejoices.

Again, if these men had their way, the Church would no longer be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The churches over which they preside are at best mere debating societies. They are everlastingly debating the question: What is truth? but never come to the knowledge of truth, never attain to the conviction of the truth. These debating societies cannot produce men who are strong in the Lord. The Church of the living God produces men like Moses, who was not afraid of the power of Pharaoh, but boldly faced him with his "Thus saith the Lord," while those nurtured in the apostate Church easily capitulate to the demands of reason and, at best, will only hesitatingly and falteringly uphold the teachings of Scripture. And while the Word of the Lord in the mouth of Moses brought deliverance to Israel, the preaching of the moderns cannot deliver the anxious sinner from his uncertainty, doubt, and despair. Their Church cannot function as the pillar and ground of the truth.

Finally, God's people render glad allegiance to their Lord. His Word is law unto them. They are a loyal people. Today the greater part of Christendom is in open rebellion against the Lord, some marching under the banner of the Pope and others under the banner of "Private Judgment." And things have reached such a state that while formerly only those on the outside of the walls were inciting God's people to throw off their allegiance to the Lord, ridiculing and reviling the authority of Scripture, the apostate

no tradition, no council, and no Pope, but exercises the free right of research, any unity, community, or Church is impossible, and that of this confusion the history of Protestantism affords ample testimony," he writes: "Protestantism reckons—this is the solution—upon the Gospel being something so simple, so divine, and therefore so truly human, as to be most certain of being understood when it is left entirely free and also as to produce essentially the same experiences and convictions in individual souls." (*What Is Christianity?* p. 294 f.) Harnack himself claims the right to subject Scripture to his private judgment, but what he here says is true: the Gospel is so simple and the teaching of Scripture on any point so clear that *when it is left entirely free*, when man's reason, etc., does not interfere with it, it produces the same convictions in individual souls; it will produce one doctrine, one faith. Lenski on Acts 17:11: "Everyone of us and all of us together can truly find only this *one* truth and true sense in the Scriptures, and will be thus one in faith. And the Scriptures are clear, perfectly adequate to present this one truth to every man. They who deviate from that one truth, no matter how, can do so only by making the Word mean what it never meant, and *they*, they alone, are to blame for such deviation."

Church today has admitted such men within the walls and entrusted them with the leadership.⁵⁴⁾

The Church is in a bad state. Summarizing, we shall say that the root of the trouble is the unwillingness to bow before the authority of Holy Scripture. An editorial in *The Lutheran* of March 24, 1927, discusses an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, by a Protestant writer, which pronounces the doom of Protestantism. "Authority in religion is everywhere giving ground." Among the things to be "swept into the dust heap of time" are certain suppositions, false loyalties, bigotry, lay popes, bitter intolerance, terrible emotionalism, etc. All sorts of organizations are formed to prop up the tottering structure; and "Chatauqua devices" to keep alive a seeming interest in religion are put into operation. "The average Protestant Church is like a club in which there are no conditions of membership, no dues, no responsibilities." "The old disciplinary systems of discipline by which the lay members of Protestant churches are bound to profess certain beliefs and to maintain certain rules of conduct, etc., have become as obsolete as the old formulae, the confessions of faith." *The Lutheran* comments: "This writer has not gotten down to the root of the disease. If we had to say what is wrong with large portions of the Protestant Church, we could put it into a single phrase—*unwillingness to bow before the authority of the Word*. 'What saith Scripture?' has ceased to be the all-important question to which teachers and leaders in the Protestant wing of the Church can give a united and satisfying answer. The Reformers were not at a loss to give an answer. When they unseated the Pope, they put Christ and His Word on the throne. . . . The only thing to assure the life of Protestantism, of Evangelical Christianity, is to get back to the authority of the Word. That is the only authority before which the Lutheran Church is willing to bow. . . . We refuse to be numbered among sectarian groups who have no solid ground of faith on which to stand."

54) I. M. Haldeman: "The truth is (according to Modernism) man of today has altogether outgrown the Bible. . . . The Bible, if it is to be tolerated at all among educated and cultured people, must be shorn of its childishness, its barriers to intellectual growth. If it be accepted at all, it can be only as it comes under and responds to this imperial consciousness and experience in man. . . . *Today Modernism is doing more to destroy the Bible and cast it into the final discard than all the efforts of openhanded infidelity*. . . . When this infidelity comes from those in the Church, leaders in the Church, men who are training young men for the Christian ministry; men who not only come in the name of Christ but with profession of love and devotion to Him and a passionate desire to exalt the Bible, free it from all things that hinder its complete acceptance; when such teachers come and after their fashion strike out the Bible from its place of full inspiration, they accomplish a cataclysmic ruin, a shipwreck of faith not possible at the hands of ordinary infidels" (*op. cit.*, p. 108 ff.).

All will be well with the Chirstian Church, all will be well with the Lutheran Church, if men learn to bow before the authority of Scripture, refrain from putting their own thoughts into Scripture, and joyfully follow the directions of their Lord and Master as He speaks to them in His Word. Let us heed the warning Luther uttered in his last sermon at Wittenberg: "I will not swerve one finger's breadth from the mouth of Him who said: 'Hear ye Him.' . . . The devil will turn on the light of reason and turn you away from the faith. . . . If one delights in his own thoughts, fancies, and conceits and puts these fine thoughts into Scripture, das ist der Teufel ganz und gar" (XII:1174).⁵⁵ Let us follow the advice Luther gave in his very last sermon, preached at Eisleben:⁵⁶ "Here is the Lord; Him alone we should hear in these things, as He himself says: 'Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.' He reveals it to the simple and foolish, who do not pride themselves on their own knowledge and wisdom but hear and receive His Word. . . . For the Lord has spoken and thus must it be: All things are delivered unto Me. I am the man who alone shall teach and rule; the wise and learned must not contradict Me; let them blind their eyes and silence their reason. For our wisdom and knowledge concerning divine things is what Satan gave us when he opened our eyes in the Garden. There Adam and Eve wanted to be wise in the devil's name. God Himself had taught them and given them His Word that they should keep it if they would obtain true wisdom. Then came the devil with his better wisdom; he closed their eyes so that they could not see God—

55) In the article "Schriftauslegung und Analogie des Glaubens," *Lehre und Wehre*, 1907, Dr. Pieper says, page 154: "Of the vices to which man is addicted since the Fall the greatest and most pernicious one is this, that he likes to form his *own* thoughts on God and divine things instead of taking all his thoughts exclusively from God's Word. Luther's last sermon preached in Wittenberg deals with this vice. Luther calls it 'Duenkel'. — I would like to recommend that at least those who hold the teaching office in the Church should read this sermon *once* every year. Here Luther shows up, ex professo, the root of the trouble in the Church. The sore trouble in the Church is indeed the evil lust by which men take delight in their own thoughts about God and divine things, thoughts arising *outside* and *beside* God's Word. . . . And in order to deceive themselves and others, they try to hide themselves behind Scripture. Their own thoughts they call Scripture and Holy Spirit, 'right interpretation of Scripture,' 'demanded by the analogy of faith,' etc. And that is what Luther calls: the devil in Scripture."

56) Be it noted that in this very sermon, in which Luther denounced the Pope for suppressing the God-given right of private judgment, he denounced, in equally strong terms, those who set their private judgment above Scripture. It is hard to understand how men can keep on making statements like this: "Luther himself never dreamed of the dynamite in the forces that he had unleashed" (*The Christian Century*, Nov. 30, 1938).

could not see the devil. We, too, are sick with this horrible disease that we would be wise and knowing in the devil's name. . . . This is the lesson we must learn: not to be wise in our own conceit, but just close our eyes, simply stick to Christ's word, go to Him on His kind and gracious bidding, and say: Thou alone art my dear Lord and Master; I am Thy pupil" (XII:1260, 1264).

TH. ENGELDER

The Social Gospel

(With Special Reference to Walter Rauschenbusch)

"Why bother about the social gospel?" a man recently told the present writer. "The social gospel is dead and buried. No one concerns himself about it any more. It has been superseded by the theology of Karl Barth in its various forms, by the religious philosophy of Kierkegaard, by the neo-orthodoxy of Niebuhr and others, and by a number of other movements and developments."

That may be true enough, on the basis of outward appearances. However, we have a parallel phenomenon in Unitarianism. This also was declared to be dead, at least a half century ago. The truth is that it was no longer a positive factor in the church life of America, simply because it had penetrated and permeated practically all those churches, no matter what their antecedents, in which liberalism had become established. The deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Ghost, had been denied by so many preachers and theologians for so long a time that Unitarianism was practically rampant in many church groups. The same thing holds true for the social gospel in the modern world. It may no longer be a separate movement in the Christian churches of America for the simple reason that it has absorbed or has been absorbed by a great many church bodies as well as individual congregations with their pastors, that it has become part and parcel of much of the religious thinking (and writing) of America. Hence it will be an interesting, if not a profitable, task to inquire into its antecedents, origin, and tenets, and then to examine its present status in the Christian churches of America.

The antecedents of the social gospel are clearly discernible in the religious philosophy of Schleiermacher, with its vague subjectivism, excluding the objective certainty of the grace of God in Christ. Schleiermacher erred with regard to the doctrine of the atonement and therefore also of justification; he erred with regard to the concept "faith"; he erred with regard to the inspiration of the Holy Scripture, referring to an "illumination" of the writers rather than the miracle of inspiration; he was not even clear in