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# Essays on the Inspiration of Scripture

**D**URING the winter of 1954 a group of students of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, requested a discussion of the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures with greater scope than that possible in the classroom. There was no question whether the Scriptures should be regarded as the sole source and norm of faith. The chief questions of the students centered in the extent to which the Scriptures themselves and the Confessions of the Church teach a doctrine of Verbal Inspiration and what the function of that doctrine is.

The late Dr. Frederick E. Mayer addressed a large gathering of students to initiate the extended discussion. The next stage of discussion involved the presentation of a symposium of papers and discussions under the moderatorship of the undersigned, on three class levels: senior, junior, and first and second year together. Nearly 400 students participated in a total of six hours of discussion. The symposium was first presented to the staff of the Seminary and discussed by it.

While prepared for a particular purpose, the essays appear to be of a type useful for the perusal and information of our readers and are herewith presented.

RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

## The Position of the Church and Her Symbols

Of its candidates for Holy Ordination and of its college and theological seminary professors, The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, along with the other synods of the Synodical Conference, requires only an affirmation that the canonical books of both Testaments are the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice (*The Lutheran Agenda* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n. d.], pp. 106, 123).

But in its official pronouncements — as well as in various approved, in part even quasi-authoritative, publications of recent date, such as *The Abiding Word* (1947), the late Dr. Theodore Engelder's *The Scripture Cannot Be Broken* (1944), *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (1943), and Dr. John Theodore Mueller's *Christian Dogmatics* (1934) — The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod stands committed to a doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. Part I of *The Common Confession* says: "Since the Holy Spirit by divine *inspiration* supplied to the holy

writers content *and fitting word*, therefore we acknowledge the Holy Scriptures *in their entirety* as the inspired Word of God." Part II — still unadopted — explicitly refers to the Holy Scriptures as "God's *verbally inspired* Word, that is, God moved men to write what He wanted recorded in the *words* which He wanted employed" (*Proceedings of the 42d Regular Convention* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953], pp. 503, 513). The strongest declaration to date is still that of *A Brief Statement* (1932), which calls Verbal Inspiration "not a so-called 'theological deduction,'" but a tenet "taught by direct statements of the Scriptures, 2 Tim. 3:16; John 10:35; Rom. 3:2; 1 Cor. 2:12." It goes on: "Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35." (*Doctrinal Declarations* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936], p. 42.)

The more or less immediate source of all these formulations we find in Dr. Francis Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*, Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924), where he rejects *Realinspiration* and *Personalinspiration* in exclusive favor of *Verbalinspiration*, "because the Scriptures, of which 'being inspired' is affirmed, consist not of items of subject matter nor of persons, but of written words" (p. 262). Thus the "Verbal Inspiration" affirmed within The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod is not absolute, but is deliberately defined, delimited, and determined by the statements of the Sacred Scriptures and by the fact of the inescapably verbal character of the Sacred Scriptures, as well as by the explicit rejection on the part of our Church's spokesmen of all mantic, ecstatic, mechanical, and dictation theories of inspiration.

We have thus to differentiate this type of Verbal Inspiration from the Verbal Inspiration of the "Hard-Shell" Baptists, contemporary Fundamentalists, and such sects as Jehovah's Witnesses. It is true that there has been some popular assimilation of our view to that of Reformed Fundamentalism. This has come about partly through an uncritical use of theological materials originating among the latter and partly through our indiscriminating choice of polemical targets during the era of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy among the Protestant denominations; frankly, this assimila-

tion needs to be corrected. It is also true that we can trace both positions back to the developed Augustinian-Gregorian opinion held in the late medieval Western Church. But the history of both is quite different. Reformed Fundamentalist Verbal Inspiration crystallized the literalism, the legalism, and the Biblicism inherent in historic Calvinism, and it did so in antithesis to the scientific rationalism of the nineteenth century. It is characterized by a tendency to absolutize the authority of the Sacred Scriptures severed from the authority of their Divine Author and to identify its own literalistic interpretations with the truth of the divine revelation.

On the other hand, the Verbal Inspiration affirmed within The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod reflects here as at other points a revived seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy modified by Pietistic influences; it was formulated in conscious antithesis to the religious empiricism of the Schleiermacher tradition. Pietism was at many points a reaction against Orthodoxy, but in this article conservative Pietism tended to reinforce the Orthodox position. In turn the inspiration doctrine of the second and third generation of Orthodoxy received its particular point and emphasis in the framework of the general polemic against George Calixt, but it can hardly be said to have received any really novel elements thereby. Earlier Orthodoxy, exemplified by Blessed John Gerhard, does not stress the “verbal” aspect in its description of the mode of inspiration; nevertheless, the concept for which “Verbal Inspiration” has become the accepted theological shorthand symbol among us is as clearly there as it was in the theology of Calvin, in the Tridentine decrees, and in every school of pre-Reformation Scholasticism. If there was one point of universal agreement among all of these aside from the nude assertions of the Ecumenical Creeds, it was the authority, the inspiration, and the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures. It is not surprising, therefore, that we do not have an explicit article on the Sacred Scriptures in the Lutheran Symbols.

The difference between the theologians of Orthodoxy and the Symbols is that the former deal with the *locus de Scriptura Sacra* reflectively, abstractly, and philosophically — after all, they were Schoolmen and systematicians — while the Symbols deal with the implicit doctrines of inspiration, authority and inerrancy in an

existential and functional way, without the use of philosophically refined technical terms, such as Verbal Inspiration, perspicuity, and sufficiency, and without a two-way equation between the Scriptures and the Word of God.

Thus the Apology (Pref 9) describes Holy Writ as "the Scripture of *the Holy Ghost*," contrary to which the adversaries have condemned the tenets (*sententias*) of the Evangelical party without refuting them by Scripture passages (*scripturas*). But the classic prooftexts for Verbal Inspiration are almost significantly neglected in our Symbolical Books. 2 Tim. 3:16 is quoted twice (FC SD VI 14; XI 12), 2 Peter 1:21 once (SA III VIII 13), the others not at all.

The Apology (IV 107) asserts in a practical way the *perspicuity* of Scripture by professing astonishment that the adversaries are not moved by so many Bible passages which clearly attribute justification to faith.

The Large Catechism (Sacrament of the Altar 75) similarly asserts the *veracity* of Holy Writ by saying that if you cannot feel the sinfulness of your flesh, you ought to believe the Scriptures, which will not lie to you, inasmuch as they know your flesh better than you do. In the same way the Formula (SD Summ 5) ascribes to a peculiar grace of God the restoration of the truth of His Word through the faithful ministry of the eminent man of God, Dr. Luther, in these last times in contrast to the darkness of the abominable Papacy.

The Sacred Scriptures are to the Lutheran Confessors the *source of doctrine*. In contrast to merely patristic authority, the Smalcald Articles (II II 15) set up the invariable rule: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith and no one else, not even an angel." The Augustana (Pref 8; Epilog to XXI 2; XXI 4 German) and the Apology (I 2; II 32.42; IV 5.166; XII 16; et passim) appeal to the Sacred Scriptures as a whole as well as to individual passages as final authority. The "summary and generally accepted concept and form" that the Formula (SD Summ 1) regards as essential for basic and firm agreement in the Church is to be drawn from the Word of God. The prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of both Testaments are "the pure, limpid fountain of Israel" (FC SD Summ 3).

The same Scriptures are also the only certain *rule*, according to which all teachers and teaching are to be judged and evaluated (*ibid.*). The title page of the Book of Concord describes the explanations of the Lutheran position contained in the Formula of Concord as being based in God's Word as the only standard (*Richt-schnur*). The Formula (Ep Summ 7) adds other descriptive names: Judge (*Richter*), rule (*Regel*), and touchstone (*Probierstein*). The Scriptures occupy a thoroughly unique place, above all post-Apostolic writings — which are merely witnesses to the mode in which the doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles were preserved (Ep Summ 2). The Formula finds this position vindicated by Psalm 119, "Your Word is the lamp of my feet and a light on my way," and by St. Paul to the Galatians, "If an angel were to come from heaven and preach something else, he shall be anathematized" (FC Ep Summ 1).

The Formula (SD II 25—28) asserts in connection with the doctrine of free will that *the ability to understand the Scriptures comes only from the Holy Ghost* and that man does not natively possess it. This statement is followed by one of the longest catenas of proof in the Symbols — no fewer than 25 Bible passages one after the other, plus a quotation from St. Augustine — after which the Formula continues: "This doctrine is founded in the Word of God." Blessed Martin Luther (Large Catechism Baptism 49) proves the propriety of pedobaptism by pointing out that he and others who were baptized in infancy are people who obviously have the Holy Ghost and can by the grace of God interpret the Scriptures and know Christ. (Justus Jonas asserts in his German translation of the Apology that the doctrine of justification serves pre-eminently to clarify the right understanding of the whole Sacred Scriptures [IV 2 German].)

To summarize: Without using the term "verbal," the Lutheran Symbols appeal to a Bible composed of the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of both Testaments which is in all its parts and as a whole inspired by the Lord and Life-Giver, who spake by the prophets; which is the source and norm of all doctrine; which is truthful and clear on all matters of revelation; and for the full understanding of which Baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost are necessary.

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

## The New Testament View of Inspiration

"Verbal Inspiration" may not be the best conceivable formulation of the doctrine of Scriptures, being subject, like all dogmatic formulations, to incrustation and misunderstanding. All dogmatic formulations, "Verbal Inspiration" included, suffer by comparison with the bright, plastic, vivid, and dynamic word of the Bible itself. But, it should be also noted, the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures is, like any other true doctrine of the Church, an act of thanksgiving and adoration. The fact that this doctrine, like every other doctrine, has at times received a dry and overintellectual formulation does not call into question its basically doxological character. (The fact that men have made swine of themselves on the fruit of the vine does not cancel or call into question the fact that the good Creator, God, gave wine to make glad the heart of man or the fact that our Lord will drink it with us "new" in His Father's kingdom.) Verbal Inspiration is the Church of God's response to the condescending God, who has by His Holy Spirit revealed Himself to man, i. e., has offered Himself in Christ Jesus for personal communion with man — and personal communion with man involves *verba*, words.

### I. INSPIRATION IN GENERAL

A. When the Church speaks of the inspiration of Scriptures, it is taking seriously and acknowledging gratefully *the witness of Jesus and His Apostles to the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament*.

#### 1. *Jesus*

One need hardly labor the proof for Jesus' wholehearted assent to the Old Testament. He neither criticized the Canon of His contemporaries nor questioned their implicit trust in its authority (John 5:39; 10:35); and He stated in the strongest possible terms the irrefragable validity of the words spoken by the Law and the Prophets. (Matt. 5:17f.: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, *I am not come to destroy but to fulfill*. For verily I say unto you: Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law till all be fulfilled.") His language is saturated with Biblical thought and Biblical im-

agery; it lives in Him with such an immediacy that even His dying prayer is clothed in the language of Psalm 31. He repels the satanic temptation to misuse His Messianic office with *gegraptai* (Matthew 4); His *via crucis* is marked out for Him by Scripture (Matt. 26:24, 54); and not the least of the gifts of the Risen One to His own is this, that "He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45). — "The Bible is for Him a direct and immediate Word of God. . . . It is for Him the book in which He finds His God and in which God presently speaks to Him. For in it He hears His Father's voice, and it proved the strong weapon, sword, and shield of His life."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *The Apostolic Kerygma*

If there is anything certain about the "primitive *kerygma*," it is the fact that it rang, in all its forms, with *kata tas graphas* (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). What Luther said of Peter at Pentecost — *Der Mann steckt voll Schrift* — can be said of the whole early *kerygma* and *didache* of the Apostles. "This is that which was written by the Prophet Joel"; "To Him bear all the Prophets witness"; "Philip . . . began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 2:16; 10:43; 8:35). No one in the early Church ever had an "uninterpreted" history of Jesus; the early Church knew only a Jesus whose life was framed, formed, shaped, and illumined by Scripture. When the Apostles wished to show that the whole life, work, and death, especially the death, of Jesus was God's will and work, God's revelation and God's gift, they did so by pointing to the Old Testament Scriptures and Jesus as their fulfillment. And in this they were true witnesses of their Lord.

The Apostolic writings reflect this characteristic of the *kerygma* faithfully. One example from Paul may serve for many. He actually parallels Scripture and God: "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not *before God*. For what saith the Scriptures?" (Romans 4:2, 3.)

B. When the Church speaks of Inspiration, it is taking seriously and gratefully acknowledging *the promised Paraclete and His gifts* and the fulfillment of the promise at Pentecost and in the lives, words, and *writings* of the Apostles.

<sup>1</sup> P. Feine, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, p. 21. (Translation my own.)



When Jesus promised the Counselor to His own, the Paraclete who would not so much replace Him as complete His presence, He promised them a Divine Presence who would remind them of all that He had said, would teach them, lead them into all truth, and glorify the Christ who sent Him (John 14:26; 16:13).

C. When the Church speaks of Inspiration, it is taking seriously and acknowledging gratefully *our Lord's unique and unrepeatable gift of the Apostolate as the foundation of His Church*. This Apostolate was all that He achieved before the Crucifixion, and the re-establishment and confirmation of the Apostolate was His chief work in the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. By the Apostolate the "once" of Jesus the Christ, the "once" of the Incarnation, becomes for the Church which has the Apostles *in their writings* the continually valid "once for all." (Historically, the Apostles gave the Church of Christ two things: (a) the Old Testament Christocentrically understood, and (b) their witness to Jesus as the Christ. The one was a book, the other became one.)

## II. VERBAL INSPIRATION

A. In speaking of *Verbal* Inspiration the Church is taking seriously and acknowledging gratefully *the fact that Jesus and His Apostles lay stress on the very words of God's elder revelation in the Old Testament*.

Jesus, in meeting a charge which struck at the very center of His claim and therefore at the basis of His mission and work, a charge which denied His deity and His veracity, "staked His argument for the rebuttal of the most serious allegation that could be brought against Him upon the brief statement drawn from Psalm 82:6. It is this appeal to Scripture that is the pivot of his whole defence."<sup>2</sup> Paul, in Galatians 3:16, lays stress on the fact that Scripture (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 17:7; 22:18; 24:7) employs a singular collective instead of a plural designation for the descendants of Abraham, and that, too, in a highly Christological context.

B. The Church, in speaking of *Verbal* Inspiration, is taking seriously and acknowledging gratefully *the fact that the Jesus who in the days of His flesh "began to do and to teach"* (Acts 1:1)

<sup>2</sup> John Murray, *The Infallible Word*, pp. 24, 25.

*continues to do and to teach by His Holy Spirit through men* who are witnesses who must *speak* of what they have heard and seen, men who for this task of thus speaking receive power from on high, men who are by the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit enabled to declare the great deeds of God. "We have received . . . the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we *speak*, not in the *words* which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." (1 Cor. 2:12, 13.)

C. When the Church speaks of *Verbal Inspiration*, it is taking seriously the *fact that the Holy Spirit* (the personal, inward, and creative working Presence of God in the hearts and minds of men) *does not annihilate or reduce to insignificance what is human* (a man's history, character, temperament, mind, language, words) *but transfigures and employs it*. The gift of prophecy is no less a gift of the Spirit for being in the form of *words* that engage the understanding of the speaker and address the understanding of the hearers; it is for that very reason a greater gift than speaking with tongues (1 Cor. 14:15-19). The Spirit can work in ecstatic utterance, too; but that is not predominantly or even characteristically His working. He works, not in some vague region beyond or behind words, but in and through words, personally, for He is a teaching Spirit.

It is often said that Verbal Inspiration does not take due cognizance of the human aspect of the Biblical writings. Some proponents of Verbal Inspiration have no doubt been guilty of that, but the fault does not lie in the terms or in the basic intention of the doctrine. Schlatter<sup>3</sup> has pointed out: "If the Spirit is kept separate from the words of the Apostles, He is kept separate from the conscious life activity of those who had God's work to do; for they do this work by the Word. Thereby the Spirit would be separated from their work and from their intercourse with men, since this is done by word. But since the Spirit calls and empowers the messengers of God for their ministry, His gift to them consists in the Word."

D. When the Church speaks of *Verbal Inspiration*, it is taking

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<sup>3</sup> *Hilfe in Bibelnot*, I, 216.

seriously and gratefully acknowledging the *sane and healthy realism of the Bible*, which draws the line between word and deed less sharply than our thinking does;<sup>4</sup> which remains conscious of the incalculable power of words and of the dread responsibility involved in their utterance (Matt. 12:37; James 3). The Bible knows no mystic flight from the word to the thought behind the word. Even the Sacraments are not "wordless mysteries." They are given concrete significance by words. They speak and are spoken of. The Bible does not, of course, conceive of words apart from the living context of living, happening reality, a fact which ought to be remembered in both the exposition and the criticism of Verbal Inspiration.

Only in an age like ours, when words have been taken out of the living texture of men's morally responsible lives, in an age that has cheapened, secularized, and degraded words unmercifully, an age in which a man takes neither his own nor the other man's words seriously, where words have lost their accent of eternity, where we just "say things" — only in such an age is it conceivable that theologians should grow coy and bemused about *verba*. Since it takes words seriously, the Bible has no romantic aversion to the *book* as such. One can hardly imagine the Apostles getting exercised over the reproach that theirs is a "book religion." Christ took a book in the synagog and found therein the living voice of God to pronounce His Messianic claim to the people of Nazareth (Luke 4); and it is a remarkable fact that just those three books of our New Testament which speak most explicitly of Christ as God's living Word to mankind (John, 1 John, Apocalypse), speak most unabashedly about words, sayings, commandments, and attach great solemnity to the act of writing (John 20:31; 21:25; 1 John 1:1-4; Rev. 1:3; 1:19; 22:18, 19).

"Verbal Inspiration" speaks of that mighty condescension of God whereby He in living, personal, and dynamic presence among and in men spoke His Word in the words of men whom He chose, shaped, and endowed, thus creatively restoring the words of men to the primordial power, adequacy, and truth with which He endued

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<sup>4</sup> "The Word of God is the speaking or significant side of His work," G. S. Hendry in Richardson, *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, s. v. "Revelation," p. 197.

them at the Creation, when He made man in His image, for communion with Himself. This act of God makes men's words His very own, the potent and inescapable vehicle of His revelation, the means whereby He confronts men in His grace in Christ. This grace, which comes in His inspired words, is therefore real, divine grace, really offered; and it spells life or death as it is accepted or refused.

M. H. FRANZMANN

## Inspiration and Authority

Our Confessions state that Scripture alone is the source and norm of doctrine and life. Both terms "source" and "norm" imply an authoritative status of Scripture, especially if we take the term authority in the wider meaning which it has in the Latin word *auctoritas*: *auctor*.

What is that authority?

There are false views regarding the nature of this authority. They are found also among some who accept the verbal inspiration of Scripture; for example, the Fundamentalists, inasmuch as they do not properly distinguish Law and Gospel. It is not an authority of external compulsion. It is not a buckling under a code of rules which is spelled out in words and to which I submit because of a coercive fear.

Such an external authority is also involved if I submit to it merely from the compulsion of reasoning. If only the rules of logic and purely intellectual processes convince me that Scripture is true and obligatory, then I still have set up a false authority because I operate with a coercion which is foreign to Scripture. Obedience to any such form of external authority is still in the realm of unbelief because "perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Scripture becomes a source and norm for me by that authority which releases me from every human and demonic compulsion. It is the authority of the obedience of faith. (Rom. 1:5; 16:25f.) This faith is not the result of obedience to human laws nor the dictates of the human mind. It is a new creation, a new and free life in Christ, engendered by the Holy Spirit through the message of Jesus Christ, the Savior from the power and dominion of sin, death, and the devil. The object of my faith is the Incarnate Word,

the Incarnate Son of God. That faith may have been created in me before I could read a word of Scripture, but when I go back to Scripture from which that creative message came, I find that it, too, makes Jesus the object of my faith: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).

By that faith is born the new man who delights in the Savior and in being like the Savior, who rejoices in doing what the Savior wants. Progressively the new man strives to emulate the Object of his faith, who said: "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me" (John 4:34). All expressions and manifestations of that faith are motivated by His words: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). New powers, new attitudes, and a new obedience are operative. Such a faith liberates from all coercion; it liberates from the dominion of men who "teach for doctrines the commandments of men." In that faith freedom and obedience are no longer opposite poles of an antithesis, but freedom and obedience progressively become a synonymous and an all-pervading unitary power.

This obedience of faith therefore has no self-imposed or man-made limits; it is an all-out surrender of self to the Savior and His will. It does not boggle at or sense a foreign compulsion when the Savior says: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The Savior is not a taskmaster when He lays down as the requisite of discipleship: "If ye abide in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth" — no compulsion "because the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). That faith is eager to follow His directions in finding the revelation of Himself when He said: "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me," and adds His condemnation of those who will not seek Him thus: "And ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" (John 5:39, 40). The believer who knows that his faith in his Savior is the result of the proclamation of the Gospel expressed in the words of Scripture, will in the free obedience of this faith return to Scripture as the source of his faith and find in Scripture the norm of the content of that faith, also a norm of what he believes regarding Scripture itself.

At this point we should not forget, however, that the obedience

of faith never reaches perfection. By faith Christ dwells in me, but never to the extent that I succeed in giving Him complete occupancy. Always the old Adam tries to reclaim possession, and to the extent that he is not crucified in a life and death struggle he succeeds. When he succeeds, and to the extent that he does, the obedience of faith to the testimony and words of Scripture also is impaired. Understanding Scripture as a source and norm is, therefore, an unending daily growing in faith and sanctification. Again this is not essentially an intellectual process, but an experiencing of the truths of faith in Scripture in ever-increasing clarity, a rejoicing in every newly discovered glory of its revelation.

This unceasing immersing of one's self in the testimonies of Scripture will result in growth of faith and consequently will help to overcome problems and doubts that disturb the imperfect and immature faith. Thus it will open up ever wider circles of what has been called the Christocentricity of Scripture. The center — what Luther called: *was Christum treibet* — may at first appear to be a very small and circumscribed circle of passages, especially in the Old Testament, but its circumference will expand as we grow in understanding the Savior's word that all Scriptures testify of Him. I may have difficulty and I may never succeed in fully understanding how whole, apparently "peripheral" books, such as Judges or Esther, or how the incidentals of Paul's overcoat and scrolls are radii that have any connection with that center. But as I ponder in faith the unfathomable depths of the revelation of Scripture in its very heart (John 3:16), as I desire the sincere milk of the Word that I may grow thereby, I grow very humble; I become more fully aware that the horizons of my faith are very circumscribed and that my understanding of its truth is very limited. If Jesus said that all of Scripture speaks of Him, I will not want to say: No, it can't be. How many intellectual and spiritual giants after a lifetime of intensive study and meditation have not confessed: "I find that I have merely dipped from the ocean of divine revelation in Scriptures by thimblefuls"?

That same growth in spiritual understanding as the result of the obedience of faith will help us to solve what appear to be contradictions or inaccuracies in the statements of Scripture. I readily admit that I am still confronted with problems for which I have

no rational or logical solution. I know that I have some answers that the believers did not have fifty years ago, and I also know that new problems have arisen as a result of recent investigations. But the basic question is: How do I approach these problems and questions? With what do I harmonize in principle these apparent contradictions? Do I begin at the center, the heart of the Gospel, in which by faith I hear God speaking to me, and endeavor from that point to find the congruence of all its parts, or do I begin from a point outside this faith with a purely rational approach to these problems and make my ability to understand and harmonize these statements intellectually the sole criterion of true and false? This does not mean the denial or exclusion of the powers of the mind which enable me to engage in textual, historical, and exegetical studies. But it does presuppose the functioning of an intellect which has been converted, which stands in awe before that infallible Word upon which, as its center, rests my faith in Christ Jesus, my Savior. Am I doing violence to my intelligence when I confess that at this stage, *now*, I don't perfectly understand all the parts of the whole in which I find the mystery of the Gospel, when mysteries surround me also in God's revelation in nature regarding which the wisest confess: "*Ignoramus*"? No, because I have the promise of my Savior: "The Spirit will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

But we must not overlook the fact that Scripture *is* an authority of compulsion, an *exousia*, which, in an absolute way, compels, threatens, convicts. It speaks in this authority above all to the unbeliever whether he acknowledges it or not. But I, the believer, need Scripture in this aspect of its authority also because the obedience of my faith is not perfect, because my hold on the Christ in me has to contend day by day with the clutch of the devil in me, with the old Adam in me, "that when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21). The authority of Scripture is the norm which condemns in an absolute way, whether heeded or not, any and every thought, word, and deed which emanates from that evil source which is still present in me; in other words, every lapse into the disobedience of unbelief. It is the norm by which I can decide whether I am listening to the Christ in me or the old Adam in me. Whatever is left of unbelief in me is subject to the

threat and conviction of that authority of Scripture which brings me God's Law as the condemnation of sin. By this authority of Scripture I stand condemned whenever Satan or the old Adam lures me from the obedience of faith into unbelief, which begins in the heart as do murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies; indeed also blasphemy, the sin of unseating God and His authority, of contradicting God in His revelation, of saying, "Yea, hath God said?" I need the authority of Scripture because, like Paul, I would not know that lust is sin "except the Law had said: Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). I would not know what the unbelief and sin of false teaching is but for Scripture which says: "If any man preach any other Gospel . . . let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9). Have I progressed beyond the need of the words of Scripture to condemn sin in me? Certainly not, seeing that the Savior Himself, when Satan tempted Him to blasphemy and false doctrine, took recourse to Scripture and with it as a live weapon overcame temptation by saying three times, "It is written."

But let us return to the authority of Scripture as a norm and source of doctrine which I accept in the obedience of faith.

The words of Scripture are the source from which I heard and hear the message of Jesus, my Savior. God has spoken, and He speaks to me from Scripture. Can I help returning to that source as a norm for everything that I believe regarding what God has done to save me and to make me wise unto that salvation? Scripture does say something about the origin of its words of life. What it says involves a miracle as unfathomable to the human mind as my confession: I believe that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is my Lord. The words of Scripture are the words of men and the Word of God. 2 Peter 1:20, 21: What men said "moved by the Holy Ghost" is identified with "the prophecy of Scripture," the Word in its written form. In the Scriptures "God," or "the Holy Ghost," has spoken "through the Prophet," "through the Prophets," "through the mouth of David," "through the mouth of His holy Prophets." The result is the *logia theou* (Rom. 3:2). What God spoke through the Prophets (Heb. 1:1, 2) is identified with what is written, and the risen Savior told the disciples that all the written things must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44).



An explanation of this miracle should not be attempted. This miraculous interpenetration of the divine and the human defies any human analysis. But because of this *auctoritas* ("authorship") the words of Scripture are sufficient to accomplish their purpose: to make me wise unto salvation.

The authority of Scripture also plays a part in determining my fellowship with other Christians. To the Romanist and the Reformed alike we say: "I accept the words of Scripture 'This is My body.'" This does not mean that every Roman Catholic and every Reformed Christian will be lost. Some will be saved in spite of their aberration from Scripture. Thus there will no doubt also be in heaven those Christians who do not accept the verbal inspiration of Scripture. In fact, there will be many there who lived before there was a Bible in existence or who never read a word of the Bible after it had come into existence. But is not what Scripture says about the Holy Eucharist just as decisive for my obedience of faith as what Scripture says of itself? Those who know Scripture and reject its self-testimony may be saved by the mercy of God in spite of this disobedience. But the rejection or neutralizing of the teaching of Scripture is the result of indifference to God's Word, and this is sin.

In conclusion may I take occasion to remind ourselves that God has not revealed everything to us in Scripture. The *deus revelatus* remains the *deus absconditus*, but His revelation is sufficient to tell me how I, who have rebelled against God, am saved from the eternal death of my self-effected separation from Him and how I can again become His child in an eternal reunion with Him. The same is true of God's revelation in the Incarnate Son. We still look forward to His completed revelation in the clouds of heaven and upon the throne of His glory. Then we shall see Him face to face and shall no longer have need of faith nor of Scripture.

In the meantime let us seek to know Him better by faith as He is revealed to us in Scripture. On our pilgrimage through life on the paths of that Word, the experience of Jacob will be repeated in us. Again and again we shall say: "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Gen. 29:17.)

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