

# THE SPRINGFIELDER

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# Luther On The Word

EUGENE F. KLUG

FROM HIS writings we know that Luther would be much in favor of the church constantly re-examining itself in the light of the *sola Scriptura* principle, in the light of God's Holy Word, the single authority God left us. But since Luther is interpreted in so many different ways in his attitude toward Scripture, its inspiration, authority, etc.—and that by theologians within the Lutheran church itself!—is it really possible to know what he thought about the Word and Scripture? The variance of interpretation suggests two answers: either Luther was so ambiguous that he confused and still confuses all who read him; or, as often happens with men of heroic proportions, he is quoted and presented in such a way that men support their own theological positions through his mouth. Luther was quite aware of this technique and especially detested it when used on Scripture, as he told Erasmus: "They all quote the Scripture as witnesses and assertors of what they themselves are saying," without actually having a "serious interest in the Divine Scriptures!"<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably Luther presents certain difficulties to his interpreters, because of the vastness of his production. But he is a remarkably consistent theologian, and no less so on the doctrine of the Word than on other doctrines. It is, therefore, one of the tragedies of Lutheran scholarship that opposing viewpoints are defended on the basis of citations from Luther which ignore what he said *in toto* and in context. This is not to say that he is absolutely clear and absolutely defensible in every point; but it is a plea for honest scholarship, in order that Luther might be heard and not another who uses him merely as a sounding board for his own views.

Luther's concern for the Word is always at the same time a pastoral concern for, as he said, "there is no people of God where this doctrine of Christ is missing or where it is repudiated."<sup>2</sup> He knew perfectly well that the church would never be without the weak in faith, indeed without hypocrites either; but he felt very strongly about those who ignored clear Scriptural teaching in order to peddle their own private opinions within the church. For that unfortunate eventuality he advocated stern measures: "When a point of disunity in doctrine is reached, then there must be a separation, and it will become evident who the true Christians are, namely those who have God's Word, pure and straight."<sup>3</sup> In connection with I John 2, 19, Luther explains that the church would always be troubled with false teachers. But this is how he viewed them: "They went out from us, but were not of us . . . They are in the church, but not of the church. Again they are in numerically, but not rightfully."<sup>4</sup> In a long sermon on 1 Timothy 1, 5-7, preached at Woerlitz on November 24, 1532, Luther calls the apostle as

witness against those who shamefully manhandle the Scriptures, the Word of God, stating:

For this is precisely the plague that results; when the Word of God is not proclaimed with earnestness and diligence, the listeners become listless and the preachers become lazy; there the concern must soon collapse and the churches become desolate. Then invariably there appear these false spirits, who offer something new, attract the rabble to themselves, and boast that they are masters of the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

In treating the subject, "Luther on the Word," the nub of the question in our day must obviously be Luther's attitude toward the Scriptures. Many scholars, as we know very well, agree with Emil Brunner that "he who identifies the letters and words of Scriptures with the Word of God has never truly understood the Word of God."<sup>6</sup> Grandly he claims Luther for his side and then pontificates: "The Word of God in Scriptures is as little to be identified with the words of the Scriptures, as the Christ according to the flesh is to be identified with the Christ according to the spirit."<sup>7</sup> Not only is this unfair and untrue as far as Luther is concerned, but the Reformer would have skewered Brunner with his choicest verbal barbs for insult not only to the Lord's inspired Word, Holy Scriptures, but to the Lord's holy person.

#### *Scripture—Word of God*

This is really the heart of the problem. Can anything like propositional truth, objective, external, at-hand material exist under the covers of a book for faith to accept? Can a book itself, so ancient, and so largely written in story form, constitute the living, dynamic, existential, saving Word of God? The logic simply goes this way: material which is 2,000 and more years old simply cannot by itself be true and valid for our day, at least not in its entirety. Certainly it cannot be thought of as the Word of God, *per se*, for our time. Must we not look beyond the text of the Bible itself, perhaps to its chief and central message, or preferably to the sovereign Lord, who became flesh, as the only true Word through whom God alone reveals Himself to man, through personal confrontation, where and when He wills to become real, meaningful, and of saving power to those who receive Him in faith?

This looking beyond the Word for the "Word" is not new. Man has an inveterate habit going back to the dawn of time of doubting the Word God has placed before him, as though there were a better, more dynamic, more true Word than the one given. Adam had this trouble; so did the Israelites; Dives likewise; and every higher critic who cuts up the Scripture is merely acting out what is in all of us. The tragic, fateful end to which this finally leads is dramatically portrayed in the life of "that famous professor of Old Testament, Wellhausen, who in the last lecture of his life stepped on to the rostrum with the empty cover of a Bible in his hand and

cried in a piercing voice, "That, gentlemen, is what I bequeath to my successor."<sup>8</sup>

Because of what Scripture had to say about itself, Luther confidently and loudly heralded the viewpoint that it was the Word of God, and therefore authoritative in all that it contained, clear, and without error.<sup>9</sup> Thus, when Isaiah, or Moses, or Paul, or Matthew writes, it is not merely their word—and one word against another, or one theology against others—but the Word and theology of God. In childlike trust Luther received it just as his Lord Himself had done, and he referred to instances like those recorded in Matthew 4, 4; 7, 10; Luke 24, 44; John 10, 35. Commenting on Psalm 22, 7, Luther states: "The Holy Scripture is the Word of God, written and (as I might say) lettered and formed in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God cloaked in human flesh. And just as Christ was thought of and dealt with by the world (*in der Welt gehalten und gehandelt*), so is the written Word of God too."<sup>10</sup>

The words of Scripture are among the *larva Dei*, the "coverings," or "masks," through which God in His grace comes to us, speaks to us, reveals Himself to us, explains Luther. The greatest and most wonderful of these "masks" was when Christ, in the likeness of the sinful flesh, yet without sin, was "made of a woman, made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4, 4.5). God comes to us in no other way. In His naked majesty we could not face Him and survive. All the more reason not to despise the means God has chosen! "But," says Luther in his Genesis commentary, where he speaks of the *larva Dei* in most engaging way, "those who want to reach God apart from these coverings exert themselves to ascend to heaven without ladders (that is, without the Word)." And then, as a result of their presumption and self-exaltation, "overwhelmed by his majesty, which they seek to comprehend without a covering, they fall to their destruction."<sup>11</sup>

Luther's point is very plain: do not despise God's gracious workings, no matter how simple, humble, and foolish they may seem; for it is the eternal God in Bethlehem's manger and it is His eternal Word on the pages of Holy Writ. It was because the Holy Scriptures were the pure Word of God that Luther, on the basis of Galatians 1, 9, exhorted that no other doctrine be taught in the church except what they set forth.<sup>12</sup> The Holy Scriptures are that Word through which the Holy Spirit comes and we should be circumspect about receiving any other, is Luther's strong urging in his sermons on John's gospel.<sup>13</sup> In his treatise *On the Councils and the Churches* (1539) he emphasized the primacy of the Scriptures in all matters of Christian faith and life. Drawing a line from Word to Gospel to Scriptures without distinction, Luther spoke of them all as providing the line of demarcation between true, or pure, teaching and false doctrine.

Luther, of course, did not believe that the Bible apart from its proper use (*extra usum*), that is, preached, studied, read and pondered within the heart, could perform its God-given function of

turning hearts to repentance and faith. But this was precisely its God-given purpose. This Word of God was no mysterious, mystic, distant object, but something which God had placed at man's hand in the sacred Scriptures. "The whole Scripture," stated Luther, "is concerned with provoking us to faith; now driving us with precepts and threats, now drawing us with promises and consolations. Indeed, whatever things are written are either precepts or promises; the precepts humble the proud with their demands, the promises exalt the humble with their forgiveness."<sup>14</sup> This beautiful delineation of the Law and Gospel in the *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) shows the great pastoral heart of Luther at work, fully trusting that God and His Word inscripturated for this very reason.

Luther cannot be claimed for the side of those who insist that the divine Word is to be identified simply and only with the Christ who is proclaimed by the Gospel and witnessed to in the Scriptures. Luther, too, of course agreed that Jesus was the divine Word spoken of in the beginning and identified by John. At the beginning of his comments on Genesis he states: "This Word is God; it is the omnipotent Word, uttered in the divine essence . . . And when it was spoken, light was brought into existence, not out of the matter of the Word or from the nature of Him who spoke but out of the darkness itself."<sup>15</sup> It is this Word which causes light to be and all other things as well, for this Word, as Luther points out, "denotes a thing," which is more than an uttered word, but is the One whose very will initiates creative design and action.<sup>16</sup> The same holds true for the written Word which He gave; by His command and promise it is His Word, His revelation, by which God proclaims His saving Word unto men. This does not detract from the transcendent wonder of God's revelatory power in any way, nor place into man's hand a medicine cabinet sort of instrument which he can manipulate to his own salvation; but it simply asserts the truth that God deigns to come thus unto men through His own chosen "covering" or "mask."

As far as Luther was concerned, therefore, the Bible as revelation has to do with historical happenings, events, miracles, assertions, which are as true as the Gospel which it proclaims, all of which are to be received by us as genuine *Historie*, and not merely as *Geschichte*; as facts, and not mere fictions or legends behind which some truth is to be discovered; that the Jesus of history, in other words, is the same as the Jesus of faith; that the Bible presents articles of faith for acceptance and does not come to us overlaid with myths which we must demythologize and reconstruct; that when it uses figurative or symbolic language it itself is its own best interpreter; and, above all, that we dare not set the Bible as the Word of God into opposition against Christ, or the mighty acts of God, nor the proclaimed Word into opposition against the written, for they all coalesce under the Spirit's working and teaching to communicate and reveal God's saving purpose.

The works, or mighty acts of God, and the Word of God are not two separable entities or realities, as little as are Christ and the Word. Yet they are not to be confused or simply identified; for the fact is that the former, the mighty acts of God are known to us only through the Biblical Word, which likewise is embraced within the wondrous activity of the Word, Who was made flesh. The emphasis which the Erlangen School introduced into modern theology, of distinguishing God's revelation by deed and mighty act from the Scriptures as a solemn record of these events in the saving history, but not revelation as such, is a false dichotomy and totally un-Luther-like! Luther knew that a theology which had a "Word of God" beyond the text of Scripture was a dangerous and worthless kind of subjectivism, satanic in its delusion.

Since Scripture is God's Word it also is the final authority in setting articles of belief. "No councils have done it or can do it," says Luther in his beautiful treatise *On the Councils and the Churches* (1539).<sup>17</sup> This comes down to cases in point, that is, specific articles of faith. For example, on the two natures in Christ, Luther asserts in his *Sermons on John's Gospel*, that "we will believe this and adhere to the text," because "Scripture teaches it."<sup>18</sup> Luther tears in furiously on those who dare to strip Christ of His true deity by juggling with the words "Son of God," "God's Son," etc., as the Arians did, and as liberals still play the game. And he asks: "What would finally remain certain and clear in Holy Writ, yes, in any language," if such license went unchecked?<sup>19</sup> "The Holy Spirit," Luther adds, "has erected a safeguard on both sides" by not only applying "the names 'God' and 'man' to Christ, but . . . also . . . the definition; that is, He expressed explicitly and clearly how these terms are to be interpreted and understood."<sup>20</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity is equally as mysterious and incomprehensible to human reason as the personal union of the human and divine natures in Christ. But says Luther: "This must be accepted by faith . . . For Holy Scripture, which is God's Word, says so; and I abide by what it states."<sup>21</sup> Luther was just as intransigent on events connected with the creation. Well he knew that tremendous words, like "Let there be light," in the first verses of Genesis "are incomprehensible to any human reason or wisdom, no matter how profound!" But the authority of God and His Word were at stake here, and so Luther settles the issue by stating: "We must honor the Holy Spirit by believing His Words and accepting them as the divine truth."<sup>22</sup>

Scripture's authority was Luther's final court of appeal also on the sacraments. Through all the controversy with Zwingli, Karlstadt, Oecolampadius, and others, on the true meaning and nature of the Lord's Supper, also at Marburg, and finally in the last defense Luther made of the real presence in his *Short Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544), he held all parties to the plain and clear texts of Scripture. "Believe everything whole and simple,"

he charged, "or believe nothing." For "the Holy Spirit does not permit himself to be parted or divided."<sup>23</sup>

For those who object to being bound this way to an external, objective authority, like Scripture, Luther has this reminder: "In the olden days Abraham had to listen to his Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth. Balaam's ass, also was wiser than the prophet himself. If God then spoke by an ass against a prophet, why should He not be able to even now speak by a righteous man against the pope? In like manner St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error."<sup>24</sup> Luther, of course, did not intend this to mean that the doors were opened for any self-styled spirit, but, as he said in answer to Erasmus, "we hold that all spirits should be proved in the sight of the church by the judgment of Scripture."<sup>25</sup>

"This then is our basis," as far as articles of faith are concerned, says Luther. "Where Holy Scripture is the ground of faith we are not to deviate from the words as they stand nor from the order in which they stand, unless an express article of faith compels a different interpretation or order. For else what would happen to the Bible?" is Luther's pertinent challenge as he writes *Against the Heavenly Prophets*.<sup>26</sup>

Luther is agitated, too, when the *proclaimed* Word is set over against the *inscripturated* Word. This is the stance taken by Althaus, who expends considerable effort in trying to show that for Luther Scripture, as such, "simply does not have the authority of the word of God."<sup>27</sup> This is said in connection with Luther's comments on the canon, specifically the Epistle of James, and his evaluation of the books of the Bible on the criterion of their Christocentricity. We are well aware of Luther's concern for the centrality of Christ in all theological matters and discussion, but he is merely repeating the charge which the apostle Paul gave to the church in Galatia, not to know any other gospel than that which he preached to them. To conclude, therefore, as Althaus does, that "therewith Luther has in principle abandoned every formal approach to the authority of the Bible,"<sup>28</sup> is to claim too much, is to read his own theology of the Word into Luther.

Luther would not have quibbled with Althaus over the Word being primarily a spoken word, as the Gospel proclaimed to men's hearts concerning God's mercy in Christ. In fact, Luther would have agreed that it was in this form that the apostles (and prophets) first gave it; also that "the Scripture and the printed word are not an advance over and beyond the living word."<sup>29</sup> But he would certainly not have concurred in characterizing the Scripture merely as something that "has come in between, as something which is necessary only because it is an indispensable aid in the proclamation of the word" and that "Christendom therefore needs to have the 'Scripture,' the enduring *memorial* of the apostolic preaching, in written form" as a standard by which to judge teachings and teachers.<sup>30</sup>

Althaus, indeed, places one hand further out on the neo-orthodox limb, as he labels "both Scripture and the spoken word" as "external words" in distinction from what is "primarily a direct mystical communication from God's Spirit to man's spirit," an internal word.<sup>31</sup> At this point, as a matter of fact, he runs the risk of being other than a Lutheran! He admits that for Luther this distinction does not hold since the Reformer never acknowledged another word as the Spirit's Word than the external, objective Word of Holy Writ. Luther, of course, distinguishes between the Word of God as it is received by faith within the hearts of believers and the external facts and message of the Word of Scripture which are perfectly clear also to the unbeliever, to the Turk and the Jew, but which are rejected in unbelief.

Again, Althaus adds an insight which is more his own than Luther's when he states that it is "God's freedom to *add His Spirit* to the external word when and as he wills,"<sup>32</sup> which means that the word "exists only from moment to moment through God's presence and speaking his word."<sup>33</sup> This bit of neo-orthodoxy, and, we might add, Calvinism, Luther would not have swallowed. It was his firm belief and conviction, based on Scripture's dictum, that the Holy Spirit was *always* operative in His Word, and he hesitated to explain the mystery of why the hearing was coupled with faith in the case of some, while others refused to believe. He certainly never suggested that this was because the Spirit of God was now operative in the Word, and now not; nor that there was a special, irresistible power or grace for some but not for others. This would have been a direct affront to what God had proclaimed in His Word concerning *gratia universalis*.

Finally, Althaus fails, too, to prove his case when he labels faith in the Bible, as a volume containing also historical and cosmological material, a "fabricated faith," an intellectual exercise. Citing Luther as his authority, he says: "Anything that I must believe simply on the grounds that it is set down in the Bible is law, and the corresponding faith is legalistic faith, and not saving faith."<sup>34</sup> There is no need to argue that such faith lacks the one saving object, Christ! But Luther would have gone on to say, true faith does not talk that way, that is, reserving for itself the right to accept, or not to accept, certain things in Scripture.

In fact, Althaus is noticeably bothered about Luther's child-like trust in the Scripture in all details and his readiness to say: "Because God says it, I will believe that it is so; I will follow the word and regard my own thoughts and ideas as vain."<sup>35</sup> And so he finally admits in all honesty: "Here is the point at which the clarity of Luther's own Reformation insight reached its limit."<sup>36</sup> Luther, in other words and to his way of thinking, contributed to a "false legalistic authority of the Bible" by identifying Scripture with the Word of God. The orthodox theologians of the seventeenth century were wrong in insisting on it, Althaus avers further, and we have since been "trying to repair this damage by distinguishing between



differentiating what faith really is from the legalistic distortion of faith." Althaus concludes his criticism of Luther on this point by urging that we "distinguish within Luther himself between that which reflects the historical situation and tradition of his time, and the 'Word of God' in the true sense and a false biblicism, and by that which belongs properly to the Reformation."<sup>37</sup>

What is Althaus deploring? His criticism is reminiscent of Adolf Harnack's famous indictment against Luther that "after all he did not break the enslavement to the letter (of Scripture)."<sup>38</sup> Need we say more when the lists are drawn this way? Althaus can have his Harnacks, Wellhausen, *et al.*, and we will take Luther, naive and overly credulous though he may appear to sophisticated modern critics. If his theology of the Word be biblicism, then let us have more of it! No matter how soft and coaxing the caress of would-be friends of Holy Writ, if they argue against its God-stamped authority in any way, Luther was of the conviction that he must take his place with the Savior in the wilderness, recognize the old evil Foe as the assailant, and stand unyielding on Scripture's text, for it was the Holy Ghost's book in every sense.

#### *Centrality of Christ*

In his *Heidelberg Theses* (1518) and already in sermons preached earlier, Luther has made very plain that Christian theology is always to be *theologia crucis*, a theology that begins and ends with Christ "who was made our righteousness, virtue, and wisdom by God," in whom God "reckons to us His Son's righteousness," through whom we have "the grace and mercy of God . . . freely given to us in Christ and the merits of Christ which are imputed to us."<sup>39</sup> This is in the final analysis the only true wisdom, the *sapientia crucis*, which answers life's most searching problem, the rupture of man's relation with God through sin. "Therefore, let the works go, no matter how great they may be, prayers, chants, yammering, and yapping; for it is certain that nobody will ever get to God through all these things. Besides it is impossible. Rather, the heart must have love for Christ, and through Him for the Father."<sup>40</sup>

In his treatise *That Doctrines of Men Are to be Rejected* (1522) Luther states that "it is beyond question that all the Scriptures point to Christ alone."<sup>41</sup> With this as their central theme, "the Scriptures," says Luther in the same treatise, "set the consciences of men free and forbid that they be taken captive with the doctrines of men;" and he adds perceptively: "This conflict between the Scriptures and the doctrines of men we cannot reconcile."<sup>42</sup> Since the Scriptures teach this so clearly, he is exceedingly impatient with Erasmus for speaking of them as unclear and obscure. An "unintelligent" and "ungodly" stance on Erasmus' part, Luther called it! Even a schoolboy and the man in the street would know better. Should not a theologian therefore recognize as axiomatic, asks Luther, this principle and fact: "Take Christ from the Scriptures—and what more will you find in them?"<sup>43</sup>

In the *Bondage of the Will* Luther is at considerable pains to defend Scripture's perspicuity. At the center of his argument is the fact that the core teaching of the Gospel concerning Christ is so clear. In its light all other doctrines and passages of Scripture take their light and bearing point. This suggests another principle which for Luther was very basic, that "the Scriptures must be understood in favor of Christ, not against Him." Therefore for something to be true theologically, indeed for any part of Scripture to be truly Scripture, it "must either refer to him or must not be held to be true Scripture." And Luther goes on to add, in the same *Theses Concerning Faith and Law* (1535): "Therefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures."<sup>44</sup> Luther's whole point simply is that in the interpretation of Scripture as God's Word, the Christ-principle rules, that is, everything must serve that central truth and message concerning man's justification and salvation through the meritorious sacrifice of God's Son. If it does not, it is not Scriptural, and it is not God's Word.

It is in this sense that the words, *was Christum treibet*, that which teaches or presents Christ, occur in connection with the Epistle of James in Luther's *Prefaces* on the books of the Bible. We need make no excuse for Luther's rather strong opinion about this epistle, but whatever he says must also be taken in context. On the one hand, he acknowledges that there is much in the epistle which is very commendable; and, on the other hand, all of it must be understood in accord with, and never against, Scripture's central theme, which is Christ. This holds true, as far as Luther was concerned, for the rest of the Scriptures as well as all that they contain. Luther is not saying what ever does not preach Christ is to be, or may be, eliminated. This is, therefore, not a *selective* tool or principle on Scripture's contents, but an *interpretive* key for unlocking the Scripture correctly, as well as for all theologizing. For the same reason Luther expressed the opinion that the epistles of Paul to the Romans and to the Galatians settled all doctrinal questions, for they treated the Gospel so fully and so clearly.

Luther had an answer, too, for those who would turn this Christo-centric principle into a Christo-monistic artifice for the construction of their own systems. He is then prepared to reverse things, as a sound Scriptural theologian, and say that, when his adversaries press *their* ideas of "Christ" against Scripture, he will press the Scripture against their so-called Christ-theology. That took care of the papists and the *Schwaermer* in his day; and it is the answer for all Bultmanns and Tillichs in ours.

Luther simply abided by the tested principle that what was not Biblical could not be theological and required of faith, no matter how it was bent and twisted. For example, when he had to deal with the trouble stirred up by Karlstadt on the matter of the elevation of the elements in the Sacrament—Karlstadt held the position that it dare not be done because Christ had not done it or com-

manded it—Luther simply asked, What does the Scripture say? “If it is to be the rule that one is so strictly to follow the example of Christ and not the Word alone, then it will follow that we should observe the Last Supper nowhere but in Jerusalem, in the upper room . . . Do you see here the devil, who before has misled us through saints? He would now mislead us through Christ Himself! Beware where you do not hear God’s Word *commanding* or *forbidding* you . . . The Word, the Word is to be followed, don’t you hear? When one now holds before you how Christ has done it, speak up briskly: Very well, he has done it. Has he also *taught* and *commanded* it to be done? . . . (Karlstadt) *constructs his own Christ*, that we are to follow his works without the Word . . . He knows no more about the New Testament than he does about the Old.”<sup>45</sup>

Luther is saying literally, if my opponents quote Christ, or what they imagine Christ to have said or thought or done, against the Scripture, I will quote the Scriptures against their “Christ.” He cleared the air beautifully on this very issue in his debate with Erasmus. The savant of Europe had argued that “Christ crucified should rather be preached” and “that the language of Scripture is accommodated to the various capacities of the hearers.” A plain dodge and maneuver for greater freedom in handling Scripture! Luther took up the thrown gauntlet and parried: “Silly, ignorant remarks, all of them! We teach nothing save Christ crucified. *But* Christ crucified brings all these doctrines with Him . . . Do you, I wonder, take preaching Christ crucified to be just a matter of calling out ‘Christ was crucified,’ and nothing more?” And when Erasmus bridled at such attributes in God, like wrath, anger, hatred, etc., Luther let him have it full blast: “Carping obstructionism!” “These expressions,” says the valiant champion of the Word, “do not make Scripture obscure, nor do they need adapting to the various capacities of the hearers—unless, of course, *one likes creating difficulties where none exist.*”<sup>46</sup>

Nor could Luther be thrown off by the opponents pounding their fists on the Bible as proof of their positions. He understood the psychology perfectly: “They all quote Scriptures as witnesses and assertors of what they themselves are saying.” And he knew from their handling of specific texts that their “behavior,” as he said, “is quite in keeping for those who have no serious interest in the Divine Scriptures!”<sup>47</sup> So, his advice simply was—for there was no other recourse: “If they now rap on the Scriptures saying there is one God, so let us rap thereon in turn, since the Scriptures indicate just as strongly that in this one God there are more than one. Our Scriptural texts are as valid as theirs, Because there is not a superfluous letter in the Scriptures . . . They are God’s Scriptures and God’s Word.”<sup>48</sup> It was simply a plea for the whole counsel of God, like Paul’s before the Ephesian elders (Acts 20, 27), as over against an emasculated Gospel.

As far as Luther was concerned, therefore, the issue was very clear. If the tribunal of Scripture was gone, what tribunal was left—at least of divine authority? Therefore, he admonished so earnestly and so truly: “Stick to the Word of God. Ignore every other—whether it is devoid of Christ, in the name of Christ, or against Christ, or whether it is issued in any other way.”<sup>19</sup>

One thing stands sure: if the Lutheran church in our day intends to remain Lutheran, and if genuine Christian faith is to prevail, it needs this Reformation lesson, as well as resolve: the church lives or dies on the *sola Scriptura* principle!

### FOOTNOTES

1. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trans., *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*. (Westwood, N.J.: 1957), p. 225. (Hereafter referred to as BOW.)
2. *Luther's Works* (American edition), Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, editors. Vol. 23 (Sermons on John 6-8), p. 386. (Hereafter referred to as LW.) Concordia and Muhlenberg Presses. (Cf. Weimar Ausgabe, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Vol. 33, 627, 25. Hereafter referred to as WA.)
3. WA 51, 521, 35.
4. WA 51, 521, 32 ff.
5. LW 51, 265.
6. H. Emil Brunner, *The Theology of Crisis*. (New York: Scribner's 1931), p. 19.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Quoted in Johannes Hamel, *A Christian in East Germany*. (New York: Association Press, 1960), p. 50.
9. On Scripture's inerrancy see LW 32, 11; 40, 351f; 1, 122; 37, 279; BOW 70; 125-136 *passim*; *Works of Martin Luther* (Phil. ed.), II, 261. (Hereafter referred to as WML.)  
Luther's position on Scripture's inerrancy is in harmony with that of the seventeenth century orthodox theologians, as well as with more recent Lutheran theologians like Walther, Pieper, Engelder, P. E. Kretzmann, and Arndt, contrary to what is claimed by Herman Sasse in *Accents in Luther's Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), p. 82f.
10. WA 48, 31, 4; *Luthers Saemtliche Schriften* (St. Louis Walch ed.), Concordia, 1881-1910. IX, 1770.
11. LW 1, 14; WA 42, 11.
12. LW 26, 58; WA 40, I, 120.
13. LW 23, 174.
14. WML II, 291.
15. LW 1, 19; cf. also 17.
16. LW 1, 16.
17. WML V, 178f.
18. LW 24, 96.
19. *Ibid.*, 93.
20. *Ibid.*
21. LW 22, 6.
22. *Ibid.*, 10.
23. WA 54, 158, 28.

24. WML II, 76.
25. BOW 125; cf. also a similar statement in his *Sermons on John's Gospel*, LW 23, 97.
26. LW 40, 157. Luther's great concern for purity of teaching rose from his high regard for God's Word and the resulting insult which would be involved in being indifferent to attacks upon it. That is why he led off with a solid right to the theological mid-section in the first of his theses *Against the Thirty-two Articles of the Louvain Theologists*: "Whatever is taught in the church of God without the Word is a godless lie." In the same set of theses he slashed at an old target, the fact that "the mass is taught to be a sacrifice without the authority of the Word," pointing out in addition and with keen perception that "because it does not have the authority of the Scriptures, it is despised with the same ease as it is approved." LW 34, 354 f.
27. Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), p. 81.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 72f. Emphasis added.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
35. WA 37, 39; quoted in Althaus *op. cit.*, p. 51, footnote 28.
36. Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Ad. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*. (Tuebingen, Mohr), p. 430.
39. LW 51, 28f.
40. *Ibid.*, 47.
41. WML II, 432.
42. *Ibid.*
43. BOW 71.
44. LW 34, 122. Theses 41 and 49.
45. LW 40, 134f. *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525). Emphasis added.
46. BOW 107f. Emphasis added.
47. *Ibid.*, 225.
48. LW 34, 227. *The Three Symbols* (1538).
49. LW 22, 451; cf. BOW 66f, 85, 98, 125, 128.