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Book Review

# What Does "Inerrancy" Mean?<sup>1</sup>

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This paper is primarily a terminological study rather than a theological one. It inquires into the meaning of, rather than into the justification for, a term that has become a staple of dogmatic discussion in our own and other denominations.

Lutheran clergymen and professors affirm everything that the Sacred Scriptures say about themselves and everything that the Lutheran symbols say about the Sacred Scriptures. It is significant therefore that the term "inerrancy" does not correspond to any vocable of the Sacred Scriptures. It does not correspond to any vocable in the Lutheran symbols. The Catholic Church has never defined it dogmatically. None of the formulations of the ancient "rule of the faith" or "canon of the truth" affirm it. It is not a tenet of the patristic consensus. It is an ecclesiastical term subject to definition by usage.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally prepared for presentation during the annual retreat of the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., at the request of the faculty's program committee. The paper was subsequently read to the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at the Commission's request. Throughout the paper "inerrancy" refers to the Sacred Scriptures, except where another reference is explicitly indicated.

<sup>2</sup> In "A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures" published in 1960 the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., declared that the Holy Scriptures are inerrant in the sense that they express what God wants them to express and accomplish what God wants them to accomplish. Otherwise the statement does not use "inerrant" or "inerrancy." At those places where one might expect "inerrancy" to occur, the statement employs the

## I

From the Formula of Concord through Leonard Hütter (1563—1616) and John Gerhard (1582—1637), the older Lutheran orthodoxy does not greatly occupy itself with the idea which lies behind "inerrancy." With the ancient church<sup>3</sup> and with the first generation of reformers, early Lutheran orthodoxy affirms the correctness and adequacy of the Sacred Scriptures for the things that must be known and believed for a Christian to be saved and to live a godly life. The freedom of the Sacred Scriptures from error is largely an unarticulated assumption of undefined scope. When one gets to the middle and late 17th century, however, one finds state-

positive term "truthfulness." Thus for the signatories of the statement the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures means that they are truthful and that they express and accomplish what God wants them to (CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXXI [1960], 626).

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, for instance, who declared in his 82d Letter to St. Jerome: "I believe very firmly that no author [of the canonical books] went astray in anything that he wrote (*nullum {librorum canonicorum} auctorem scribendo errasse aliquid firmissime cred{o}*); "it is impious to doubt with reference to the writings [of the prophets and the apostles] that they are free from all error (*de {prophetarum et apostolorum} scriptis quod omni errore careant dubitare nefarium est*);" and "I do not doubt that the writers [of the canonical Scriptures] did not go astray with reference to anything at all in them and that they did not assert anything in them deceitfully (*conscriptores {scripturarum canonicarum} nihil in eis omnino errasse, nihil fallaciter posuisse, non dubit{o}*)" (i, 3; iii, 24). (*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 34, 354, 7—8, 18—19; 376, 28—29)

ments like this one, taken from John-Andrew Quenstedt (1617—1688): "The original canonical s[acred] scripture is of infallible truthfulness and wholly free of error, or, what is the same thing, in the canonical s[acred] scripture there is no lie, no falsehood, not even the smallest error either in words or in matter, but everything, together and singly, that is handed on in them is most true, whether it be a matter of dogma or of morals or of history or of chronology or of topography or of nomenclature; no want of knowledge, no thoughtlessness or forgetfulness, no lapse of memory can or ought to be attributed to the secretaries of the H[oly] Spirit in their setting down of the s[acred] writings."<sup>4</sup>

The reasons for this increasing explicitness are chiefly four:

For one thing, the Colloquy of Regensburg in 1601 highlighted the subject of authority in religion.<sup>5</sup> The hardening of

<sup>4</sup> S{acra} Scriptura canonica originalis est infallibilis veritatis omnisque erroris expers, sive quod idem est, in S{acra} Scriptura canonica nullum est mendacium, nulla falsitas, nullus vel minimus error, sive in rebus sive in verbis; sed omnia et singula sunt verissima, quaecunque in illa traduntur, sive dogmatica illa sunt, sive moralia, sive historica, chronologica, topographica, onomastica; nullaue ignorantia, incogitantia aut obliuio, nullus memoriae lapsus Spiritus S{ancti} amanuensibus in consignandis s{acris} litteris tribui potest aut debet (Johannes-Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica*, pars prima, cap. IV, sect. ii, quaest. 5, thesis; [Wittenberg: Johannes Ludolphus Quenstedt et Elerdi Schumacheri Haeredes (Matthaeus Henckelius), 1685], I, 77; all the Quenstedt quotations in this paper are from the cited chapter and section).

<sup>5</sup> On this colloquy see Wilhelm Herbst, *Das Regensburger Religionsgespräch von 1601* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1928). The colloquy pitted a number of Lutheran theologians, among them Giles Hunn (1550—1603) and James

the polemical lines that resulted tended increasingly toward the opposition of an infallible Roman Catholic pope over against an infallible Lutheran Bible. This opposition affected the thinking of both sides profoundly. In the case of the Lutherans this opposition contributed to the dogmatic elaboration of the commonplace on the Sacred Scriptures.

Another factor was the 17th-century antisocialian polemic of the Lutherans, who felt themselves called upon to reject the thesis of Faustus Sozzini (1539—1604) that the evangelists and apostles "erred to a limited extent."<sup>6</sup>

A third factor was the working out by the orthodox Lutheran theologians of inferences of their doctrine (a) of the monergism of the Holy Spirit in inspiration, and (b) of the truthfulness of Holy Scripture. The argument ran thus:

(a) The Sacred Scriptures are the communicated word (*dictamen*) of the Holy Spirit;

(b) The Holy Spirit is all-knowing and absolutely truthful;

(c) Any kind of inaccuracy or imperfection is unworthy of the Holy Spirit;

(d) No inaccuracy or imperfection can exist in the Holy Scriptures.

A fourth factor was the revolution in mathematics that is associated with such names as those of Francis Viète (1540 to 1603), Nicholas Tartaglia (1500—1557),

(1548—1618) and Philip Heilbrunner (1546 to 1616), against a number of Roman Catholic theologians, including Adam Tanner (1572 to 1632), James Gretser (1560—1625), and Albert Hunger (1545—1604).

<sup>6</sup> *In aliquibus leuiter errarint* (Faustus Socinus, *Libellus de autoritate scripturae*, p. 72, cited in Quenstedt, quaest. 5, antithesis III, p. 79).

John Napier (1550—1617), and notably René Descartes (1595—1650), Girard Desargues (1593—1662) and John Kepler (1571—1630), coupled with the whole thrust of the period toward greater scientific precision.

Thus the doctrine of what a later generation was to call "inerrancy" is in the late 17th century a secondary *Schutzlehre*. It is designed to protect and vindicate the truthfulness of the Holy Spirit, who increasingly appears in the theological literature of the period less as the principal Author than as the exclusive Author of the Holy Scriptures.

It is not without significance that for reasons quite similar to those alleged for the thesis that the Sacred Scriptures are free from error John Gerhard repeats the arguments of John Buxtorf the elder (1564—1629) on behalf of the cooriginality of the Hebrew-Aramaic vowel points with the consonants.<sup>7</sup> A little later and along the same lines Bishop Jasper Rasmussen Brochmand (1585—1652) defends the originality of the square Hebrew alphabetic characters.<sup>8</sup> Finally August Pfeiffer (1640—1698), on a similar basis, asserts the freedom from all corruption, either through malice or carelessness, of the text of both testaments in their original languages through the operation of the divine Providence.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Gerhardus, *Loci theologici*, locus I, cap. xv; ed. Eduardus Preuss, I (Berlin: Gust. Schlawitz, 1863), 144—151.

<sup>8</sup> Caspar Erasmus Brochmand, *Universae theologiae systema*, art. II, cap. ii, quaest. 8; 5th ed., I (Ulm: Johannes Görlinus, 1658), 17—19.

<sup>9</sup> Augustus Pfeifferus, *Critica sacra*, cap. IV, sect. ii, quaest. 4—6; 6th ed. (Dresden and Leipzig: Gothofredus Leschius, 1721), pp. 86 to 99.

This observation is not intended to downgrade the total concern of late Lutheran orthodoxy for the dependability of the Sacred Scriptures as a revelation of God's being and purposes. Neither does the similarity of the arguments employed imply that these theses themselves are of identical validity; many perfectly correct theses have been supported with arguments of dubious cogency. It does, however, raise the question if these arguments, which fail to establish the other theses in fact, are adequate to establish the thesis that the Sacred Scriptures are free from error in the sense in which Quenstedt seems to assert that they are. Again it is not unreasonable to assume that God, the Author of a perfect redemption, would have given a revelation that meets Quenstedt's criteria, but the assumption must be tested against the facts. This the second part of this paper proposes to do.

"Inerrancy" itself is a relatively young word. On the surface it looks like a transliteration from an original Latin vocable *inerrantia*, derived from the participle, *inerrans*, of a verb, *inerro*. A canvass of the standard lexicons of classical Latin, of du Cange's *Glossarium*, of Blaise, of Niermeyer, and of specialized vocabularies like Souter's *Glossary*, Schütz' *Thomas-Lexikon*, and Deferrari's *A Lexicon to the Summa* discloses no use of *inerrantia*. Cicero and Lactantius (240?—320?) use *inerrans* of the fixed stars. In his treatise on arithmetic Boethius (480?—524?) uses *inerratum* in the sense of "absence of error." The verb *inerro* occurs in Pliny the Younger (61? to 113?) and Apuleius (born 125?) in the literal sense of "wander about in" and in the tropical sense of "swim before" or "dance about in." Minucius Felix (late

2d century) uses *inerro* in his *Octavius* (31, 4) apparently in the sense of "stumble upon."

This may suggest a reality that sometimes escapes us in our discussion of the term, namely that "inerrant" in its etymological sense is actually a poetic, evocative, metaphorical term. It is appropriate to a person or a hypostatization, to the author of a book, but not to a book as a book. We sense this in our ordinary speech, which does not usually ascribe "inerrancy" even to a very accurate book. "Accuracy," "truthfulness," "dependability," "credibility," "correctness," or "exactitude" are more likely to come to our lips when we speak of a book.

As long as we realize that "inerrancy" is used metaphorically of the Sacred Scriptures to describe them as "not wandering away" from the truth, well and good; we are not likely to become quarrelsome about it in that case. But when we begin to take the term literally of the Sacred Scriptures as such, a student of comparative religion might be impelled to observe that we are perilously close to the threshold of a tendency which exists in other world religions. This is the tendency toward the deification of the written revelation of God. Certain schools of Jewish theology, for instance, have affirmed the preexistence and the divine nature of the Torah just as certain schools of Islamic theology have similarly affirmed the preexistence and the divine nature of the Qur'an.

Thus what we have in "inerrancy" is a kind of do-it-yourself term, formed from a nonexistent Latin original vocable on the analogy of other combinations, with *in-* meaning "not" and *errantia* meaning "the act of wandering about." *The Oxford*

*English Dictionary* actually lists the English adjective "inerrant" (corresponding to the Ciceronian *inerrans*) in 1652 in technical astronomical reference to a fixed star. It was not until 1837, however, according to the same source, that "inerrant" was used in the modern sense of "exempt from error, free from mistake, infallible." In that year a writer in *Fraser's Magazine* (XV, 368) declared: "The same inerrant pen winds up this . . . in the emphatic terms, 'which is idolatry.'" The *Oxford Dictionary* records this acquired meaning again in 1868, in E. S. Ffoulkes' *Church's Creed or Crown's Creed*, p. 20: "Whether absolutely inerrant or not in matters of faith."

The same source lists the abstract noun, "inerrancy," as occurring in English for the first time in the formidable four-volume *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* of Thomas Hartwell Horne (1780—1862). Part ii of Volume II of the seventh edition (1834) states on p. 81: "Absolute inerrancy is impracticable in any printed book."<sup>10</sup> The first occurrence of the term in an explicitly religious context is reported by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as on page 326 of *An Eirenicon* (1865) by Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800—1882): "The old ultramontane doctrine of the inerrancy of the Pope, i.e., that of his preservation from error."<sup>11</sup>

From St. Jerome's day on—and this is particularly true of the theologians of late

<sup>10</sup> Conceivably the statement may have occurred as early as the first edition, 1818.

<sup>11</sup> Similarly the German equivalent of "inerrancy," the word "Irrtumslosigkeit," is also a relatively recent term in the German language—so recent that the Grimm *Wörterbuch* has no entry for it.

Lutheran orthodoxy—theologians have set forth the doctrine of accommodation in part at least in order to avoid the embarrassment of a literal interpretation of "inerrancy." This doctrine holds that in the process of inspiration the Holy Spirit accommodated the language of the Sacred Scriptures to the limited knowledge of human beings—both authors and original readers—and to the popular apprehension of scientific reality. This realistic doctrine reflects credit rather than discredit upon those who devised it. The chief difficulty has been that it has rarely been applied consistently or extensively enough.<sup>12</sup>

The great Strasbourg theologian, John-Conrad Dannhauer (1603—1666), describes the process in these terms: "As far as the accidental conformity of style is concerned, the Holy Spirit by a singular condescension adapted Himself to the temperaments, nationalities, and learned pursuits of the God-inspired men. As a result Isaiah (royal blood!) wrote in a more refined way, Amos in a humbler fashion, St. Luke, steeped in Greek letters, more elegantly."<sup>13</sup> In his *Hermeneutica sacra* Dannhauer cites as examples of accommodation to vulgar belief the designation of

St. Joseph as our Lord's father and of comets as falling stars.<sup>14</sup> Quenstedt puts it this way: "[One must] distinguish between the manner of speaking and the phrases, words, and vocables themselves. The h[oly] writers owed their manner of speaking to daily usage and custom or even to their education, and it is from this that the difference of style, chiefly of the prophets, arises. For just as they were accustomed or educated to either a sublimer or a lowlier manner of speaking and of writing, so the H[oly] Spirit in using a particular style was willing to adapt Himself and condescend to the abilities of men. Thus He expressed the same matters in a grander way through some and in a slighter way through others, since the fact that the holy writers employed the particular words that they did and not other or equivalent words derives solely from the divine instigation and inspiration. The H[oly] Spirit accommodated Himself to the grasp and ability of the holy writers so that they would set down the mysteries according to their usual manner of speaking. The H[oly] Spirit went so far as to communicate by inspiration those words to His secretaries which they would otherwise themselves have employed if they had been left to themselves."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This is not designed on the one hand to minimize the problem of defining the "enough" or on the other to justify the misuse of the doctrine of accommodation to represent God as accommodating Himself to the moral and spiritual defects or the willful ignorance of the writers.

<sup>13</sup> *Quoad accidentalem styli conformationem singulari συνκαταβάσει Spiritus sanctus se demis[it] ad ingenia, nationes, studia θεοπνευστών, quo factum ut Esaias (regius sanguis) nitidius, Amos humiliter, Lucas literis graecis imbutus elegantius scripserit* (Johannes Conradus Dannhauerus, *ΟΔΟΣΟΦΙΑ christiana*, phaen. I—g; [Strasbourg: Fridericus Spoor, 1649], pp. 34—35).

<sup>14</sup> Johannes Conradus Dannhauerus, *Hermeneutica sacra sive methodus exponendarum s. literarum* (Strasbourg: Josias Staedelius, 1654), p. 409.

<sup>15</sup> *Distinguendo inter genus loquendi et inter ipsas phrases, verba et voces: Genus loquendi debebant scriptores {acri} quotidiano usui et consuetudini, vel etiam informationi, et hinc quoque diversitas styli praesertim prophetici oritur. Nam prout informati aut assuesfacti erant ad sublimius humiliterve loquendi et scribendi genus, sic eodem usus Spiritus S[anctus] sese hominum indoli attemperare et condescendere voluit atque ita res easdem per alios mag-*

John William Baier (1647—1695), following his father-in-law John Musaeus (1613—1681), declares: "Since the primary Author of Scripture is one, and all Scripture is God-breathed, it will have to be said that the H[oly] Spirit accommodated Himself to the ability and situation of His secretaries in providing them with the verbal concepts."<sup>16</sup>

The Wolffians went farther. James Carpov (1699—1768) held that the Sacred Scriptures speak of physical and mathematical matters "according to the appearance (*secundum apparentiam*)" or "according to an optical truthfulness (*secundum veritatem opticam*)," but not "according to physical truthfulness (*secundum veritatem physicam*)."<sup>17</sup> Since the "physical truthfulness" does not belong to the purpose of revelation, it cannot be proved out of Holy Scripture.<sup>17</sup> Siegmund Baumgarten (1706

to 1757), another Wolffian, rejected an infusion of the inspired matter and dictation by the Holy Spirit. He held that in the selection and organization of material and in the style and presentation God retained as much of each Biblical author's way of thinking as was consistent with the purpose of the revelation, and that the authors had to use their full mental powers and exert all diligence to obtain so much historical information and to comprehend general verities.<sup>18</sup>

## II

It is unquestionably true that we can infer some of the implications of the truth of the Sacred Scriptures from the fact that the Holy Spirit of truth is the principal Author of the prophetic and apostolic writings. We may properly ask here, however, if such an inference is rational or strictly theological.

It is equally true that we can infer other implications of truth of the Sacred Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments.

But side by side with these reflections we must take into account the actual Sacred Scriptures in the concrete forms in which we have them by God's providence through the church's faithful transmission.

To begin with, we can well remind ourselves that God does not use the original Biblical documents to communicate His truthful Word to men, nor does He even make exclusive use of the Sacred Scriptures in their original languages for this purpose. Our own experience certifies that He communicates His truth to men in the King James Version, the Rheims-Douai version, the Revised Standard Version, the

*nificentius, per alios tenuius exprimere; quod vero has et non alias voces vel aequipollentes adhibuerunt scriptores sacri, hoc unice ab instinctu et inspiratione divina est. Spiritus S[anctus] enim ad scriptorum sacrorum capium ac indolem sese attemperavit ut mysteria secundum consuetum dicendi modum consignarentur. Adeoque ea verba Spiritus S[anctus] amanuensibus inspiravit, quibus alias usi fuissent, si sibi fuissent relictis* (Quenstedt, quaest. 4, fontes, dist. 1; pp. 75—76).

<sup>16</sup> *Cumque auctor Scripturae primarius unus sit, ac tota Scriptura θεόπνευστος, fatendum est, Spiritum S[anctum] ipsum in suggerendis verborum conceptibus accommodasse se ad indolem et conditionem amanuensium* (Johannes Guilielmus Baierus, *Compendium theologiae positivae*, prolegomena, cap. II, sect. 7g; ed. Carolus Ferdinandus Guilielmus Walther, I [St. Louis: Officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae, 1879], 111).

<sup>17</sup> Jacobus Carpovius, *Oeconomia salutis novi testamenti seu theologia revelata dogmatica methodo scientifica adornata*, I, 166—168, cited in Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Systematische Entwicklung aller in der Dogmatik vorkommenden Begriffe* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1819), p. 307.

<sup>18</sup> Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, *Evangelische Glaubenslehre*, ed. Johann Salomon Semler, III (Halle: Johann Justinus Gebauer, 1760), 35—37.

New English Bible, the Confraternity translation, and the paraphrases of J. B. Phillips and the late Ronald Knox, as He has done through the *Luther-Bibel*, the Vulgate, the Itala, the Peshitta, and the Septuagint. This is not without importance for our inquiry.

But setting aside this consideration, the form of the Scriptures, as we have them in the original Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek, possesses elements of decisive significance for the nature of the truth of Sacred Scriptures.

We shall refrain from entering upon the whole question of the inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. We need only observe that they have come to us in a form which clearly recognizes both their divine and their human authorship. Πᾶσα γραφή (2 Tim. 3:16) — the whole Old Testament — has the predicate θεόπνευστος. The Torah is not a human authority to St. Paul (1 Cor. 9:8). Yahweh speaks to Ahaz (Is. 7:10). The word comes from Yahweh to Jeremiah (Jer. 7:1). The Spirit of Yahweh speaks by David (2 Sam. 23:2; compare Matt. 22:43; Mark 12:36; Acts 4:25; Heb. 4:7). In almost all of its 375 Old Testament occurrences *ne'um* is followed by Yahweh — "Yahweh's oracle." The New Testament quotes from the Old Testament as the address and the speaking of God (Matt. 1:22; 22:31; Acts 13:47; Rom. 9:25; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 1:6-8; 5:5,6; 8:8) and of His Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 10:15).

On the other hand, Moses and the people of Israel sing their *Cantemus Domino* (Ex. 15:1-18; see also verse 21), Hannah sings her *Exultavit* (1 Sam. 2:1), David sings his *Dominus petra mea* (2 Sam. 22:1), the Mother of God her *Magnificat* (Luke

1:46). When the New Testament quotes the Old it often refers merely to the human author(s) by title or name Matt. 2:1, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 12:17; 15:7; 21:4; Acts 2:16, 31, 34; 7:48; Rom. 9:29; 10:19, 20). The author of the Third Gospel undertakes to write an orderly account of the events that underlie the Christian faith (Luke 1:3). St. Paul affirms that he gives no command of the Lord. (1 Cor. 7:25)

It is data like these which determined the ancient formula that God, or, by more specific appropriation, the Holy Spirit (described in the Nicaenoconstantinopolitanum as τὸ λαλήσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν), is the principal (or primary) Author of the Sacred Scriptures. This does not imply that He is the first among equals. It does imply that He is the originating *principium*. It also affirms the secondary and instrumental role of the human authors. In stressing their instrumental role, however, we must not forget that God availed Himself of *human* authors and that, as far as we can observe, they generally were in full possession of their *human* faculties when God used them.

We have a canon of the Sacred Scriptures that God has not defined by an explicit revelation, that the Catholic Church<sup>19</sup> has not fixed by any formal dogmatic decree, and that at most points in Christian history represents merely a moderately common consensus.

<sup>19</sup> The "Catholic Church" does not here refer to the Roman Catholic denomination, which defected from authentic Catholicity in the canon of the Sacred Scriptures which it defined at Trent, sessio quarta (1546), decretum de canonicis scripturis (H. P. Schroeder [ed.], *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* [St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1941], pp. 17 f., 296 f.).



We have Sacred Scriptures which have taken over from the secular world of men not only vocables, morphologies, grammars, syntactical systems, idioms and conceptual complexes, but also the remnants of a varied mélange of philosophies, natural histories, cosmologies, and eschatologies<sup>20</sup> that had passed into the public domain. These also, and not merely the words that are catalogued in Gesenius, Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, and Kittel-Friedrich, are the vehicles of the divine revelation.

In determining what is vehicle and what is cargo we can often appeal to the general hermeneutical principle of the presumed internal self-consistency of the document being inquired into. In the special case of the Sacred Scriptures theology has formulated this principal as "Scripture interprets Scripture (*Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*)" or some equivalent thesis. We still have always to decide, of course, which "Scriptura" is in the nominative and which is in the accusative, but the principle is as useful as well as a valid one.

Sometimes, however, this principle does not give us the decisive help that the situation calls for, and we are thrust back upon our human experience. By way of example, Eccl. 10:2 reads *lev chākhām līmīnō welev kesil lishmō'lo*. The King James Version translated this: "A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left." Superficially this is a scientific statement about human anatomy. It would be inappropriate, however, to deduce from it that we could have a college applicant step for a chest X-ray in front of a fluorescent screen calibrated in intelligence quotient points and let this

substitute for a carefully administered intelligence test or a realistic appraisal of his high school grades. The Revised Standard Version paraphrases and interprets the bare vocables of the Hebrew: "A wise man's heart inclines him toward the right, but a fool's heart toward the left." On the basis of this verse so interpreted we could not, however, correlate the frequency of right turns with automobile drivers' intelligence. The point is that in this passage the necessity of providing a metaphorical rather than a literal interpretation derives not from anything in the Sacred Scriptures but from human experience.

Again, when Mal. 1:11 (in the spirit of Joshua 10:13; Ps. 19:4-6; Matt. 5:45) speaks of the sun's rising and of its setting, it is our contemporary knowledge of the heavens and not something in the Sacred Scriptures that make us read this as a pre-Copernican phenomenal accommodation. We can say the same thing about references to the four corners of the earth in Is. 11:12 and Rev. 7:1 and to the constellations in Job 38:31. When our contemporary knowledge of the natural order seems to conflict with a literal acceptance of other Biblical assertions, may we not consider the possibility that here, too, we are dealing with prescientific descriptions which are not integral to the divine revelation?

Turning to other details, we have such phenomena as a passage which seems to be taken from the Book of Zechariah ascribed in Matt. 27:9, 10 to Jeremiah; St. Jerome claims to have seen an *Apocryphon of Jeremiah* which contained the citation word for word. In quoting from the Old Testament, the New Testament is likely

<sup>20</sup> ταρταρώσας in 2 Peter 2:4, for example.

to expand the Old Testament source, abbreviate it, alter it, paraphrase it, and even quote it according to the Septuagint (Acts 15:16-18 quoting Amos 9:11, 12 and Heb. 10:5-9 quoting Ps. 40:6-8 are instructive examples). This procedure has implications for the importance of the precise words and a number of other issues.<sup>21</sup> At times we find in the New Testament a theologically conditioned use of the Old Testament that possibly can best be described as allusive.<sup>22</sup> The New Testament can allegorize an Old Testament pericope and appear to assume that the allegorical meaning will be self-evident to the reader (Gal. 4:21 to 31). St. Paul can quote Eliphaz the Temanite (Job 5:13) as authoritative in 1 Cor. 3:19. The supernatural rock that followed Israel according to 1 Cor. 10:4 does not occur in the Old Testament but in the Jewish tradition that the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan represents. In Gal. 3:16 St. Paul can make a point of the difference between σπέρμα and σπέρματα, although Gen. 12:7 and parallels use the collective *zera'*, which admits of no such differentiation. In Gal. 3:17 he raises the problem of the length of time between the promise to Abraham and the giving of the Torah (430 years, with the LXX text of Ex. 12:40, or 645 years, on the basis of Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9 and the Hebrew of Ex. 12:40). 2 Tim. 3:8 derives the names of Jannes and Jambres not from

the Biblical account (Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18, 19) but apparently from Jewish tradition. St. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 raises in verse 4 the issue of the chronological relation of the departure of Abraham from Haran to the death of Terah in the light of Gen. 11:26, 32 and 12:4 and the possible dependence of the Protomartyr on an oral tradition that was likewise familiar to Philo the Jew (for another example see v. 23). Verses 15 and 16 raise the question of the burial place of Jacob (Shechem or Hebron-Mamre) when compared with Gen. 50:13 (see also 23:16-18 and Josh. 24:32).<sup>23</sup>

Admittedly an argument from literary parallels is not intrinsically decisive. Nevertheless, the striking similarities of Matt. 11:28-30 and Ecclus. 51:23, 26-27 raise questions. The situation is similar when we compare Luke 12:19, 20 with Ecclus. 11:19; Rom. 1:20-23, 26, 29-31 with Wisdom 12:24; 13:5, 8; 14:24-27; Rom. 9:20 to 23 with Wisdom 12:2, 20; 15:7; the divine πανοπλία passage Eph. 6:13-17 with Wisdom 5:17-20; 2 Cor. 5:1, 4 with Wisdom 9:15;<sup>24</sup> Heb. 11:35 with 2 Macc. 6 (especially v. 19) and 7, as Theodoret observed as early as the fifth century; Heb. 1:1-4 with Wisdom 7:22-26;<sup>25</sup> James 1:13 with Ecclus. 15:11, 12; James 1:19 with Ecclus. 5:11; James 5:3 with Ecclus.

<sup>21</sup> The New Testament's extensive use of the Septuagint was one reason why some of the ancient fathers accepted the legend of its divine inspiration.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Matt. 2:15 quoting Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:23 apparently quoting Is. 11:1, with Ναζωραῖος reflecting the Hebrew *netzer*; but see also Num. 6:1-21 and Judg. 13:5 (*nazir*-Ναζωραῖος).

<sup>23</sup> In verses 22, 23, and 30 some of the details of St. Stephen's account of Moses seem to rest on Palestinian Jewish tradition (Joachim Jeremias, "Μουσῆς," in Gerhard Kittel [ed.], *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, IV [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1942], 870).

<sup>24</sup> The only passages in Biblical Greek where σκῆνος occurs.

<sup>25</sup> Note the occurrence of πολυμερῶς, πολυμερές and ἀπαύγασμα in both passages.

12:11; <sup>26</sup> 29:9, 10; and Rev. 21:18-21 with Tobit 13:16, 17.

Jude 6 seems to have affinities with Gen. 6:1-4 (compare the ἄγγελοι of the Codex Alexandrinus rescriptor in verse 2) as amplified by 1 Enoch 10:4-6. In verse 9 Saint Jude apparently derives his information about the account of St. Michael's contest with Satan from a form of the pseudepigraphic Assumption of Moses known to the early church fathers. Verses 14, 15 explicitly ascribe a passage from 1 Enoch 1:9 to the "seventh-from-Adam Enoch" — an ascription that has long given Christian exegetes concern. Tertullian felt that it conferred canonical authority on the whole of 1 Enoch. Some contemporaries of Saint Jerome rejected the whole Letter of Saint Jude because it quoted a pseudepigraphon. St. Augustine, whose view prevailed generally, was willing to allow St. Jude to quote a single passage from 1 Enoch without impairing his own apostolic authority or conferring canonical status on the entire pseudepigraphon.<sup>27</sup>

Again, God has given us the account of His reconciling action in Jesus Christ not in one account, but in four gospels. As the Gospel came from the breath and breathing of God, it was a "four-shaped Gospel" (*euangelion tetramorphon*), to use the happy term of St. Irenaeus. It was the anti-egghead Gnostic heretic Tatian who created for the church the first diates-

saron.<sup>28</sup> This is not to deprecate the value of the vast and reverent harmonistic effort that Christian exegetes have expended upon the gospels. Yet the fact persists that no harmony is wholly satisfying. We achieve the illusion of continuity only at the cost of suppressing data which the sacred writers provide by divine inspiration. The Synoptic problem and the problem of the Fourth Gospel remain real problems. From the genealogies and the chronology in the infancy narratives to the events of the resurrection and the 40 days following, we are confronted with episodes that appear in different sequences (for example, Matt. 8:1-4 and Luke 5:12-16; 6:20); with logia that appear in different forms which seem to reflect editorial adjustment in view of a different *Sitz im Leben* (for example, Mark 10:17, 18; Luke 18:18, 19; Matt. 19:16, 17); with subsidiary details that it is impossible to reconcile with certainty; and with parables that change their audience from evangelist to evangelist (for instance, Matt. 18:1, 10-14; Luke 15:2-7). Objectively, the question whether the rooster crowed once or twice before St. Peter's third denial of our Lord on Good Friday morning (Mark 14:30, 72; Matt. 26:34, 74, 75; Luke 22:34, 60, 61; John 13:38; 18:27) is minor. More important are such problems as the time of the end in the "Little Apocalypse" of Mark 13 and its parallels (or recensions) in Matt. 24:1-42 and Luke 21:5-35, and the text of the words with which our Lord instituted the most venerable Sacrament of the Altar.

In addition to the Gospels, we have

<sup>26</sup> In Biblical Greek κατίσω occurs only in these two passages.

<sup>27</sup> The parallels between the First Gospel's account of our Lord's infancy in chapter 2 and traditional Jewish accounts of Moses' birth and early life must have appeared striking to early Jewish Christians (see Jeremias, *op. cit.*, pp. 874 f.).

<sup>28</sup> Tatian's omission of our Lord's genealogies from his harmony make him one of the earliest literary critics of the Bible.

other parallel accounts that diverge, sometimes vastly, sometimes merely in detail. A case in point is presented by the two books of Chronicles. When we compare them with the four books of Samuel and Kings it becomes clear that they by no means merely contain Paralipomena; from some points of view they are "Paraleipomena." The variant accounts of David's last days and Saul's accession present one specific instance. Another involves the differences in the casualty reports after the battle of Helam in 2 Sam. 10:18 and 1 Chron. 19:18. There is the question if it was God (2 Sam. 24:1) or Satan (1 Chron. 21:1) who opposed Israel and incited David to number the nation. The military statistics given in 2 Sam. 24:9 are different from those given in 1 Chron. 21:5; similarly, those given in 1 Kings 4:26 differ from those given in 2 Chron. 9:25. There are differences in the scope of the reformatory and military activity of Asa as reported in 1 Kings 15:14, 16 and as reported in 2 Chron. 14:3, 5, 6. Again, the age of Ahaziah at his accession is reported differently by 2 Kings 8:26 and by 2 Chron. 22:2.

We have other phenomena. For instance, the apparently hyperbolic use of large numbers in the Old Testament (so possibly in 2 Chron. 13:17 and 14:9) raises problems. So does the chronology of the Old Testament implied by the data of Gen. 5 when the Masoretic text is compared either with the Septuagint or with the postulates of even the most conservative datings of the earth and the universe by modern scientific methods. Another problem is the source of the horses in Ex. 14:9 in view of 9:3, 6. The *'arnevet* of Lev. 11:6 only *appears* to chew the cud.

Deborah sings a song (Judg. 5:1) apparently written about her (v. 7). We have synchronistic problems connected with the death of Baasha (1 Kings 16:6-8 and 2 Chron. 16:1) and the accession of Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30 and 17:1). The 20-year-long reign of Pekah in 2 Kings 15:27, which 1 Kings 15:32 and 16:1 also imply, cannot be reconciled with the Assyrian synchronisms. We have another synchronistic problem in the dates of Hezekiah's reign posed by 2 Kings 18:1 when compared with 15:30; 18:2; 20:6.

We have variant accounts of events in what appear to be different sources within the sacred record. Cases in point are the creation accounts of Gen. 1:1-2: 4a, and of 2:4b-3:24; the twofold origin given for the names Beersheba (Gen. 21:30, 31 and 26:32-38) and Bethel (Gen. 28:18, 19 and 35:15); the two callings of Moses and Aaron (Ex. 3:1-6:1 and 6:2-7:7); the location of Gen. 11 after Gen. 10 (compare especially 10:5, 20, 31 with 11:1 and 10:21-31 with 11:10-32); the different versions of the Decalog; the problem of reconciling the report of 1 Sam. 16:18-23 with 1 Sam. 17:32-38 and the conversation between Saul and David of 1 Sam. 17:55 to 58; the two references to the Goliath of Gath the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam (1 Sam. 17:4, 7, 49-51; 2 Sam. 21:18-22; see also 1 Chron. 20:5); and the number of children borne by Saul's daughter Michal (2 Sam. 6:23 and 21:8). Deuteronomy 10:1-7 raises the problems of the maker of the ark of the covenant when compared with Ex. 37:1, of the date of the deposit of the second set of the tables of Law in the ark when compared with Ex. 19:1 and 40:17, 20, the itinerary of Israel when compared with Num. 33:30

to 39, and the time and place of Aaron's death when compared with Num. 20:1, 22 to 29; 33:38; and Deut. 32:50.

The preceding is not intended to provide an exhaustive, but merely a representative, list of problems.<sup>29</sup> Every serious student of the Sacred Scriptures is aware of these and many other difficulties. Admittedly, it is possible to explain some or all of the cited difficulties to one's own satisfaction. But that they are genuine difficulties remains a fact attested by the volume of effort that Christian exegetes and systematicians have expended in endeavoring to account for them from the days of the primitive church on. It may be an index to the gravity of the problem that we in our time have difficulty in finding a categorical label for these Scriptural phenomena. We quite properly shy away from "contradictions," "errors," and "mistakes." Yet such euphemisms as "paradoxes," "discrepancies," "disagreements," and "variations" are hardly better.

The fact is that the truth of the Sacred Scriptures is something to be evaluated in terms of their own criteria and of the qualities which they themselves exhibit. These qualities do not—speaking generally—include great precision in formulation, stenographic fidelity in reporting exact words, prosaic literalism in interpretation, bibliographically accurate citations of author and title, comprehensive documentation, carefully synchronized chro-

nologies, a modern historiographic sense, harmonistically consistent adjustment of sources to one another, and meticulously exact descriptions of attendant historical, physical, and other scientific details. These were not generally the qualities of the men or of the cultures which the Holy Spirit employed, and where these qualities are absent in the Sacred Scriptures, this, too, is a mark of the Holy Spirit's condescension and accommodation not to error but to humanity. Admittedly the picture of the Sacred Scriptures that emerges when all these factors are taken into account is likely to be less tidy than a purely theoretical construct, but it is also likely to be more realistic, more correct, and more genuinely truthful.

### III

It does not seem to this writer that we are serving the best interests of the church when either we continue formally to reaffirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures or even continue to employ the term. Outside our circles, with the possible exception of the Roman Catholic Church, the term "inerrancy" has in general become the shibboleth of sectarians, often of obscurantist sectarians. For them the term usually implies commitment to certain traditional interpretations which they place on certain Bible passages and which they apparently deem essential to their spiritual security. The motivation of the highly vocal publishers of certain periodicals in Lutheran circles is obviously complex, but this same kind of compulsive necessity seems to animate the insistence of some of them on the term "inerrancy." In this situation the continual reaffirmation of our formal adherence to the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures is perilous. Our motives

<sup>29</sup> This writer does not intend to imply that some other more modern issues—for example, the Dominical institution of Holy Baptism and of the Sacrament of the Altar, or the dispensability of the virgin conception (and birth) of our Lord as an article of the creed because only the infancy accounts of Matthew and Luke affirm it explicitly—are in the same category.

may be most laudable and our understanding of the implications of the term for ourselves may be most correct. Yet we run the risk of confirming our contemporary sectarians in their confusion and of projecting a false image of our own theological position.

At the same time we should carefully check our own motivation for not using the word "inerrancy." Certainly a mere desire to avoid being classified as obscurantists would not suffice, in view of our Lord's words, "Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in the glory of the Father with the holy angels" (Matt. 8:38). Again, we cannot refuse to employ the word "inerrancy" on the ground that the Biblical doctrine of inspiration is docetic, just as we cannot entertain the charge that the Biblical doctrines of the virgin conception (and birth) or of the sinlessness of our Lord, for instance, are docetic.

A second reason for ceasing formally to reaffirm our formal commitment to the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures is its ultimate *theological* irrelevance. A little noticed footnote in the doctoral dissertation of Robert Preus points out that "the dogmaticians use the same arguments and proof texts for the inerrancy of Scripture as for its inspiration."<sup>30</sup> This statement, quite correct for the later dogmaticians like Abraham Calovius (1612—1686), whom Preus instances as an example, illustrates two points: (1) the thesis that the Sacred Scriptures are "free of error (*errore ex-*

*pertes*)" is for the dogmaticians basically a negative way of affirming inspiration; (2) this thesis implies a situation which Quenstedt sketches in these words: "Not only the canonical books of the sacred volume themselves, but even the letters, points, and words of the original text survive without any corruption, that is, the Hebrew text of the O[ld] T[estament] . . . and also the Greek text of the N[ew] T[estament] . . . have been preserved by the divine providence complete and uncorrupted."<sup>31</sup> This is a position which modern textual criticism renders untenable. As this has become more and more apparent, the claim of inerrancy has increasingly been posited only of the originals.<sup>32</sup>

The original documents are inaccessible and irrecoverable, however. The ascription of inerrancy to these documents is therefore an irrelevant and ultimately superfluous predication which says nothing more than that inspiration is the act of the Holy Spirit and that God is truthful. For copies—which is all that we have to appeal to today—we can at most claim

<sup>31</sup> *Non tantum libri ipsi canonici sacri codicis, sed etiam literae, puncta et verba textus originalis sine omni corruptione supersunt, hoc est, Hebraeus textus V[eteris] T[estamenti] . . . itemque textus Graecus N[ovi] T[estamenti] . . . per divinam providentiam integer et incorruptus conservatus est* (Quenstedt, quaest. 18, thesis; p. 194. See also quaest. 19, *ekthesis*, obs. 2; p. 206).

<sup>32</sup> For the sake of precise distinction alone, without drawing any conclusions from his stipulation, Quenstedt had distinguished between the original manuscripts and the no-longer-existing autographic copies which Moses, the prophets, and the apostles "wrote with their own hands or which in the case of copies written by others they had attested with their signatures" (*sua manu scripserunt, vel per alios scripta sua subscriptione confirmarunt*). Ibid., quaest. 19, *ekthesis*, obs. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture* (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1955), p. 78, n. 2.

a relative, a derived, a virtual inerrancy. But "inerrant" — like other adjectives compounded with a negative prefix — implies a perfect logical dichotomy that has no middle term. It confronts us with the same kind of absolute antithesis as complete-incomplete, perfect-imperfect, commensurable-incommensurable, demonstrable-in-demonstrable, exact-inexact, accurate-inaccurate, organic-inorganic. Thus by inference it compels us to say less about the Sacred Scriptures as we actually have them than we as Lutherans want to be able to say about them.

Again, since the original documents are inaccessible and apparently irrecoverable, the ascription of inerrancy to these documents is in the last analysis *practically* irrelevant.<sup>33</sup> "The Sacred Scriptures are

<sup>33</sup> A senior member of the St. Louis faculty has shared with this writer the following quotation illustrating the argument from textual criticism as he was compelled to confront it in his early graduate studies over four decades ago. It is footnote 1 on page 3 of Marvin R. Vincent, *A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1899):

"Nothing can be more puerile or more desperate than the effort to vindicate the divine inspiration of Scripture by the assertion of the verbal inerrancy of the autographs, and to erect that assertion into a test of orthodoxy. For —

"1. There is no possible means of verifying the assertion, since the autographs have utterly disappeared.

"2. It assumes a mechanical dictation of the *ipsissima verba* to the writers, which is contradicted by the whole character and structure of the Bible.

"3. It is of no practical value, since it furnishes no means of deciding between various readings and discrepant statements.

"4. It is founded upon a pure assumption as to the character of inspiration — namely, that inspiration involves verbal inerrancy, which is the very thing to be proved, and which could be proved only by producing inerrant autographs.

"5. If a written, inspired revelation is nec-

essary for mankind, and if such a revelation, in order to be inspired, must be verbally inerrant, the necessity has not been met. There is no verbally inerrant, and therefore no inspired, revelation in writing. The autographs have vanished, and no divine guidance or interposition has prevented mistakes in transcription or in printing. The text of Scripture, in the best form in which critical scholarship can exhibit it, presents numerous errors and discrepancies."

the Word of God" is a maximum statement; we cannot say more than this by affirming that the irrecoverable original documents of the Sacred Scriptures were inerrant. For these reasons, it would seem that we ought to cease affirming the inerrancy of something that practically does not exist. It is to be doubted if the distinction between the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures as we have them and the inerrancy of the irrecoverable original documents is one which a layman appreciates. What is significant is that the lone statement which calls the Old Testament *θεόπνευστος* (2 Tim. 3:16) is made with reference not to autographs nor apparently even to apographs, but in the context (since Lois and Eunice are Greek names of Jewish women and Timothy had not been circumcised prior to Acts 16:3) presumably with reference to the Septuagint Version.<sup>34</sup>

To repeat: Our better information in the field of textual criticism and textual history makes many of the now naive-seeming oversimplifications of the 16th and 17th centuries untenable. We may still marvel reverently and gratefully — as

essay for mankind, and if such a revelation, in order to be inspired, must be verbally inerrant, the necessity has not been met. There is no verbally inerrant, and therefore no inspired, revelation in writing. The autographs have vanished, and no divine guidance or interposition has prevented mistakes in transcription or in printing. The text of Scripture, in the best form in which critical scholarship can exhibit it, presents numerous errors and discrepancies."

<sup>34</sup> This is of course not intended to preclude or to brand as futile the theological exploration of the possible implications of the mysterious process of inspiration; it is intended to affirm that in the present situation of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod the affirmation of inerrancy is practically irrelevant.

we should—at the providence of God that has preserved so many witnesses to the New Testament text which enable us to recreate the presumptive original with such a high degree of probability, and that has disclosed so many new and unexpected witnesses to the Old Testament text in our own time. But we can no longer affirm the doctrine of the incorruptibility of the transmitted text with the enthusiasm or the scope with which the 17th century felt itself free to do so.

Furthermore, it seems to be a widely held conviction that the doctrine of the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures guarantees the orthodoxy of the church or the person who affirms it. No such necessary correlation exists. This ought to be clear from the fact that in our time Orthodox Jews (in the case of the Old Testament), the Roman Catholic integralists, the neo-calvinist and postfundamentalist groups in the National Association of Evangelicals, the bulk of the organized membership of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements, the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's witnesses all affirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures. In past history the first church father explicitly to affirm the Sacred Scriptures' absolute freedom from error, St. Jerome, held (with Origen, who taught a rigid verbal inspiration) that the Sacred Scriptures contained ludicrous and blasphemous elements which demanded an allegorical interpretation if the Holy Spirit's integrity were to be vindicated.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Obviously, in view of the line that runs from Jean Astruc to the post-Bultmannians, a formal denial of the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures does not guarantee orthodoxy. But an unqualified affirmation of the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures is no prophylaxis against doctrinal error or even heresy either.

The posture of faith is always a posture symbolized by the word "nevertheless." The question is: What words shall we say before and after "nevertheless"?

Are we not finally most reverent if we say that many of the matters that detractors of the Sacred Scriptures have decried as error are accidental to the divine revelation and do not affect its substance<sup>36</sup> and if we then affirm, "Nevertheless, the Sacred Scriptures are without any qualification the Word of God and, by God's own declaration, true"?<sup>37</sup>

Whether we retain the term "inerrancy," however, or content ourselves with affirming that the Sacred Scriptures are God's Word and true, it is essential that we approach this thesis from the a priori of our baptism and with a clear appreciation of the self-declared purposes of the Sacred Scriptures and with a serious effort to appreciate the purpose of the individual author.

God has given us a revelation of His

<sup>36</sup> At many points we may feel impelled to repeat the distych tag-line that the already cited August Pfeiffer quotes as the reason why some psalms are acrostics and other are not: *Sic placuit Domino; dicere plura nefas* (That's the way it pleased the Lord; to say anything more would be impious). (Pfeifferus, p. 95.) We must learn to take the Scriptures as they are and not make them out to be something else in order to fit our theological theories about them.

<sup>37</sup> This in no way minimizes the task of the exegete or depreciates the contribution of the archaeologist and the textual critic; it merely suggests that their primary mission is to be concerned with the authentically religious aspects of the Sacred Scriptures rather than with the secular aspects, just as the fact that our heavenly Father has counted the hairs on the head of every human being shows His infinite concern for each of us without being of specific significance for the working barber or beautician.



being and of His purpose in the Sacred Scriptures to enlighten us in our native darkness (Ps. 119:105); to create and establish in us faith in Christ as God's Son (John 20:21); to provide us with instruction (διδασκαλία), to reprove us, to correct us, to train us in righteousness, that as men of God we may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16); to give us the right mind-set (νοῦθεσία, 1 Cor. 10:11); to provide our hope with encouragement (παράκλησις, Rom. 15:4) and for other religious ends. He did not give us His revelation to satisfy our curiosity (even about spiritual things) or to give us information about the subject matter of secular disciplines like geography, mathematics, history, astronomy, physics, and genealogy.

We need equally to be as sure as we can be about the purpose of a particular author in a particular passage. Where the stress is on a religious purpose, his concern with the precise and literal accuracy of concomitant historical or scientific detail may recede into the background. The presentation may be cast in a form that to the boundless wisdom of the primary Author of the Sacred Scriptures seems best calculated to impart the religious truth at issue to all kinds of hearers and readers through the centuries of human history. Here, too, the possibility must not be overlooked that the human author is using a literary form natural to him but not part of our literary conventions—such as a Semitic form of epic in the first chapters of Genesis and apocalyptic in the last book of the canon. Many of the judgments that even some Lutheran theologians make about the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures still derive from a time when scholars'

knowledge of the literary types available to the Holy Spirit and to the Biblical writers was more meager than it is now. The discoveries of archaeology have disclosed to us many parallel patterns of expression which are contemporary with and which in some cases even antedate the Biblical documents.<sup>38</sup>

It has become abundantly clear that we need not and indeed cannot force all the Biblical documents into the relatively few literary categories that derive largely from a post-Biblical classical literary tradition. Far less can we impose upon the sacred authors the canons of historiography that underly the Cambridge or the Propyläen histories. Before we cry either "error" or "literal truth," we need to be sure that we understand as fully as the present state of knowledge permits the objectives of the literary type that the Bible is using. Here, since these types do not come neatly labeled in Holy Scripture, we must in charity allow for differences of isagogical and hermeneutical opinion.

In applying the criterion of human experience to which we have previously adverted, there will likewise be inevitable differences of opinion—for example, as to the extent that midrashic influence can be allowed in the Old Testament or in the New. Obviously, we who believe in the almighty power of a Pantocrator to whom nothing will be impossible will not exclude the possibility of miracle at every point on principle, but the other principle of the economy of miracles may induce

<sup>38</sup> This does not imply that the Sacred Scriptures are dependent for their revelatory content on these non-Israelite documents or to suggest, for example, that the Genesis narratives are merely Shumero-Akkadian mythology demythologized.

one or the other of us to accept an alternative solution in certain cases.

In all this, of course, we need to find a defensible mean. We cannot capitulate to the uncritical Athenian enthusiasm that greets every novel isagogical theory or exegetical interpretation as an assured result. Nor can we cherish the traditionalist skepticism that refuses to concede any possible merit to a view which calls into question a personally long-held, and on occasion very vocally asserted, position.

At the same time, we must take care not to *deny* the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures, both for pastoral reasons and because the initial affirmation of the freedom of the Sacred Scriptures from error was designed to reinforce and to affirm in other words the doctrine that the Sacred Scriptures have the Holy Spirit as their principal Author and that they are the truthful word of the God of Truth to men. An explicit denial of inerrancy would almost certainly be interpreted as a rejection of the main thesis of which inerrancy is a *Schutzlehre*.

The most defensible strategy, it would seem, would be to refrain from using the term "inerrancy" in our presentations. In contexts where we should normally make a statement on this point, we should instead affirm positively that the Sacred Scriptures have the Holy Spirit as their principal Author, that they are the Word

of God, and that they are true and dependable. But what if we are explicitly challenged? Then we should first refuse to reply to loaded questions with "yes" or "no." Next we should point out the inadequacy of "inerrancy" as a term from the standpoint of communication. Then we should patiently affirm our acceptance of everything that the Sacred Scriptures say about themselves and that the Lutheran symbols say about them. Finally we should assert our conviction that the Sacred Scriptures have the Holy Spirit as their principal Author, that they are the Word of God in the language of historical human beings, and that they are true and dependable. In the meantime, we need to continue to explore reverently and prayerfully together the isagogical and hermeneutical problems and possibilities that these convictions about the Sacred Scriptures imply. We shall approach this exploration from various angles and upon the basis of backgrounds that differ considerably in detail (despite our unanimous commitment to our Lord, to His written revelation, and to the Lutheran symbols). For that reason we must not expect complete agreement in method or in results, nor dare we despair of ourselves, of other theologians and clergymen, of our church body or of the church because such agreement fails to materialize.

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