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# The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod Continued

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IN A PREVIOUS ISSUE of THE SPRINGFIELDER, my colleague Dr. Raymond Surburg prepared a review article on Paul Bretscher's *After The Purifying*.<sup>1</sup> It is not the custom of our journal to review books twice unless there is some special reason to do so. I believe that such a reason exists. Several years ago I attempted to analyze theologically some of the historical roots that have brought us to the current impasse in Missouri Synod theology in an article entitled "The Law-Gospel Debate in The Missouri Synod."<sup>2</sup> In that article I attempted to isolate one factor to the exclusion of all others that could uniquely be attributed to what I took the liberty of dubbing the "Valparaiso theology." The term "Valparaiso" was used because the most prominent opponents of the theology in "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" had in one way or another been associated with that university in northeastern Indiana. My response discussed Paul G. Bretscher's article, "The Log in Your Own Eye,"<sup>3</sup> which was in part a response to "A Statement."

Nearly five years have passed since I wrote about Dr. Bretscher's position, which was the classical expression of the "Valparaiso Theology,"<sup>4</sup>

The "Valparaiso Theology" holds that Gospel, as the preached good news about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins, is the basis of theological work. It also holds that the Scriptures when used by themselves can lead to conflicting opinions and thus the Gospel as the presupposition of faith must be used in approaching the Scriptures.

Shortly following I made a specific reference to Dr. Bretscher's position,<sup>5</sup>

He who has faith in Christ or a divinely given wisdom will know the Scripture. Faith in the Gospel precedes any commitment to the Scriptures or any form of them, e.g. a paraphrase. It is a circle that can be joined at any point.

Bretscher's *After the Purifying*<sup>6</sup> may be considered a sequel to "The Log in Your Own Eye." Both may be viewed as reactions to significant happenings in the Missouri Synod. I shall let the reader provide his own chronological listing of events in the Missouri Synod between April 1972 and April 1975. The publication of Bretscher's new book is not just another event in the history of publishing. It is being provided to most parochial school teachers of the Missouri Synod through the Lutheran Education Association. A letter from Donald Kell, the association's president, states that eight thousand copies have already been sold. A second printing might be necessary. Special rates are making the widest distribution possible.<sup>6a</sup>

I hesitate to identify *the* theological position of Evangelical

Lutherans in Mission (ELIM). When I analyzed a document presented to the August 1974 convention of that group,<sup>7</sup> Richard J. Neuhaus, the competent spokesman for ELIM, said in *Forum Letter*<sup>8</sup> that I had taken the document more seriously than anyone who drafted or adopted it. Let us hope that our dear brother was exaggerating at least for those of us who take seriously the present controversy. How disappointed some would be if they found out they had been attacking verbal windmills.

In a not so subtle way Bretscher's *After the Purifying* is a direct reaction to recent events in the Missouri Synod, specifically the adoption of "A Statement of Scriptural and Confessional Principles" and synodical personnel changes.<sup>9</sup> Therefore this book must be understood as furthering the cause of the ELIM group. Its basic purpose is to gain a sympathetic understanding from parochial school teachers in the Missouri Synod. On two counts some serious attention must be given it: (1) It represents what may be considered the classical ELIM theology, so far as it is possible for any one person to represent it. (2) It is an attempt to gain a sympathetic hearing for, if not to effect a total conversion to, the ELIM theological position. Negatively, it would involve a renunciation, at least partially, of the traditional position of the Missouri Synod.

Essential to the theology of the very influential Swiss theologian Karl Barth was a peculiar understanding of a concept called "the Word of God," which was defined as God's address to men. Barth's concept of "the Word of God" involved a vertical invasion of God into our world.<sup>10</sup> The Bible was not equated with "the Word of God" but could provide a place where the "the Word of God" could become active, under the right circumstances, in the lives of men.<sup>11</sup> It is hard not to conclude that Bretscher has adopted this totally false and erroneous Barthian view of "the Word of God" and dressed it up in traditional Lutheran terminology to make it digestible for Missourian palates. Bretscher's case rests on his definition of "the Word of God"; the most common synonym is "Gospel." Since this is so basic for understanding Bretscher, he should be permitted to speak for himself.<sup>12</sup>

We shall unfold the thesis that the authentic meaning of the phrase "the Word of God" is that found in Luther's Catechisms. The Spirit speaks the Word of God's grace to our hearts out of the cross of Christ. By means of that Word He works the miracle of faith. The closest synonym for "the Word of God" is "the Gospel" in all its senses, including also the antithetical "Law."

Bretscher sets up what amounts to an algebraic formula to demonstrate the validity of his theological proposition: "the Word of God"="Gospel"=proclamation about God's grace, centering in the cross but also involving Law, Law at least in some sense. "Gospel" and "Word of God" are basically interchangeable for Bretscher. Here the concept of "the Word of God" does not mean or necessarily require a type of historical report of what happened, but a direct action of God in the hearts of people. This may be called a dynamic concept of "the Word of God." Bretscher like Karl Barth has given new



meanings to traditional terms and this complexity can only lead to incurable confusion unless each of the terms is defined. Whenever the reader understands "the Word of God" in any other sense, e.g., the Bible, he cannot but fail to understand Bretscher. Bretscher is quite clear in stating that his purpose is to present a theology different from the traditional one. He takes issue with the older Missouri Synod teachers and even lays their "sin" on the back of the seventeenth century theologians.<sup>13</sup>

In understanding any theological system it is important to determine where that system begins. Bretscher begins his system by determining the meaning of "the Word of God" in the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther.<sup>14</sup> No one can doubt that such components as "the Word of God" and Luther's two Catechisms are the stuff out of which orthodoxy is made—but heterodoxy can be made out of the same stuff, if only arranged differently.

Bretscher is guilty of two errors from a Lutheran perspective. First, Lutheran theology does not begin with the Lutheran Confessions, as Bretscher does in using the two catechisms of Luther, in establishing a foundation for itself. (This is not to deny that it begins with the Small Catechism as a teaching device.) It begins with the Scriptures and tests its results against the Lutheran Confessions to which Luther's Catechisms belong. Bretscher takes the concept identified as "the Word of God" and to determine a meaning does something that resembles a word-study in these two of our Confessions. There are eleven Confessions of the Lutheran Church, and Bretscher could be asked why he limited himself to only two. Bretscher's method is a kind of confessional proof-texting. His study is supposed to demonstrate that the phrases "His word," "that Word," "the words," "these words," etc. are to be understood according to his own sense, i.e., Gospel, a dynamic Word. Negatively Bretscher wants to show that the phrase "the Word of God" and similar phrases are not just equivalent to the Bible. "It is clear from the Catechisms that in Luther's mind 'the Word of God' is not simply equivalent to the Bible."<sup>15</sup> At least ten years ago Dr. Herbert Bouman, professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis did show that in the Lutheran Confessions the phrase "the Word of God" and Scriptures can be and are used as equivalents. This is not to deny that the phrase "the Word of God" may be used of Gospel, but the phrase is definitely used of the Bible. This is substantiated by Holsten Fagerberg, "Regardless of how many other definitions can be and indeed have been applied to the expression 'God's Word,' its relationship to the Bible must be considered of fundamental significance to the Reformation theology."<sup>16</sup> Even in the catechisms cited by Bretscher to demonstrate his interpretation, the phrase "the Word of God" can refer to a Bible passage authoritatively spoken by God. Take, for example, Luther's explanation of Baptism in the Small Catechism.<sup>17</sup> We are told that, "Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word." Then comes the question "Which is that word of God?" The answer is in the form of a Bible passage. "Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Matthew: Go ye therefore and make disciples out of all nations, . . ."

Those who will study the Lutheran Confessions for themselves will see that these confessions, especially in discussing the question of authority, do equate the Word of God with the Bible; because the Bible is recognized as the Word of God, it is the source of Christian doctrine. This fact, of course, is explicitly denied by Bretscher. Yes, for him the Bible has authority, but the Bible's authority derives from the fact that it possesses the Gospel. The point here, however, is that Bretscher clearly has a faulty or at least a truncated concept of how the phrase "the Word of God" is used in the Lutheran Confessions. What is positively disastrous is that he is *teaching* his erroneous concept to the teachers of our children in the parochial school. This is hardly an insignificant matter.

What is even more regrettable is the starting-place for Bretscher's theology. It has been mentioned above. It is not Lutheran to begin with the Lutheran Confessions. It is Lutheran to begin with the Bible and to confirm and test our findings with the Lutheran Confessions. Simply to begin with the Lutheran Confessions without explaining their relationship to the Scriptures as the Word of God is to elevate the Lutheran Confessions to that position of honor only held by the Scriptures. In addition, it is against the rules of sound logic to take a phrase, any phrase, and run it through any number of documents to determine one meaning by which all other uses of the phrase must be understood. Even in the Old and New Testaments, the phrase "the Word," "the Word of God," "the Word of the Lord," etc. can have a variety of meanings. The meaning of each is to be determined by the context in which it is found. It is illogical to transpose the meaning of one use of the phrase upon another. But this is what Bretscher has done! He is wrong in asserting that there is only one meaning for the phrase.<sup>17a</sup> After he has determined what he thinks is the meaning of "the Word of God" in the Catechisms of Luther he applies it to the constitution of the Missouri Synod. Such an illogical procedure will produce only more confusion.

Bretscher is opposed to any concept which suggests that the Scripture "as the written Word of God" is the source of Christian doctrine. But this is the very position of the Missouri Synod constitution as cited by Bretscher himself.<sup>18</sup>

For example, Article II of the Synod's Constitution declares that the Synod and every member "accepts without reservation" the Scriptures "as the written Word of God." But what do the members of the Synod have in mind when they hear and use that phrase, "the Word of God"? To many, perhaps most, it means the inspired and inerrant Scriptures, with God as the true Author of every word. To a minority, however, "the Word of God" means the proclamation of grace in Christ to sinners, and the Scriptures as the fountain and norm of that Word . . . To submit to Scripture as "the Word of God" by the "Gospel" meaning of that phrase is quite different from submitting to Scripture's authority by way of the doctrine of inspiration.

By a slight omission of the word "written," Bretscher has in fact changed the letter and the spirit of the Synod's Constitution. What is



important is what the constitution's writers had in mind—not the readers! The constitution calls the Scriptures “the *written* Word of God” (emphasis added). In the remainder of the discussion Bretscher simply uses the phrase “the Word of God” and proposes that his definition of “the Word of God,” as a type of “Gospel” proclamation of the forgiveness of sins is tenable within the boundaries of the constitution. Bretscher’s concept of “the Word of God” is only possible because he dropped the word “written” from the remainder of his discussion. The clear fact is that the inspired and inerrant written Word of God as the source of doctrine is the very position of the Synod’s Constitution. Dishonesty might be too strong a word to label this sleight of hand. But what kind of theological discussion is possible where the apparent and evident meaning of a phrase is deliberately altered by dropping out one word in order to achieve just the opposite effect?

The position which Bretscher attributes to what he considers the majority in the Missouri Synod is in fact the position not only of the Synod’s Constitution, but also of the Lutheran Confessions. His word-study approach to the phrase “the Word of God” began with a false methodology and his conclusions are not valid. Let one citation from the “Preface to the Christian Book of Concord” show that the phrase “Word of God” when used in the context of authority refers to the Bible. Where the Latin refers to “the Word of God,” the German refers to the Scriptures. Let the reader himself compare the English translation of the Latin in the *Concordia Triglott*<sup>10</sup> with the English translation of the German in the Tappert edition.<sup>20</sup>

. . . it has always been our purpose that in our lands, dominions, schools, and churches no other doctrine be proclaimed and accurately set forth than that which is founded upon the Word of God (*quae verbo Dei fundamenta*).

. . . our disposition and intention has always been directed toward the goal that no other doctrine be treated and taught in our lands, territories, schools, and churches than that alone which is based on the Holy Scriptures of God . . . (*die, so in der heiligen göttlichen Schrift gegründet . . .*).

Bretscher’s major contention that “the Word of God,” understood as the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, is the source of doctrine is simply not that of the Lutheran Confessions. The phrase “the Word of God” in the Lutheran Confessions may have other meanings for other uses, but when it is used as referring to the source of doctrine it refers to the Bible.

Bretscher’s propositions to the church in his *After the Purifying* are not simply the offering of a new theological perspective, but the presentation of an entirely new theology and doctrine. His system is at variance with what has been recognized as the traditional Missouri Synod position, as he admits several times throughout his book.<sup>21</sup> He can hardly be faulted simply because he has proposed to go against the traditional understanding. What is necessary is that his position must be carefully delineated to show that it is incompatible not only

with our church's position but with the Lutheran Confessions and especially the Bible. It has already been shown that Bretscher does not begin theology with the Scriptures themselves but with two of the Lutheran Confessions. In addition it has been shown his understanding of how the phrase "the Word of God" is used in the Lutheran Confessions and the Constitution of the Synod is faulty.

Bretscher sees the "the Word of God," defined as the preached Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, and the Scriptures as both having a function in determining what the church should believe. Bretscher does not do away with the Scriptures, but he puts them in a position subservient to Gospel or what he calls "the Word of God." Any authority possessed by the Scripture as "the Word of God" does not come because they are given by God, but comes because they serve the Gospel. This is a point which Bretscher never tires of repeating. One citation will do however. "Scripture is properly called the Word of God, then, for the sake of the Gospel of truth and life in Christ which is its glory."<sup>22</sup>

For Bretscher the Bible's authority does not depend on where it comes from, but rather on what it does. It is impossible for him to assert that the Bible is the written Word of God as a self-contained, autonomous, self-sufficient and objective fact. For Bretscher objective religious truth just might not be possible. The Bible may be called "the Word of God" when the Bible serves the purpose of bringing the Gospel, i.e. "the Word of God" as the proclamation of forgiveness. Outside of this preaching action, it should not be called "the Word of God." In several places, Bretscher scores heavily the concept that the Bible is the written word of God.

Our [Missouri Synod's] concept of plenary divine authorship immediately reduces the Gospel to only a "part" of the Bible. The Bible is now *larger* than the Gospel. The Word of God is not only the Gospel and its articles, but also the rest of the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

For the dross [Bretscher's negative term for what must be rooted out of the church] thinks that the Bible's inspiration means its divine authorship.<sup>24</sup>

Bretscher also takes issue with three prominent theologians of the Missouri Synod, Walther, Pieper, and Bente, each of whom recognized Scriptures as the written Word of God and hence also the source of Christian doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

Lutheran theology has spoken of the Bible as *norma normans* and its confessions as the *norma normata*. By these terms it was meant that the Bible alone was the originating source of all doctrine and that the Lutheran Confessions derived their authority from the Bible because they correctly reflected the Biblical teaching. Applying this same model to Bretscher, the Gospel or "the Word of God" as he defines it becomes the *norma normans*, the originating source of all doctrine, and the Scriptures become the *norma normata*, i.e., a secondary authority *quatenus*, only in so far as they reflect the Gospel.<sup>26</sup> It is only if and when the Scriptures become activated by



"the Word of God" that, in Bretscher's scheme, they become "the Word of God," except maybe in a potential sense. Perhaps the best way to put it is that, for Bretscher, "the Word of God" is something that happens *to* or *with* the Scriptures. Given the circumstances that the Bible is used to preach forgiveness, it becomes "the Word of God." In other words, preaching forgiveness can also become authoritative "Word of God." Basically this is the same position held and put forth by Karl Barth. I found no place where Bretscher cites or credits Barth for his views. Whether Bretscher arrived at the Barthian position on his own or by following Barth explicitly matters not. Bretscher and Barth have virtually identical positions on the Bible.

In the positions of both Barth and Bretscher the terms and concepts of "vertical" and "horizontal" play significant roles.<sup>27</sup> The term "vertical" applies to God's action in "the Word of God." The term "horizontal" refers to human history, of which the Bible is a part. Bretscher calls the vertical the theological reality and the horizontal the historical reality. The moment of truth for Bretscher and Barth is when the vertical line from heaven intercepts the horizontal line of human history. Bretscher does an adequate job in explaining himself.

The two lines intersect. The vertical cuts through the horizontal, both within the Scriptures and within ourselves, whenever and wherever the Word of God is spoken and heard by human beings. At the point of intersecting, the "sparks" of the Spirit's power fly, as it were. We experience that power wherever that Word of the Gospel, through preaching, teaching, sacrament, or the Scriptures themselves, bursts into Spirit and life for us.<sup>28</sup>

As Barth, so also Bretscher does not distinguish the Spirit's action in the production of the Bible from His action in bringing Christians to faith. To use Barth's terminology there is no qualitative difference in the "encounter" experienced by the writers in penning the Scriptures and the "encounter" experienced by those who accept the Gospel today. There might be a quantitative time difference but no qualitative difference between the type of action the writers of the Scriptures experienced and ours today. Lest the reader think that Bretscher's position is being misrepresented, he says quite clearly, "Our personal historicity is not different in kind from the historicity of our forefathers who wrote the Bible, who heard and read its message in each original setting and occasion, or about whom the Scriptures speak."<sup>29</sup> Yes, the history recorded in the Scriptures belongs to world history just as any other history does. It is not super-history or a spiritualized history. But in the history recorded in the Bible God was acting in a special way. Theologians have called the history recorded in the Bible "salvation history," *Heilsgeschichte*, because God was working there to bring about the salvation of mankind. God's action in all of history is called providence. His action in relation to Israel, Jesus, and the apostles belonged to "salvation history" and was not just part of providence. Since Bretscher fails to distinguish qualitatively between world history in general and "salvation history," the intersecting of vertical and horizontal lines can happen today just as it happened back in the Biblical days. Because of this



failure to distinguish between salvation history and providence in general, Bretscher has, in effect, confused conversion with revelation in the same style as Barth has. Let it be said clearly that the Christian's conversion is not cut from the same cloth as the revelations made to the prophets and apostles.

In Bretscher's system, the one fixed item is "the Word of God" understood as the Gospel of the preached forgiveness of sins. This "word of God" is not historically bound to any one time but may invade time at any point. Though "the Word of God," the theological reality as Bretscher calls it, is a type of fixed reality, the historical reality is not capable of being known in any kind of certain or fixed way. In Bretscher's system, "the Word of God" belongs to the theological reality, the vertical line, and the Bible belongs to the historical reality, the horizontal line. What belongs to the historical plane, the horizontal line, can be questioned and doubted. What belongs to this horizontal dimension can never be known for certain. Let Bretscher speak for himself. "We set them free under God to think for themselves, to test everything, and to embrace what seems convincing. We teach them also to hold in abeyance, modify, or even reject whatever does not seem persuasive."<sup>30</sup> Bretscher not only permits but commends the value of methods that put question marks over what belongs to historical reality in the Bible.

On the contrary, Lutheran education will recognize that the revolution in Biblical studies is a gift from God to be accepted without fear and used to His glory. . . . We cannot explore the findings of that revolution at this time. Certain areas in which contemporary Biblical studies have seemed to pose so great a threat are well known in our Synod. They have to do with the authorship of the Biblical books, with the formation of the Pentateuch in the Old Testament and of the Gospels in the New, with the use the New Testament makes of Old Testament texts, with the understanding of literary forms, *with the historicity and facticity of persons and events, with the authenticity of Jesus' own utterances in relation to the voices of witnesses who breathed His Spirit and spoke in His name, and with the interchangeable identification between Jesus and His church.*<sup>31</sup>

I have deliberately added emphases in the passage quoted from Bretscher so that the reader may clearly see what belongs to the horizontal line, the historical reality, and thus may be open to question. Not only does Bretscher want to call into question the authorship of certain books of the Bible; he wants to recognize as a gift from God a method that doubts and questions "historicity and facticity of persons and events." Nowhere does Bretscher make any attempt to demonstrate the validity of the methods which he calls "a gift from God," but his "gift from God" can be used to doubt the historicity of every event and person recorded in the Bible.<sup>31a</sup> Bretscher at that point has gone beyond Karl Barth who tried to avoid the question of whether or not there was history behind the "Word"; Bretscher has adopted the position of the radical German Lutheran Rudolph Bultmann. Ideologically there is no basic difference between Bretscher

and Bultmann. Both believe in a kind of "Word of God" which is existentially believed, even though every historical event or person in the Bible is open to doubt or even denial. Bretscher like Bultmann holds that a theologian can believe the theological reality while at the same time questioning the history.

Thus the Christian exegete is two things simultaneously. In terms of the Bible's "theological reality" he is a hungry child of God, eager to hear the Word of God and feed on it as his Bread of Life. In terms of the "historical reality" of Scripture, he is a disciplined historian, facing all the hardships and hazards of the historical enterprise, but not afraid to use his mind.<sup>32</sup>

The question must be posed to Bretscher whether in certain cases a person reading the Bible from the vantage of historical reality can completely see the theological reality. Bretscher seems to say yes and no to this question. First, the positive, "What we call the 'theological reality' of Scripture is actually experienced by anyone who reads his Bible with a heart that asks, seeks, and knocks according to Christ's promise."<sup>33</sup> Then, the negative, "Sometimes the Word of God is buried so deeply beneath the surface of the Scriptures that it is hardly worth the effort to mine it. The possibility of discovering riches in unexpected places must never be foreclosed, of course."<sup>34</sup> But the possibility of discovering the Word of God in a certain section of the Bible also implies the possibility of not finding it in that section. It must also be implied that someone might never find the Word of God in the Bible. Never does Bretscher point to a section in the Bible and say that he is absolutely certain that it is the Word of God. He would not *a priori* rule out the possibility that it could become the Word of God, but he does not state categorically that a section is the Word of God. According to Bretscher's system such categorical statements about the Bible are impossible.

Since no history is immune to being dissolved by the so-called historical-critical methods, Bretscher's concept of "the Word of God," the Gospel, i.e. a proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, hangs on one glorious skyhook. Yes, Bretscher speaks about "the Word of God" as the proclamation of forgiveness for Christ's sake. But where would Bretscher be if some self-proclaimed historian announced that there was no Jesus and, if there were a Jesus, He did not die or rise from the dead. Actually Bretscher's system needs no history. If Bretscher's system were adopted by Lutheran parochial school teachers and made operative in our Lutheran schools—this is the book's goal—we would have to expect the cessation of the teaching of Christianity as an historic religion about historic persons and events, Moses, Abraham, David, Jesus, Peter, Paul, *ad infinitum*. It is hoped that the members of the Lutheran Education Association who published and distributed *After the Purifying* will alert its members to the totally devastating nature of Bretscher's approach.

In comparison with Bretscher's historical agnosticism, his other points seem pale in comparison. Here are just a few of them, some of which might have been briefly touched upon before. Bretscher is not correct in asserting that the Confessions do not distinguish between



the various uses of the phrase "Word of God." They do distinguish the various meanings of the phrase, and by looking at the section each reader can see the differences for himself.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, he claims that his Gospel concept is the Rock<sup>36</sup> referred to in the Bible. If this is a reference to the rock on which the man built his house, in that case that rock is all that Jesus said, which the believer totally accepts. If Bretscher is referring to certain Old Testament passages, the Rock is God. I have found no place in the Bible where Bretscher's understanding of Rock as Gospel can be supported. Thirdly, Bretscher can never have historical certainty about what Jesus really said. Fourth, Bretscher gives an inappropriate honor to the Lutheran Confessions when he says that they control our understanding of the Scripture.<sup>37</sup> The Lutheran principle is "Scripture interprets Scripture." Even without the Confessions, we should be able to understand Scripture's true meaning. Luther discovered Paul's doctrine of justification before the Confessions were written. Fifth, with Bretscher's system, it would be impossible for the Bible ever to hold an unbeliever accountable, since only when the Spirit works a miracle in our hearts do we recognize "the Word of God."<sup>38</sup> Karl Barth had the same problem on this point. Sixth, a number of Bretscher's assertions about Jesus are inaccurate. Was Jesus' ancestry mixed because He was Galilean?<sup>39</sup> If he were Galilean by ancestry, why did the enrollment of Joseph and Mary take place in Bethlehem? Seventh, Bretscher makes light of authenticating signs.<sup>40</sup> This attitude is basic to anyone who diminishes the absoluteness of past historical happenings. Bretscher points to Jesus' refusal to perform signs on one occasion (Matthew 16:4). We refer to John 20:30-31, where the evangelist states that it is through signs that a person comes to faith. If this Gospel is too late for some, then how about Jesus' reference to signs as an answer to John the Baptist's question about the Messiah (Matthew 11:2-6)? Bretscher's system would put a big question mark over every sign that Jesus did. Bretscher is not right in saying that the "cross is the sign of Jonah."<sup>41</sup> It was Jonah's deliverance from the fish after being swallowed. The rabbis and Jesus are agreed on that one. Bretscher is also wrong in asserting that the people believed John or Jesus just because they heard their messages.<sup>42</sup> Both authenticated themselves as prophets to the people before their messages were accepted.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. THE SPRINGFIELDER, XXXIX, 4 (March 1976), pp. 212-215.
2. *Ibid.*, XXXVI, 3 (December 1972), pp. 156-171.
3. *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XLIII (April 1972), pp. 232-247.
4. THE SPRINGFIELDER, XXXVI, 3, p. 158.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
6. Paul G. Bretscher, *After the Purifying, Thirty-second Yearbook, Lutheran Education Association* (River Forest, Illinois: Lutheran Education Association, 1975).
- 6a. The letter from Donald Kell was accompanied with a study guide to Bretscher's *After the Purifying*. The study guide is entitled "His Word and Our Ambiguities" and was written by James G. Bauman, a Missouri Synod pastor. It appeared in the *Lutheran Education Association Monograph Series*, III, 1 (Fall 1975). The study guide is written to win the reader to

Bretscher's position. Several cartoons in the guide show the difference between conservative and moderate positions in the Missouri Synod. One cartoon character says, "Because I believe the Bible is inspired, I Believe the Gospel." The other says in return, "Because I believe the Gospel, I believe the Bible is inspired." The first is supposedly the conservative position and the second is the moderate.

7. THE SPRINGFIELDER, XXXVIII, 3 (December 1974), pp. 218-225.
8. Richard J. Neuhaus, *Forum Letter*, IV, 3 (March 1975), p. 5. "Writing in the December issue of *The Springfielder* (Concordia Seminary, Springfield, IL), Scaer Challenges the ELIM people to correct what he views as the faults and ambiguities in the statement. In doing so, he demonstrates more seriousness about the statement than has been generally evident in ELIM circles."
9. *After the Purifying*, p. ix.
10. Karl Barth, *Christian Dogmatics*, II, "Doctrine of God," Part 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 687.
11. *Ibid.* III, "Doctrine of Creation," Part 4 (1961), p. 12.
12. *After the Purifying*, p. 18.
13. While Bretscher provides new definitions for old terms, he indicates throughout *After the Purifying* that he is breaking with what he calls "Missouri's Tradition." Cf. pp. 14f. "In the Synod's tradition and piety, Scripture is the Word of God according to a meaning derived from the doctrine of inspiration and certified by Missouri's understanding of the sentence fragment, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus the term 'the Word of God' stands for the inspired canon of sixty-six books." This position, which Bretscher disparages, can be traced back to seventeenth century Lutheran Orthodoxy. Cf. p. 93, footnote 1. "It is helpful to be aware that the cross with which we are currently wrestling is no distinctively Missouri Synod fallacy, but came into our heritage from much earlier sources." A letter from Bretscher to *Laymen's Analysis*, dated January 19, 1976, stated the problem can be traced to the medieval heritage of the church.
14. *After the Purifying*, pp. 12f., 18.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
16. *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions 1529-1537*, translated by Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), p. 17.
17. "Small Catechism," *Concordia Triglot* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), p. 551.
- 17a. *After the Purifying*, p. 77. The letter of January 19, 1976, defends this view. cf. Note 13.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 15f.
19. *Concordia Triglot*, op. cit., p. 21.
20. *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 12.
21. Bretscher quite openly discusses those who accepted his position long ago that the Word of God is the Gospel and who attempted to cover it up by reasserting the older belief that the Bible was the Word of God, p. 100.

Consider, for example, those whose tilt was toward the primacy of the Gospel as the Word of God. On the one hand they spoke much of the Gospel, often very beautifully. On the other hand they continued to reassure their anxious brethren of their unqualified acceptance of the Scriptures as the Word of God. "Nothing has changed," they seemed to say, as they repeated in familiar words their full acceptance of the plenary inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Scriptures. But their brethren were not reassured. They saw compromise and dishonesty. They knew very well that something had changed. Critical study of the Bible would be impossible without some change of attitude toward the authority of the Scriptures.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 17.



23. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 75. It would not be an unsafe opinion to assert that Bretscher wrote *After the Purifying* to destroy as unbiblical, unconfessional, and hence also as unchristian or least sub-christian any objective understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.
26. Controversy over the proper relationship between the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions has centered around two Latin words, *quia*, "because," and *quatenus*, "in so far as." Most Lutheran churches in their formal vows use the *quia* formula, i.e., they accept the confessions *because* they agree with the Holy Scriptures. Using the *quia-quatenus* formula, Bretscher could not even say that he accepts the Bible as the Word of God *because* it agrees with the Gospel, the primary Word of God. In some places of the Bible, Bretscher admits that there might be no Word of God. Therefore he would have to accept a *quatenus* understanding. The Bible is the Word of God *in so far as* it agrees with the Gospel.
27. Cf. the diagram, *After the Purifying*, p. 72.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 87. Emphasis added.
- 31a. Bretscher does not deny the existence of history behind the Gospel but affirms it. "Their (the apostles') proclamation does not create history. On the contrary, the history through the Spirit generates its proclamation." But if history can be doubted, on what does the Gospel build? Is Bretscher opting for the theology of hope or mysticism when he says that "the history through the Spirit generates its proclamation"? *Ibid.*, p. 29. Cf. p. 91 where Bretscher speaks of exegetes changing their minds on historical questions.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 92f.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 65. In handling the Biblical data, Bretscher shows a decisive prejudice in favor of his own position. He cannot tolerate the idea that before a message is accepted by the hearer, there must be some type of certification of the message-bringer. Thus throughout *After the Purifying* he wants to demonstrate that first the Gospel or the Word of God is believed and then afterwards there follows some type of acceptance of the Bible. So in handling the persons of John the Baptist and Jesus, he asserts that their messages were accepted before the hearers asked the question of what their authority was. Bretscher has reversed the process. First, the people were convinced that John was a prophet, then they accepted his message of repentance. It was the same with Jesus. Exodus 3 shows that Moses' big concern was whether people would accept his authority. For this reason God gave him signs. In commissioning the Twelve Apostles, Jesus first gives them signs to authenticate their office (Matthew 10:1).