

1. The Word of God

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We start at the beginning. "The Word of God" as the topic of an essay proceeds to the heart of modern man's religious problems: If there is a God, one who lives and acts, how do I know anything about Him? Does He communicate with man? If so, how? How can I be sure? How can I distinguish fact from fantasy, mystical musings from religious truth? Yes, how can I know? How can I be sure? To a child of the latter third of the hard nosed, technologically minded twentieth century, communication with a deity does sound strange and improbable. God's Word? How does God speak to me, or does He?

The answer of religious men through the ages has been threefold. If we in fact receive the religious data of faith or whatever from God, there are three possible sources. One is reason. I look at the universe, at man, and myself. I deduce certain things as God in effect speaks to me through His creation. The Apostle Paul refers to this natural knowledge of God (Romans 1:19-32). But reason has obvious limitations as both the Bible and the Church have always said. Another source of God's communication with man is said to be experience and feeling. Men assert that in their very living and self reflection they come to a knowledge of things about God. But it is all so subjective. Some experience high things. Others conclude there is no God, and they hear no voices.

The final possibility is revelation — God showing Himself forth in mighty acts, in words, in dreams, visions, and in Jesus of Nazareth. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament claim hundreds of times to be the Word of God, God revealing Himself, God speaking to the Israelites and to the world.

The Christian Church has always been convinced that the inspired Scriptures, in fact, do bring us the word of the true God, that He speaks in them, that His power is active in them. Thus we as Lutherans subscribe to the statement of the Formula of Concord: "We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated."¹

In the constitution of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod we affirm: "Synod, and every member of Synod, accepts without reservation: The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice."²

Few who bear the name Lutheran would challenge those paragraphs even in the eighth decade of the twentieth century. But there is a problem. Dr. C. F. W. Walther put it squarely in an essay delivered in 1858:

"Since all divisions within Christendom appeal to Scripture, the mere confession that one believes what is in Scripture is not a confession that clearly distinguishes the confessor from the false believer. For in spite of this confession no one knows whether one accepts Scripture in the true sense or not, or whether one is a Papist, or an enthusiast, or a Rationalist or an orthodox Christian . . . For the sake of clarity it is necessary to declare how one understands and interprets Scripture and the articles of faith that are contained in it."³

How do we, how must we, understand the Scriptures today? The voices engaged in offering answers are many. Never in history has one book been

the object of so much study. Archaeologists, literary critics, historians, theologians, and many others all have something to say. The problem is that what is said is a modern Babel. Theories come, live a while, are modified, or discarded. New ones take their place. Theologians emerge as shining stars only to be eclipsed by other intellectual giants. The sands of scholarship shift and change.

The Holy Scriptures — do they give us God's own words? Is the doctrine of the complete authority and truthfulness of Holy Scripture so long affirmed in the Church and now under vigorous attack, to be preserved, or is there another answer?

A survey of the status of Biblical scholarship today is at first blush extremely discouraging. J. Christian Baker, in the July, 1970, issue of *Interpretation*, stated that "The strange new world of the Bible has become so strange to the average student (in our seminaries and universities) that he can no longer find the bridge between his world of meaning and the biblical world. The alienation of the Bible is the predominant issue in theology today."⁴ Baker also commented that in many present day seminary courses the Biblical text is ignored in favor of "fanciful meditations on modern problems."

Carl Braaten in a recent book states that the question "How do you know? is always the first question the theologian is asked . . . The problem then is 'Where can revelation be found at all, now that the traditional equation of Scripture with revelation can no longer stand unchallenged in the face of historical criticism of the Bible?'"⁵ J. V. Longmead Casserly says simply that modern Biblical scholarship has produced "a way of studying the word of God out of which no word of God ever seems to come."⁶

Why does this situation exist? What is the source of the confusion? Moreover, why do those who still hold to the Biblical view of the inspiration of the Scriptures find themselves scornfully labeled as Biblicists, fundamentalists, and obscurantists? Have the Holy Scriptures really been scientifically discredited as being inaccurate, erroneous, contradictory, and so bound in human weakness as to be unworthy of the ascription "God's Word"? What is the evidence? What is the proof?

ASSUMPTIONS

We may be sure that the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, has not been found wanting when placed under the microscope of scholarly scrutiny. Moreover, the Bible still speaks with the power of the Holy Spirit and as such needs no help or no defense. Yet attacks on the authenticity and reliability and complete truthfulness of the Scriptures should not remain unanswered.

As one trained as a scientist, as well as pastor, I have always been interested in assumptions or presuppositions. Every formula, every theory, every scientific conclusion, has behind it the things we take for granted. It is no better, no sounder than the assumptions on which it is based. Thus it seems useful to examine the assumptions, the unproved presuppositions of men who have developed theories of Scripture so alien to our belief of the past. For their conclusions are no better than the presuppositions on which they are founded. Let us then begin with an identification of these presuppositions.

Rudolf Bultmann, one of the fathers of form criticism, proposed the now famous idea for demythologizing the New Testament. He is very clear in stating his assumptions. His basic presupposition is essentially that we cannot accept the supernatural element in the Bible. He says that modern man will no longer accept the world view of the ancient Jews as reflected in the Bible. He states "The kerygma is incredible to modern man for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete . . . all our thinking today is shaped by modern science."⁷

On the basis of this assumption Bultmann proceeds to dispense with heaven, hell, angels, demons, miracles, the vicarious atonement of Christ, and the physical resurrection on Easter morn. He rejects the possibility of God intervening in events in the world causally. It is important to realize that every look Bultmann takes at the Bible is colored by the bias of this presupposition.

We shall return later to the subject of alleged mythology in the Bible. But let us state now that no scientist can prove or disprove the items Bultmann rules out of Scripture so arbitrarily. If there is a God, He can surely act in a special way that we call miracles. Spirits, good or bad, won't show up on radar screens. The meaning of Christ's death on the cross in the presence of God is surely not subject to the laws of physics. And who can on scientific grounds say that the Lord of life cannot rise from the dead, that the tomb was not empty on Easter morning? To deny these things is to act from a conjectural and not a scientific basis.

Bultmann's influence is not as great as it once was, but many scholars still share his bias against the belief that God may act in a special way. Morton Smith, editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, wrote recently "Nobody I know accepts the Old Testament chronology or thinks the nature miracles really happened."⁸ Incidentally, Smith scores as "pseudo-orthodox" those who try to save "old positions," those who say "If not true, let the stories be at least 'essentially' true. If not even 'essentially' true, let them at least teach some 'higher truth.'" One must at least applaud Smith's plea for academic honesty among theologians.

The case against verbal inspiration, especially the attempts to discredit the historical reliability of Scripture, also hinges on the presupposition that since men wrote the Bible, it must reflect their human frailties. Even Karl Barth took this position. William Temple showed the ultimate result of this presupposition when he stated concerning the Bible "The message is . . . so inextricably human and divine in one, that no single sentence can be quoted as having the authority of an authentic utterance of the All Holy God."⁹ S. J. Case, as early as 1912, maintained that religious knowledge cannot be supernaturally acquired by mere men and that one can not rely upon a record of a supposedly supernatural revelation.¹⁰

Still another assumption of many Biblical scholars today is the idea that many of the Biblical books consist of a number of small units which editors have forged into a larger work often adding "creatively" by composing their own additions. The books then reflect the work of many men and indeed of the entire church community. Thus the books of the Bible do not portray the life situation of the figures described, but the situation of a writer or writers to a greater or lesser extent removed from the historical events which they claim to describe. This "scissors and paste" method will be referred to later. Suffice it to say now that the hypothesized sources of the theory of literary criticism have not been found in the form of actual manuscripts. They exist in the minds of those who deduce them from their study of the Biblical books.

There are other assumptions in use today. Some are perfectly reasonable; others reflect a bias against the Scriptures as a reliable record of God's revelation to man through His acts and words. But it is quite evident that one whose assumptions are of the flavor described above cannot possibly ever conclude his research in a manner that is compatible with the concept of the Bible being God's very words to men. One may preserve larger or smaller portions of its spiritual message, but it will have become a message marred and perhaps mutilated beyond recognition.

I said earlier that the Bible stands on its own feet and we need not fear for its survival as the Word of God. Later I shall affirm this in Scripture's own words. But this fact ought not lead us to be indifferent to assumptions which cast doubt on the historical accuracy of the Old and New Testament. John W. Montgomery has pointed out that "Christianity is unique in claim-

ing intrinsic, not merely extrinsic connection with the empirical reality which is the realm of scientific investigation. Christianity is a historical religion — historical in the very special sense that its entire revelational content is wedded to historical manifestations of divine power. The pivot of Christian theology is the Biblical affirmation: 'The Word became flesh.' (John 1:14)¹¹

Indeed, the creation of man, the fall, the call of Abraham, the exodus, the captivity, the incarnation, the ministry of Christ, His crucifixion, His glorious resurrection; all these are events which Scriptures testify happened in time and space. It is inconceivable that these mighty acts of God can be denied or diminished and a viable Christian faith nevertheless remain.

Peter's pentecost sermon in Acts 2:22 bears testimony to the importance of the record of actual happenings: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God, with mighty acts and wonders and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know."

Now there are some who speak of revelation as consisting almost exclusively of God's acting in history. They say it is the mighty acts of God, the great events such as the exodus that alone tell the story. Sometimes this is said to downgrade the importance of words in the Scriptures, that is, the verbal message, which is God's interpretation of the meaning of His acts. Concerning this position, however, James Smart writes:

"This tendency to equate revelation with the historical events fails to take account of the fact that everywhere in Scripture the revelation which is the inmost meaning of the event is hidden until it is revealed by the Spirit of God to the faith of man. The event itself is capable of receiving other interpretations. The cross to an indifferent onlooker was merely an unfortunate miscarriage of justice. The revelation of its meaning is nowhere described as a human inference from a divine event but as a direct revelation of God to man of what He is doing."¹²

Thus we see that it is the word that interprets the acts of God so that man may understand and believe.

ASSUMPTIONS EXAMINED

It is indeed important to note the impressive answers that Biblical scholarship has brought to the claims some modern critics have against the historical facticity of the Bible. For example, the archaeologist, Wm. F. Albright in a recent book takes issue with Bultmann's claim that we must purge myths from the Scriptures. Albright notes that the Bible writers indeed purged all mythology from their source material by "excising myths or taking certain mythical elements in their corresponding empirical form and using them in the service of a higher religious vision."¹³ Albright also speaks of Bultmann's rejection of the alleged mythical world view of the Biblical authors. He states, "It is quite absurd to claim, as Bultmann does, that New Testament Christianity presupposes a three-story universe, because no educated man (i.e. in those days) believed anymore than we do in a three-story universe or any other multi-story universe."¹⁴

Albright goes on to indicate that studies based on the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown the fallacy of postulating a late date for the writings of John in the New Testament. He states that John may have written as early as the late 70's of the first century.¹⁵ In the same book Albright states that arguments against the Pauline authorship of Ephesians have been greatly weakened, and that arguments for a second century dating of the pastoral epistles have been likewise weakened by information on literary style learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Albright's conclusions regarding the New Testament are as follows. "First the books of the New Testament were composed during a period of possibly half a century, more likely 30 or 40 years. Second, there is no trace of evolution of doctrine in these books . . . Third, the whole New

Testament bears witness to the early Christians' faith in the risen Lord."¹⁶ In other words, the facts of recent discoveries support the idea that the New Testament is exactly what the books claim to be in terms of circumstances of composition and authorship.

Likewise evidence has accumulated against the famous Graf-Welhausen or Documentary Hypothesis of the Pentateuch. The theory has been modified repeatedly since its introduction in the nineteenth century, but in its modified form is still widely taught in theological seminaries. Briefly stated, the theory denies the Mosaic authorship of the first five books of the Old Testament. It claims that there is internal evidence that the books represent four major traditions (JEDP) and are the work of numerous authors and redactors who patched and repatched together various earlier documents and bits of writing and tradition.

Now it is true that the Old Testament, as does Luke's Gospel, refers to sources that were used in its composition. Numbers 21:14 refers to the *Book of the Wars of Jehovah*; Joshua 10:13 and II Sam. 1:18 mention the *Book of Jasher*. I Kings 11:41 lists the *Book of the Acts of Solomon*, I Kings 14:29 names the *Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*, and I Kings 14:19 refers to the *Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*. There are historical sources which the authors of the Biblical books used under divine guidance.

Why then do we object to the use of the Documentary Hypothesis (JEDP) with its constant reference to the hypothetical Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, Priestly, and other sources of the Pentateuch? There are two basic reasons. First, we believe that the Documentary Hypothesis operates with basic presuppositions which do not stand up under scrutiny. Secondly, the method used atomizes the books, proposes the concept of the evolution of religion, postulates a very late date for most of the Old Testament, insists that contradictory and untrue material has been included, and in the minds of many destroys the credibility of the accounts. George F. Moore in his book on *Judaism in the First Century of the Christian Era*, observes that "In fact the application of modern historical and critical methods and above all the introduction of the idea of development, involves consciously or unconsciously a complete change in the idea of revelation, a change which orthodox, whether Jewish or Christian, has resisted with the instinct of self preservation."¹⁷

H. L. Ginsberg, American Jewish scholar, says that the proponents of the Wellhausen method "heavily underestimated the value of the Hebrew Scriptures as a historical record."¹⁸

M. H. Segal, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, condemns the so-called JEDP hypothesis for its highly artificial character. He points out that proponents of the theory postulate a method of formation of literature for which no other example exists in ancient Hebrew or other related literature. He condemns "the use of highly improbable assumptions without offering any evidence for their veracity."¹⁹

Keystone of the method is the use of divine names YHWH (Jehovah) and *Elohim* (God) in distinguishing two of the principal sources of the Pentateuch. Segal in his research analyzes the use of these divine names in other historic books of the Old Testament. He concludes that his study: ". . . disproves decisively that the change of these names in the Pentateuch is caused by a change of literary source or document. The evidence shows that the two names are found side by side in contexts that are of an absolutely unitary character."²⁰

Segal also points out that even advocates of the Documentary Hypothesis admit that each of the four hypothetical documents used not a peculiar dialect, but the ordinary literary Hebrew. He is critical of other alleged proofs of the JEDP theory and finally draws the conclusion that "The claim of Biblical tradition that Moses himself was the author of his Torah in the Pentateuch is fully worthy of credit."²¹

One also hears much today of form criticism and redaction criticism. Form criticism assumes that the Biblical books came into existence as an amalgamation of oral traditions and various smaller literary units such as, in the case of the Gospels, collections of miracle stories, parables, sayings of Jesus, etc. Some of this material is regarded as authentic, but much is considered merely a fabrication of the early church. Form critics hold that we must look for the life situation (*Sitz im Leben*) of the books in the activity of the *post-ascension* era of the early Christian church, rather than in the life of Jesus. Form critics believe they can detect the forms of the sub-units which were used in the composition of the Biblical books and thus get behind the text to the sources of the text.

Redaction criticism is an offshoot of form criticism and is concerned with how the smaller units of the Gospels were put into larger units and in particular how the material was modified to express the theological convictions of the redactor or final author. It is obvious of course that both form criticism and redaction criticism are methods of literary and historical criticism akin to the Wellhausen hypothesis.

Raymond Surburg, professor of Old Testament at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, has analyzed Old Testament form criticism in *A Project in Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1969 publication of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Committee on Theology and Church Relations. Surburg states that "one of the implications of form criticism in the Old Testament is that of distinguishing between the Word of God and the word of man, especially in the prophetic writings . . . Like higher criticism, form criticism operates with the conclusions that the Old Testament Scriptures contain not only inaccuracies and errors, but outright contradictions."²²

C. S. Lewis has likewise analyzed the methods of the form critics and found them wanting. He finds no support for them in literary analysis and is particularly critical of their speculative nature. Lewis states: "One is after all sailing by dead reckoning; the results cannot be checked by fact . . . The 'assured results of modern scholarship' as the way in which an old book was written are 'assured' we may conclude only because the men who knew the facts are dead and cannot blow the gaff."²³

There are some who allege that form criticism and redaction criticism can be used with Lutheran presuppositions and thus cleansed as it were. While there can be no doubt that the literary and historical study of the Bible has positive aspects and values, the methods essentially suffer from the unLutheran and unscriptural assumption that the exegete can sit in judgment over the Biblical text and decide what is authentic, what really happened, what Christ said, or what the exegete decides he can delete or not accept. In a 1969 publication on redaction criticism Norman Perrin writes:

"That redaction criticism makes Life of Jesus research very much more difficult is, of course, immediately obvious. With the recognition that so very much of the material in the Gospels must be ascribed to the theological motivation of the evangelist or of an editor of the tradition, or of a prophet or preacher in the early church, we must come to recognize that the words of R. H. Lightfoot were fully and absolutely justified: the Gospels do indeed yield only the whisper of Jesus' voice."²⁴

Perrin attempts to salvage inspiration somewhat by holding that even so Jesus is somehow speaking through the early church.²⁵ But it is evident that the method makes mockery of the authenticity of the text.

As an exhibit of the arbitrary action of the literary critic, consider the example where Matt. 11:2-6 is submitted to scrutiny. It deals with Jesus' answer to John the Baptist concerning His identity. One author states: "Although Jesus probably thought of himself as the Christ, it is very improbable that he ever spoke the words assigned to Him here. He could not have honestly said that He raised the dead, and it is doubtful that He said that He healed the blind and lepers."²⁶ Note the method: The presupposition is that even Christ could not perform miracles. Hence the critic believes this

account cannot be genuine, because it reports Jesus as claiming just that power.

It is not hard to realize in the face of all this why Biblical studies are in a state of confusion in so many centers of theological learning. It has been said that much of this negative viewpoint toward the reliability of Scripture could have been avoided had theologians paid more attention to Biblical archaeology. Time permits only passing reference to this phase of the question. K. A. Kitchen, archaeologist of the University of Liverpool, in a recent work has summarized the current situation in Biblical archaeology. He judges that the "wholesale reconstructions" of the Bible have been at "variance with the existing documentary evidence."²⁷ He says that "we have as yet no single scrap of external objective, i.e. tangible, evidence for either the existence of the history of "J" or "E" or any other alleged source document."²⁸ Kitchen shows that what we now know of the history, the social customs of the age of the patriarchs, the names, the cost of a slave, the legal covenant forms, the geography, etc. — agree with the Old Testament record.

Some critics have dated the Proverbs in the fourth century because of the literary device of the personification of abstracts (e.g. Wisdom in Proverbs 8-9). But it is now known that this device was not first introduced as critics allege under the Greek influence of the 4th century B.C., but was in common use in the Ancient Near East 1500 years before Solomon was born.²⁹

Kitchen also comments on the position of higher critics that Genesis 1 and 2 are duplicate and contradictory accounts of the creation. It is now known to have been a common practice among the Egyptians to tell a story in two distinct styles, one following directly on another. Kitchen judges "failure to recognize the complementary nature of the subject — distinction between a skeleton outline of all creation on one hand and the concentration on man and his immediate environment on the other, borders on obscurantism."³⁰

Edwin M. Yamauchi points out that arguments for a late date for the composition of the book of Daniel based on Greek words for musical instruments are fallacies. Archaeology shows contacts between the Semites and Mycenaean Greek traders as early as the late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.).³¹ Moreover historical evidence indicates that Greek musicians were in great demand at the time of Daniel. Thus any Greek musical terms in Daniel do not necessarily indicate a composition long after the exile as some have taught.

Time does not permit more examples. But many more exist — cases of arguments used against Scripture's historical accuracy — arguments which knowledge from later discoveries have shown to be unfounded. There do indeed remain archaeological difficulties and unresolved mysteries in connection with Scripture. This is not surprising in view of the fact that archaeological work in Palestine has touched only a small fraction of the ancient sites.³² But the evidence is that the historical accuracy of Scripture is not to be taken lightly.

THE WITNESS OF THE WORD

But in the final analysis it is not enough to expose weaknesses in literary theories; it is not enough to show a strong probability for the historical faithfulness of the Old and New Testaments. The Word of God, as we said above, speaks for itself and with God's own power.

The "Word" of God. The Hebrew vocable for word, *dabar*, has a dynamic quality. The etymology of the word is that of something being behind something and pushing forward. It thrusts forward to do its work. Walter Roehrs, professor emeritus of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, states that the term "*Dabar*" ("Word") as a revelatory act is used 224 times in construc-

tions which speak of the word of God coming to man in prophetic revelation. It occurs 300 additional times in connection with God's name as a suffix or in direct context.³³

These passages often stress the power and thrust of God's Word. Joshua 21:45 reads: "There failed not any *dabar* (word) of all the good *debarim* (words) which the Lord spake unto the house of Israel." Psalm 33:6 reminds us that "By the *dabar* (word) of the Lord were the heavens made." The creative power of the word also rings out in Ezekiel 37:4, "Prophecy upon these dry bones. Hear the *dabar* (word) of the Lord." So also Psalm 119:130: "The entrance of the *debarim* (words) giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple."

The importance of the "word" is highlighted in Deut. 32:46 where the people are told: "Set your heart unto all the *debarim* (words) which I testify among you this day . . . all the *debarim* of the Law, for it is not a vain *dabar* to you, because it is your life and through this *dabar* you shall prolong your days."

Roehrs points out that in the Old Testament entire prophetic books are simply introduced as the "*dabar* of the Lord" — So Hosea, so Micah, so Zephaniah, and Isaiah introduces his book as "the vision of Isaiah which he saw." The implications of this for the doctrine of inspiration are obvious.

How does the word of God come to a man? It is important to note that the Scriptures do not seek to describe the process of inspiration. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the writer may draw on his own personal experience. John begins his first letter with the claim: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the words of life — the life was made manifest and we saw it and testify to it." (I John 1:1-2)

Luke starts his Gospel by references to many who were compiling narratives. He speaks of information given him by eye witnesses from the beginning. And he states his intention to write an orderly account. (Luke 1:1-4) He clearly intends to give Theophilus an accurate account and to demonstrate that Christianity is deeply rooted in history.

Other parts of Scripture reflect the private meditation and worship life of the author, all this also under the Spirit's guidance. Such as the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.

Beyond this there were the instances when God spoke very directly. I Samuel 3:4 describes the young Samuel hearing God call his name and speaking words. Verse 15 calls it a "vision." Genesis 32:28 speaks of Jacob wrestling with One who told him his name was to be changed to Israel. And Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:30). In II Kings 3:15 Elisha is said to have had the word of the Lord come to him after a minstrel played. I Kings 22:19 speaks of the prophet seeing the Lord on His throne and hearing him speak.

The same word of the Lord is recognized also in its written form. Huldah the Prophetess tells King Josiah, "Thus says the Lord. Behold I will bring evil upon this place and upon its inhabitants all the words of the book (i.e. of the Law) which the King of Judah has read. (II Kings 22:16; cf. also Jer. 25:13; Jer. 30:1)

Christ Himself treated the Old Testament as the very word of God. Indeed He links the two phrases directly in John 10:35: "If He called them gods to whom the *Word of the Lord* came, and *Scripture* cannot be broken."

The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of the various methods of inspiration when it says in its opening verse: "In many and various ways God spake of old to our fathers by the prophets." Then, reminiscent of John's Gospel which calls Christ the "Word" in its opening verses, Hebrews continues "God . . . in these last days He has spoken to us by a Son whom he appointed the heir

of all things." (Heb. 1:1-2) Christ Himself was God's word incarnate in His very being and in His revelation of the plan of salvation in word and in deed.

In II Timothy 3:16 Paul calls the Scriptures "inspired" (God breathed) and he says it of *all* Scripture, of all the sacred writings, i.e., the Old Testament. He knows of no diminution, no stratification, no separation of human and divine. It is all God breathed, inspired.

Peter speaks of the sacred writings of the Old Testament and said "no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (Peter 1:21) It is clear from this why the church fathers made bold to speak of God as the author of the Bible.

Even more remarkable is I Peter 1:10-12 where Peter says that the prophets "inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when they predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent process, yet not understanding fully its ramifications, and yet clearly fore-glory." This passage shows the prophets to have been conscious of the telling the future of the Messiah's ministry.

We know that the New Testament apostles and evangelists claimed also for their message the same authority of being God's word. Paul flatly says: "We impart this in *words* not taught by human wisdom but *taught by the Spirit*, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit." (I Cor. 2:13; cf. also I Thess. 2:13-15; I Cor. 14:37)

Finally Peter himself links the authority of Old and New Testament when he refers to Paul's letters and those who distort them "as they do the other Scriptures." (II Pet. 3:16)

Christ's own endorsement of the Old Testament was referred to previously. It is important to add John 5:39 to the references quoted: "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness of me." Those who have trouble accepting the messianic content of the Old Testament thus clash with Jesus' own position. The grandest endorsement possible of the Old Testament is found in Luke 24. Jesus on Easter evening walks with two of the disciples. Rather than have them recognize Him by sight of eye, He leads them through the Scriptures to find Him there. "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Critics, faced with this passage and other endorsements of the Old Testament by Christ, often speak of Christ accommodating Himself to the ignorance of the people or even not really knowing Himself the true state of affairs. But this is to add poor Christology to the list of other problems of those who will not let the text speak for itself.

The power is there in the Bible! It claims it and we feel it! Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

The power is there because the Spirit speaks in the Word. Peter and John told the church that the Lord spoke by "the mouth of our Father David saying by the Holy Spirit" and then quotes Psalm 2 as a prophecy of Christ (Acts 4:24-26).

But what does the Word of the Spirit, particularly as the Gospel word, accomplish in our lives. Robert Preus has catalogued them in an essay on the Power of God's Word:³⁴

1. It works salvation — Eph. 1:13
2. It works faith — Rom. 10:17; John 17:20
3. It works regeneration and new life — I. Pet. 1:23
4. It works hope, an eschatological viewpoint — Col. 1:5
5. It works strength for every issue of life — Eph. 6:15; John 15:7; I Cor. 2:5; I Thess. 2:13

It works these miracles and we know it is true because our heart sings within us in sweet assent. Here is God's own power, a true existential experience as we meet God in the Gospel which the great Apostle called "The power of God for salvation to every one who has faith." (Rom. 1:16) This needs no proof. We can neither add nor detract from it. It is God's power, a power of grace that conquers the gates of hell.

INERRANCY

A postscript now, but an important one — I speak of inerrancy. Actually although the term was not used, the concept has pervaded all of our earlier discussion. For inerrancy is part and parcel of Scripture's truthfulness. But let us deal now with the topic somewhat more specifically.

A clear definition of inerrancy as it is commonly understood in our midst is to be found in the Brief Statement, five times reaffirmed by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in its conventions. It states:

"Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35."

The emphasis on inerrancy has been lampooned by many who find this exercise easier than dealing head-on with the issues. But inerrancy does matter. The issue was stated well by Martin H. Franzmann in his essay to The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Counselors Conference just a decade ago. Franzmann wrote:

"Revelation is both encounter with the Revealer and the receiving of information from the Revealer. Faith is both faith *in* and belief *that*, in organic unity; that is, faith in a Person is possible only on the basis of believing that the Person is a certain kind of person and has acted in a certain way. Therefore the record of God's revelatory deeds and words is essential to the birth of faith and to the life of faith.

Now the value of a record is entirely dependent on its truth, its veracity, its factuality, in a word, on its inerrancy. 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' is recital, is crystallized history. Its value as revelation depends entirely on the truth of the fact that God is what the Old Testament proclaims Him to be, the living God, the Lord of history and manifested in history; it depends on the truth of the fact that God did deal effectually, graciously, and faithfully with the patriarchs. If He did not in fact thus deal with them, the record is worthless as a medium of revelation."³⁵

Inerrancy is no recent aberration of die-hard fundamentalists, as it is often alleged. Luther stated clearly: "The Scriptures have never erred."³⁶ He also wrote: "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself: it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."³⁷

The Lutheran confessions speak likewise. The *Large Catechism* teaches: "My neighbor and I, in short all men may err and deceive, but God's word cannot err."³⁸ The *Formula of Concord* states clearly: "God's word is not false, nor does it lie."³⁹

Wm. Arndt, sainted professor of New Testament at the St. Louis seminary, dealt with many of the alleged contradictions of Scripture in his volume *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?*. The importance of inerrancy is underlined by Arndt when he wrote: "It will have to be granted that if the Scriptures do contain actual discrepancies, they have not in every part been given by divine inspiration. To make contradictory statements means to err, to blunder. A book that contains errors, or blunders, cannot in its entirety come from the great, the all-wise, the perfect God."⁴⁰

Now there are those who dispute Arndt's point. But the record shows him to be correct. Look at the progression of the argument. The real argument over inerrancy today is not concerning apparent discrepancies, scribal

errors; concerning, for example, the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, the burial places of Jacob and his sons, or the number of men killed in a battle. Such problems of apparent Biblical discrepancies have been discussed for centuries. The issue today regarding inerrancy centers in the heartland of Scripture: creation, the messianic prophecies, the nature, words and works of Christ, the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ, and many others. The real question is: Can one view the Bible as a reliable witness at all to God's acts and God's words to man? This is what we have been talking of in this entire essay.

Inerrancy in the final analysis is a matter of faith. In a comprehensive essay Robert Preus points out two basic principles of the Lutheran fathers:

1. Scripture is *autopistos*. It creates faith in its credibility and its message by virtue of its being God speaking to his people.
2. Scripture is *anapodeiktos* — It is self authenticating. It brings its own proof, its own demonstration of the power of the Spirit.⁴¹

Arndt in his book on apparent contradictions in the Bible made the same point: "To him (the Christian) it is a divine book, having demonstrated its heavenly origin to him by proofs which are quite sufficient to him, His faith in its inspired character does not depend on the results of critical investigations carried on by learned, but very fallible scholars, but he has a far stronger staff to lean on. The Scriptures have brought him the message of redemption through the blood of Christ and have convinced him that this message is God-given and true and therefore they are his only source of hope. In this message he has found peace and joy and strength. The same Scriptures inform him that they are in their entirety given by inspiration of God and infallibly true in every detail . . . These declarations must be true, the Christian says to himself, because they are contained in the life-giving revelation of God. He that sent His only Son to die for us surely is not leading us astray when He tells us that the Bible is His own Word from beginning to end and that His Holy Spirit filled the Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists and guided them in such a way that what they wrote was not their own message, but that of the great Father in heaven."⁴²

Martin Franzmann adds another great point when he urges our attitude toward Scripture in our use of it be that of Christ and the Apostle Paul. ~~These are surely the most potent authorities one could ever quote.~~ Franzmann says:

"The New Testament is conscious of this. Jesus, for all His freedom over against the Old Testament Law, a freedom that seemed blasphemous to His scrupulous contemporaries, nowhere doubts or calls into question any event recorded in the Old Testament. He argues from the factuality of the Old Testament event, not about it. He argues from what God said about man and woman at creation, not about it. He argues from the fact that the men of Nineveh listened to the word of Jonah, not about it. Even when the Old Testament record is used by others to embarrass and contradict Him, as when the Jews point out that Moses commanded the bill of divorcement (Matt. 19:7,8), Jesus does indeed correct their misquotation of the record ("Moses *permitted*"), but He does not question the accuracy of the record; He does not operate critically on the record. And the apostles follow their Lord in this as in all else. Neither Paul nor James argues about the record of Abraham and his faith; both argue from it.

As with the Old Testament record, so with the New Testament. Paul stakes his whole apostolate and the faith and the hope of the church on the bare fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did take place. Everything depends on these things being so; and Paul cites more than 500 witnesses in proof (1 Cor. 15:1-19). Peter protests vigorously against the idea that any humanly devised myth can serve as the vehicle of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and emphasizes the eye-witness character of the apostolic proclamation (2 Peter 1:16-18). Inerrancy matters."⁴³

This is a good place to close. The Holy Scriptures claim to be the Word of God in all their parts. To attack that claim is to lose certainty in the message and even the message itself. To accept it in faithful hearts is to follow the practice of Christ our Savior, the very Word of God incarnate, about whose person and saving work both Old and New Testaments revolve. God has spoken to us through prophets, apostles, evangelists and His own Son. He still speaks. In the last book of the Bible, Christ says seven times: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)

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