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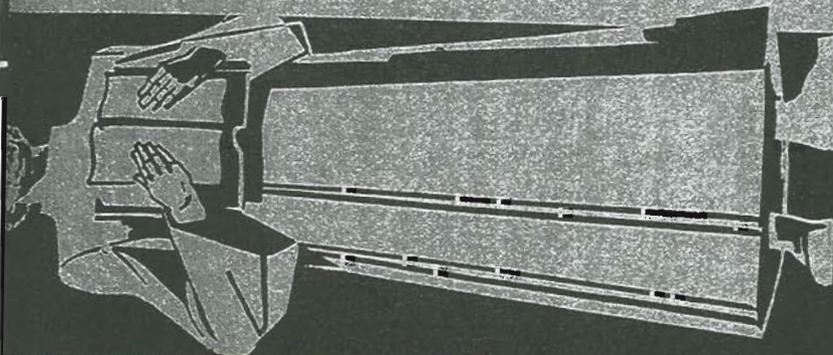
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An Evaluation of the Law-Gospel Principle as a Hermeneutical Method*

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Different systems of hermeneutics are currently in use among American Lutheran professors and pastors and different systems of hermeneutics are employed in the interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions. The problem in hermeneutics has been well stated by Dr. Jahsmann in his introduction to Mayer's *Interpreting the Scriptures*, when the former wrote:

Present-day interest in principles of Biblical interpretation has been "provoked" largely by controversies of one kind or another. Far more important is the need of the application of sound principles in the personal use and teaching of the Bible. All of us know how others (if we have failed to see the beam in our own eyes) have misused Biblical texts or have allowed false or unwarranted teachings to take on the authority of God's Word.²

Dr. Jahsmann correctly stated in his introduction to Mayer's volume that all teachers of Scripture, be they pastors, teachers or laymen, have the obligation to rightly discern and interpret the Scriptures. Rightly does he claim: "A concern for a true interpretation and use of the Bible is a concern for the truth of God. Without this concern one cannot truly serve God, no matter how much one might quote or refer to the Bible."³

The new hermeneutic of Fuchs, Ebeling, Käsemann, Conzelmann, Ott and the post-Bultmannians has resulted in a new interpretation of the Scriptures and of its teachings.⁴ In recent years principles of interpretation have been advocated which would permit a radical use of literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism and *Sachkritik*. There are those in Lutheranism who believe all these may validly be employed and despite their use nevertheless claim to be loyal to the true meaning of the Scriptures, as well as the interpretations of the Lutheran Confessions, the product of an era completely ignorant of the existence of forms of criticism that call into question some of the most important teachings of the Bible. Dr. Elliott, for a number of years a member of the Exegetical Department of St. Louis, claimed in an essay contributed to the Dr. Caemmerer *Festschrift* that exegesis has various activities and the latter are known "as textual criticism, literary criticism, redaction criticism, tradition criticism, and finally *Sachkritik*, a criticism of the contents itself."⁵ The scholar who applies all these forms of criticism is bound to produce interpretations which will be much different than any interpretations produced by those scholars of Lutheranism who are strangers to form criticism, tradition criticism, and *Sachkritik*. Those who are serious about the employment of the just four-mentioned types of

This essay was delivered as a faculty study paper May 12, 1969 at Concordia Seminary, Springfield, Ill. For more recent literature dealing with this topic cf. David Scaer, "The Law-Gospel Debate in the Missouri Synod," THE SPRINGFIELDER, 36:156-171, Dec. 1972.

criticism believe that these types of criticism can be successfully resorted to in the exegetical process without violation of any of the principles, considered necessary and vital by historic Lutheranism.

How? As this essayist examines the writing and listens to the pronouncements of those using the generally accepted methods of the historical critical method, he would say that this is being accomplished by the elimination and rejection of basic rules for interpretation formerly considered essential and valid and by making the claim that there is only one important hermeneutical principle that needs to be followed by any exegete, and that is conscientiously to employ the law-gospel principle of interpretation when dealing with any Scriptural passage.

I. Various Uses of the Law-Gospel Principle in Interpretation

Professor Forde, now of Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, claims that the basic problem in theology today is the one concerning methodology. He avers that there are no conflicts in Lutheranism over the doctrines that should be held; there are no conflicts over the content of the faith. The only problem of today is the problem of methodology between theologians in the church. Dr. Forde has defined methodology as follows: "Methodology is that branch of the theological discipline which attempts to answer the question: "How do you know what the claims which faith makes are true?"⁶ According to the Luther Seminary Professor the big question of today is that about the Word of God. Faith, Professor Forde asserts, is based upon the Word of God and therefore the question: "How do you know?" is a question about the authority of the Word of God. Both sides according to Forde insist upon the basic authority of the Word of God for the claims of faith. Today a major theological concern is: "What makes the Word of God different and more authoritative than the words of men?" According to Forde this question has been answered in two different ways in the past as it still is being answered in the present.⁷

The one way is called by Forde the *verbal inspiration* way and the other the law-gospel. To quote Forde:

Perhaps I should state at this point that I believe that both of these methods have been present within Lutheranism from the earliest times but that the latter one, the law-gospel method, has been the primary one in practice if not in theory. These two methods are quite different and there has existed, I believe, an unresolved tension between them.⁸

Dr. Forde believes that the proponents of verbal inspiration use their view to answer the question: "How does a Christian know the Bible is the Word of God?" The question, he opines, was answered by Dr. Francis Pieper by assuming *a priori* that the Bible in all its parts is the Word of God because every word of the Scriptures has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Professor Forde evaluates Dr. Pieper's position as follows:

What does this mean? It means that it is so because it *must be so in order for the Scripture to be considered the Word of God.* That is, if you believe that the scripture is the Word of God,

then you must believe that it cannot contain any errors before you even begin to read it, otherwise you would not read it as the Word of God. The position must be established *a priori*, before the actual examination of the evidence, otherwise it cannot be considered a sure basis for faith.⁹

In substantiation of this position Forde cites Quenstedt, as follows:

The Canonical Holy Scriptures in the original text are the infallible truth and are free from every error, or in other words, in the canonical Holy Scriptures there is found no lie, no falsity, no error, nor even in the least, whether in subject matter or words, but all things and all details that are handed down in them are the most certainly true, whether they pertain to doctrine or morals or history, or chronology, or topography or nomenclature; no ignorance, no thoughtless or forgetfulness, no lapse of memory, can and dare be ascribed to the amenness of the Holy Spirit in their penning of the sacred writings.^{9a}

Professor Forde devotes seven pages of his essay to a description of what he labelled the verbal inspiration method, pointing out its strengths and weaknesses. According to Luther Seminary professor, associated with the verbal inspiration method is orthodoxy's understanding of faith, as consisting of knowledge, assent to, and trust in the truth set forth in the Bible. Faith is *notitia* knowledge; *assensus*, assent, *fiducia* trust. This conception of faith means "that one first gains knowledge of things which pertain to salvation, i.e. one learns the truths; secondly, one is persuaded to assent to them intellectually and ultimately to trust in them."¹⁰ The advantage of this method is that it is simple and readily understandable, and secondly that it intends to place men under the authority of the Word of God.

However, the Luther Seminary professor seriously questions the view that by believing the Bible to be inspired in all its parts the reader is placing himself under the authority of Scripture. "For when all is said and done, the *a priori* belief that that is the way it *must* be in order for Scripture to be the Word of God is nowhere established in the Scripture, and it is a human construction; it is a human idea what the term "Word of God" must mean."¹¹ Dr. Forde claims that to assert that the Bible is without error is to tell God ahead of time what the Bible must contain. When theologians endeavor to portray the Bible as God's Word they are endeavoring to establish God's Word in the same way as they establish the truth of man's Word. "A man's word is trustworthy if it corresponds to the facts; God's Word can be true only in the same way."¹² According to Forde, persons who claim that the Bible is errorless are in grave danger of placing themselves in a position of dictating to God the conditions under which a person can believe." Forde contends that there is a big advantage to not knowing *a priori* what God is going to say. With this advantage the reader of the Bible can listen adequately and then proceed to form his understanding.

A disadvantage of "the inspiration theory" according to Forde

has been its inability to cope with the facts gained by Biblical research and in the world around him. For 200 years now, the Bible has been shown to have many erroneous ideas and teachings which simply cannot be defended against facts established by scientific historical research. "Clearly the belief that there are no mistakes of any sort in Scripture simply is not true. The many discrepancies *within* the Bible itself—where the Bible disagrees with itself—demonstrates that fact."¹³

The view that holds that the Bible is verbally inspired is a method according to Forde, based on a theory—a human theory about the nature of the Word of God. This theory, he claims, is invalid for it fails to explain the facts as revealed in the Bible.

The alternative method is the law-gospel method according to the Lutheran TALC professor. This method, he opines, has been employed by the best Lutheran theology. Because every Lutheran pastor knows that you cannot bring individuals to faith in Christ by telling them the Bible is inspired, by preaching law and gospel, it follows that by the use of law-gospel principle in preaching and teaching, people become convinced that the Bible is God's Word. "How do you know? is not answered by telling people that Scripture is *theopneustos* but that sinners are under the judgment of God and that Christ has removed their sins and is willing to accept repentant sinners as His children."¹⁴

This method means that the user of Scripture does not have *a priori* ideas about what the Bible is. It has the advantage of not stating what the Word of God is or what it has to be. Thus Forde asserted: "I cannot start with *my ideas* of what the Word of God is or what it would have to be and then make Scripture fit this idea. It means that at the beginning I can only hear this thing which some men call the Word of God and then experience what it does to me and says to me, and from this hearing and experiencing learn what the Word of God really is. The *Word* of God is not a thing, not a proposition, it is an event."¹⁵

Forde claims that the Word of God is quite different from the words of men. God's Word is not a dead Word, but it is a living, creative Word. The Word of God has to be *preached*, and then something happens. Either people accept it or are repelled by it. The Word of God establishes its own authority.¹⁶

When the Word of God is preached two kinds of things can happen: judgment or redemption. According to Luther the Word of God works as law and as gospel. By the law the sinner is judged, by the gospel the same sinner is tendered salvation. "The Word of God as law attacks me in my security and as a gospel convinces me of grace, and I become convinced that this *Word* is the *Word of God* only in and through this experience. The Word of God is therefore confessed to be the Word of God because of the Way in which it works on me as law and as gospel to bring about faith. It *shows itself* to be a loving and true Word in this action."¹⁷

According to Professor Forde it is a mistake to believe that the laws of the Bible are merely a group of vocables accessible to reason. So the Gospel is not merely a set of words which man's reason can

grasp. The gospel is only heard by faith, it is only heard by those who through the law have been brought to the end of the line. The Gospel is something so special that it could not be expressed in books at all, but has to be proclaimed as a living voice as found in a sermon on I Peter, where the Reformer asserted:

And it, the Gospel, really is not what you find in the books and what is contained in the letters, but rather a spoken declaration and living Word—a voice which resounds, is publicly proclaimed and every where heard . . . therefore, if one should ask what the Gospel is, the sophists of the higher schools would answer; it is a book which teaches a good thing. They do not know what it is because they do not understand it. Gospel means good message.¹⁸

Faith comes out of hearing of the gospel proclamation when the law has destroyed all self-confidence in man. Faith can ask no securer basis than this. From this perspective it is possible to allow for errors in the Bible; they do not affect faith which is created by the Gospel. The Word of God is living and active and needs no theory of inspiration. "The Word of God is something *qualitatively* different from man's word, not just *quantitatively*, and it makes its own way in the world. It is authoritative because it established its own authority."¹⁹

Another group of theologians found represented in different synods of Lutheranism, who use the law/gospel principle of interpretation, are those who are calling themselves "evangelical Lutherans" and those adhering to the older position as "Lutheran scholastics." Dean Lueking in his book, *Mission in the Making*, published in 1964, makes this distinction and applies these labels to groups in the LC-MS.²⁰ Those who accept the position that the Bible as verbally inspired in all of its parts are depicted as guilty of scholasticism, while those who stress the law-gospel syndrome are the interpreters of Scripture that are supposedly truly evangelical and confessional in their theological position.

Walter R. Bouman of Concordia Teachers College, River Forest has espoused this position, claiming in the 1965 *Yearbook of the Lutheran Education Association* that in the history of the LC-MS there had been unfortunately developed an unLutheran approach to the interpretation of Scripture and a wrong approach to the interpretation of the Lutheran Confessions.²¹ Dr. Bouman contends that the LC-MS has not been faithful to Luther's understanding of the Scriptures. In the 1965 *Yearbook* Dr. Bouman made the following charge.

The neo-scholasticism of the 19th century became the dominant theological approach of the Missouri Synod. *The Book of Concord*, the Reformation and the Scriptures themselves were read in the light of neo-scholasticism. Franz Pieper became its great theological spokesman, and his work was transmitted to several generations of teachers through the teachings and writings of E. W. A. Koehler.²²

Robert C. Schultz, now no longer with Missouri, was one of

the first scholars to try to break the Pieper-Koehler misconception that had pervaded the LC-MS Bouman wrote:

Schultz documents the struggle to recover the Reformation point of view in terms of Law and Gospel. C. F. W. Walther actually made a break-through in his stress in his theses on the pastoral use of Law and Gospel. But a similar breakthrough never occurred in the systematic theology of the Missouri Synod.²³

One of the great errors of past LC-MS history according to this self-named school of Lutheran evangelicalism was the making of a distinction between Scripture as the formal principles and justification as a material principle. It is the contention of Bouman and those who share his point of view that the weakness of scholasticism was epistemological, asking how and what can I know. This same argument Forde also employs. In distinguishing between Scripture as formal principle and material principle Bouman wrote:

There could be no distinction between Scripture as a formal principle and justification as a material principle. Instead the form was also at the same time the material and the categories burst. How does God deal with me? Through Law and Gospel. What does He say? Law and Gospel. This was the dynamite that exploded scholasticism. Under the distinction of Law and Gospel, under the impact of the Gospel of liberation from Law, all of theology was radically new.²⁴

Forde, Bouman and those espousing this Scriptural methodology claims that the law/gospel principle is decisive for Lutheranism and that the exegete need not worry about such matters as the factual inerrancy in Scripture, but about law and gospel. Thus to quote Bouman again:

If God deals with us in Law and Gospel, then we will look for THAT and be struck by THAT in Genesis, Joshua and the Ascension story. And we will recognize that whatever the cosmology-our own or that of the Bible-God calls our idolatrous use of His world into question with the Law and creates everything-even sinners-anew out of nothing through the Gospel.²⁵

Dr. Rudnick of Concordia College, St. Paul, asserted in a letter published in *The Lutheran Witness-Reporter* that it was permissible to teach evolution inasmuch as such teaching does not violate the law-gospel principle.²⁶ Thomas Streeter, in *Advance*, May 1966, informed his readers how revolutionary it was that the Reformation Lutherans had Copernicans among them, "because Copernicanism differed with cosmology in the Book of Judges. But this did not concern the Lutherans because it was not A THREAT TO THE GOSPEL."²⁷

The Commission on Theology's *Stance Document* sets forth the law-gospel principle as a principle of interpretation. In this document the last of the Six presuppositions given as guidelines for developing a

sound Scriptural stance toward biblical studies was enunciated in the following manner:

In hearty agreement with the Lutheran Confessions we affirm that the right understanding the Gospel (including the proper distinction of Law and Gospel as grounded in the article of Justification) is the key that finally unlocks the meaning of Sacred Scriptures (Apol. IV: 2-5, German; F. C. SD, V.1). We therefore hold that all theological questions raised by any interpretation must be posed and answered with reference to this central concern of the Scriptures. We hold that those technical questions involved in interpretation which neither aid nor impair the right of understanding of the Gospel (in its fullest sense) ought not to become a matter of controversy in the church (Cf. Apol. VII, 20f.; FC, SD Summary, 15). Not that the technical questions as such may be dismissed in advance as trivial. On the contrary, the Christian interpreter is bound to deal seriously and soberly with all questions that arise in connection with the interpretation of any part of Scriptures, precisely to enable him to judge correctly whether they aid, impair, or are irrelevant to the right understanding of the Gospel.²⁸

Unless the essayist is completely misunderstanding this paragraph of the *Stance Document*, it claims that an interpretation of a Scripture passage or passages is permissible, even though it may question clear statements of the text, as long as it does not violate the law/gospel principle. Since the *Stance Document* has not defined what is meant by those technical questions involved in interpretation which neither impair the right understanding of the Gospel (in its fullest sense), it is difficult to know what in the text is unessential for not rejecting or accepting a given interpretation that does not deal faithfully with a verse, a paragraph, a chapter or segment of Scripture. There are Lutheran interpreters who reject the miracles of the Bible, repudiate prophecy when it predicts future events, reject clear isagogical statements of the Old and New Testaments, question the factuality of events recorded in the historical books of the Bible as unimportant and assert that if their rejections and repudiations of Scriptural teaching do not violate the law-gospel principle, this may be done without objections legitimately being raised against such interpretations as being erroneous because they violate the hermeneutical principle that the text is to be understood according to the sense intended by the original author. There are those who reject the existence of Satan, the existence of good and evil angels, belief in the Virgin Birth, the miracles of Christ, a visible second return of Christ, a corporeal resurrection and other clearly revealed teachings and still contend that the non-acceptance of these teachings is not serious because it does not violate the law-gospel principle. Professor Schroeder as a member of Valparaiso's Religion Department wrote that it is possible within the law-gospel principle to practice literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism and Sachkritik and be soundly Luther and Biblical.²⁹ Evolution, an errant Scriptures,

"the new morality" and "situation ethics" are all possible by this simple device of asserting that the distinction between law-gospel is not violated. The Dean of Gettysburg Seminary claims that it is possible to interpret the Lutheran position in Barthian, Niebuhrian, Tillichian or Whiteheadian terms.³⁰ This would only be possible by the espousal of a hermeneutics that claims that as long as the law-gospel principle is not violated, the interpreter can interpret according to any of the accepted positions of current theology.

AN EVALUATION OF THE LAW-GOSPEL DISTINCTION AS A HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLE

The position of those Lutheran theologians who claim that the basic principle of Lutheran hermeneutics is the law-gospel principle and that all passages in Scripture must be evaluated according to it are establishing a new hermeneutics. To be able to deny clear explicit statements of a biblical text, repudiate doctrines held by the historic Christian Church and apply types of criticism that make the body of Scripture uncertain leads to a hermeneutic that is destructive of the Word of God. A number of demurers must be entered against the law-gospel proponents.

I. The question must be asked: "Is this position in harmony with the view that the Holy Scriptures hold of themselves?" Professor Forde has raised the question of the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Old and New Testaments. Lutheran and Protestant scholars believe that there are a number of Biblical passages that clearly teach the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament. Matthew 5:18, spoken by Christ, as reported in Matthew's Gospel reads: "For verily I (Christ) say unto you, Till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot (the smallest letter) or one tittle (the distinguishing projection of the Hebrew letters) shall in no wise pass from the law (i.e. the Old Testament), till all be fulfilled." This passage indicates that not only the thoughts conveyed by Scripture, but also the individual words themselves, are valid vehicles of those thoughts and as spelled out by individual letters are possessed of infallible truth and will surely find their fulfillment and realization.³¹

To cite another passage: John 10:35, "the Scripture cannot be broken." In the estimation of Dr. Carl Henry, this Johannine passage indicates something of the intensity of inspiration and at the same time enables the Christian to contemplate the view of our Lord concerning the Old Testament. An examination of the context of John 10:34f. shows that Jesus singled out an obscure passage in the Psalms ("ye are gods," Ps. 82:6) to reinforce the point that "the Scripture cannot be broken."³² Henry contends that this passage "is doubly significant because it also discredits the modern bias against identifying Scripture as the Word of God, on the ground that this assertedly dishonors the supreme revelation of God in the incarnate Christ. But in John 10:35 Jesus of Nazareth while speaking of himself as indeed the one "the Father consecrated and sent into the world," nonetheless refers to those in a past dispensation "to whom the Word of God came (and scripture cannot be broken)." The

unavoidable implication is that the whole of Scripture is of irrefragable authority."³³

II Timothy 3:15-17 is being cited as evidence that the main purpose of Scripture is to point to Christ and is therefore soteriological. The inference is then drawn that in dealing with those portions of Scripture, that do not deal with soteriology, the interpreter is at liberty to interpret as he sees fit, as long as his interpretation does not violate the Christological intent of the Scriptures. Those who utilize the passage in this manner conveniently do not use the entire passage, which asserts "that the entire Old Testament is inspired by God and the entire Old Testament is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living. So that the man who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good work."³¹

The word "theopneustos" means literally "God-spirated" or "breathed out." This vocable affirms that the entire Old Testament is the product of God's activity, that all of the Old Testament is the product of God's creative breath. It is rather difficult to conceive that God should inspire a book that is replete with contradictions and many errors. It is the contention of Dr. Henry that "whoever searches the Gospel narratives faithfully in view of Jesus' attitude toward the sacred writings will be driven again and again to the conclusion of Reinhold Seeberg: "Jesus himself describes and employs the Old Testament as an infallible authority (e.g. Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:44)."³⁵

Two books of the Holy Scriptures, Deuteronomy and Revelation, make the statement that no reader or user of these books was to add to or detract from them. In Deuteronomy Jahweh commands Israel through Moses: "You are neither to add to the word that I command you, nor to take from it; these commands which I enjoin upon you are of the Lord your God; you must obey them." (ch. 4:2) At the close of Revelation, the author writes: "I personally warn everyone who listens to the words of the prophecy of this book: If any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues that are described in this book. And if anyone detracts from the words of this prophetic book, God will detract his share in the tree of life and in the holy city as described in this book." Since these two books are inspired by the Holy Ghost, it would seem logical to assume that the author of the other canonical books would require the same attitude toward their writings. This, therefore, must be cited against those who believe they can detract from or change the contents of a biblical book which is done by the practitioners of radical literary criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism and Sachkritik.

Those who claim that only the Christological portions of Scriptures are binding on the interpreter are merely resorting to a device that was employed by critical scholarship when it abandoned and rejected the traditional view-that the Bible as a whole and in every part is the word of God written and that one must distinguish between those matters in Scripture that apply to theology and morals and those that apply to science and history. Henry P. Smith and Charles A. Briggs attempted to distinguish between two types of

truth and thus allow for error to inhere in matters pertaining to history or science. Those who claim that one need only not violate the proper distinction between law-gospel to interpret how one desires are even going farther than did Smith and Briggs. As long as the exegete does not deny the gospel he is free to interpret the Scriptures according to the most recent views of current scholarship. However, to the position that there are different types of truth in the Bible there are two fatal objections that must be made. First, the New Testament does not distinguish between the historicity of the literal Adam and Eve as implied in I Timothy 2:13, 14 as also in I Cor. 11:8, 9; the literal stay of Jonah in the stomach of the whale is absolutely essential if it is to serve as an analogy for Christ's three days in the tomb (Matt. 12:40). It is impossible to reject the historicity of these two passages, greatly contested today, without rejecting the authority of Christ and the apostle Paul. In these passages it is very difficult to separate between the theology-ethics and science-history classification. The historicity of the Adam passages in Genesis is the basis for Paul's doctrine of original sin and also of the unity of the human race. In this instance one cannot permit error in history-science without ending up in error in doctrine.³⁶

It is difficult to harmonize the concept of a Scripture inspired by God the Holy Ghost with the idea that God's Word should be unreliable and not truthful or dependable. The distinction between law-gospel as binding as over against other clearly revealed statements would appear to the essayist as being out of character for a volume that claims divine inspiration. When Jesus on Maunday Thursday evening in the Highpriestly Prayer asked His Heavenly Father to preserve his disciples and asserted: "Preserve them in thy word, thy word is truth," it is difficult to see how Jesus could only mean that the Old Testament was reliable insofar as law-gospel were properly being divided, and was not speaking that the historical statements and warnings were true.

Paul in a number of passages insists on the importance of adhering to his teaching. At the end of II Thessalonians he said, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him" (2 Thess. 3:18). In the Pastoral Letters there are at least thirteen references advocating healthy or sound doctrine. These passages stress the truth that not just certain doctrines are to be held, but all revealed teachings are to be obeyed. In Titus 1:9, Paul listed as one of the duties of a bishop that he be a man holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers." In the same chapter Titus was told to rebuke the Cretans sharply "that they may be sound in the faith" (2:2). "Speak thou the things that become sound doctrine." Paul proclaimed the existence of a divine standard of truth, from which no deviations were to be permitted, when he commanded Timothy: "If any man teach otherwise and consent not to the wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud . . ." (I Timothy 6:3-4). Not only the Christological doctrines of Scriptures are binding upon Christians, but those not

directly connected with the plan of salvation are to be held, if set forth clearly in Scriptures.

To confine the obedience which the Christian exegete is to render to the Scriptures, to those doctrines necessary for salvation is placing a restriction on the Word which is refuted by scores of passages, which in fact militate against the essential unity of Scriptures. We agree with Luther: "My dear fellow, God's Word is God's Word: that will not permit much picking (*das darf nicht viel Menkels*). Anyone who makes God a liar, or blasphemes Him in one word, or says that it is a small thing for Him to be blasphemed or made a liar, he blasphemes the entire God and thinks little of all blasphemy of God. He is a God who will not permit Himself to be divided, or to be praised in one place and rebuked in another, to be honored in one place and despised in another" (*Das diese Worte usw. Noch stehen.*)³⁷

At Worms, when Luther's very life was at stake, the Reformer testified "My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God." "Scripture alone is the true overlord and master of all writings and doctrines on earth,"³⁸ and the Lutheran Confessions demand this position of all pastors and teachers of the Church. Thus the *Formula of Concord* states: "Dr. Luther himself . . . has expressly drawn this distinction, viz. that God's Word alone is and should remain equal, but to it everything should be subordinated (Solid Declaration, Summary Formulations, 9).

This position of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions has been the historic position of our LC-MS for over a century. Lutheran hermeneutics has operated with the principle of the unity of Scriptures, holding that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments have one Author, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who spoke through the Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles, not only does not contradict Himself, but He offers a message which should be regarded as an essential unit and organism. Like the human body the Bible is a unit, a body which normally functions when all the component parts are active in bringing the full revelation to mankind. Many parts of Scripture are depicted as a revelation and manifestation of the Godhead through the Person of Jesus Christ, described by Paul as the divine Wisdom of God and by John as the *Logos*, or the Word of God. Therefore, to limit the binding portions of Scripture for the believer to the Law-Gospel teaching is to place restrictions on the Scriptures that are contrary to its expressed purpose.

Those who limit the interpretation of Scripture to the law-gospel principle are guilty of setting up for themselves what amounts to a kerygma and dispense with the remainder of Scripture as unimportant. Theologians who proceed through the Bible and selectively declare: "This is kerygma" and "This is not kerygma," are no longer placing themselves "unter der Schrift" to employ one of Luther's famous expressions. When the exegete limits the teachings of Scripture that are binding upon the consciences to those that do not conflict or violate the law-gospel syndrome, then severe limitations have been placed upon the Scripture. Then the exegete who follows this type of hermeneutics is not submitting to the entire Scriptures

but is proceeding magisterially to judge the Scripture and proceeds to accept what pleases him and to reject what fits his theories.

The proponents of the law-gospel principle are just as guilty of coming to the Scripture with an *a priori* as are the believers in the infallibility of the Bible. Forde claimed that the law-gospel was not dictating to the Word of God as to what it was to say ahead of time to the reader. E. G. Wright in criticizing Bultmann's essay that dealt with the Old Testament took Bultmann to task for his employment of the law-gospel principle to reject the Old Testament and asserted that Reformed theologians do not work with such a principle of interpretation.³⁹ It would be difficult to find a passage that sets forth the statement in clear words that the interpreter first must proclaim the law and then enunciate the gospel to the crushed and penitent sinner. Luther and the Lutherans came to the correct conviction that the Scriptures do indicate that before the sinner can appreciate the Gospel he needs to realize that he is a lost and condemned sinner. Then the Good News of what Christ has done for the sinner is to be announced. The law-gospel is based on deductive reasoning inferred from clear passages of the Word. Those who claim that they are objective when they interpret the Scriptures according to the law-gospel dichotomy are no more objective than those who in their interpretation of the Scriptures hold them to be errorless at least as found in the autographs.

The proponents of the law-gospel principle of interpretation are guilty of deprecating all that is not law-gospel in the Scriptures. This amounts to sheer and unmitigated reductionism. Operating with this principle as the sole rule of interpretation is similar to the Bultmannian existential kerygma. This essayist agrees with Dr. Montgomery who asserted: "It should be evident that this entire line of reasoning illogically assumes that biblical statements can be translated willy-nilly into Law-Gospel statements and their obvious literal meanings ignored or regarded as non-revelatory."⁴⁰

In conclusion we quote from the faculty reaction to the *Stance Document*, adopted May 22, 1967:

The faculty is of the opinion that the Law-Gospel principle dare not be used as a single principle of the interpretation to the exclusion of or in contradiction of other valid principles of interpretation.

Scriptures passages, which by their very nature, cannot be interpreted by the single Law-Gospel principle, require that the interpreter follow the accepted canons of interpretation, for example:

- a. Scripture interprets Scripture;
- b. The Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New Testament;
- c. A passage must be taken in its literal sense unless the context compels a figurative understanding;
- d. Scripture is to be interpreted according to the analogy of faith.

FOOTNOTES

1. Kent Knutson, "The Authority of Scriptures," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 40:156, March, 1969; Gerhard Forde, *The Law-Gospel Debate* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969.) 248 pp.
2. Allan Hart Jahsmann, in the preface to Herbert T. Mayer, *Interpreting the Holy Scriptures* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), pp. 3-4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
4. John Warwick Montgomery, "Lutheran Hermeneutics and Hermeneutics Today," in *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics. Concordia Theological Monthly, Occasional Papers*, No. 1, pp. 81-91.
5. John H. Elliott, "The Preacher and the Proclamation: Some Architectural Reflections on Gaps and Bridges," Robert W. Bertram, editor, *The Lively Function of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 111.
6. Gerhard Forde, *Theological Perspectives. A Discussion of Contemporary Issues in Lutheran Theology* (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1967), p. 51.
7. Gerhard Forde, "Law and Gospel as the Methodological Principle of Theology," *Theological Perspectives, op. cit.*, p. 52.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 53. 9a.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
18. As quoted by Forde on page 63.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Dean Lucking, *Mission in the Making* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964.)
21. Walter R. Bouman, "A Theological Analysis," John S. Damm, editor, *The Teaching of Religion. Twenty-Second LEA Yearbook*, 1965 (River Forest, Ill. 1965), p. 33.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
26. Letter to the editor, *Lutheran Witness Reporter*, 2:8, July 3, 1966 No. 13.
27. Thomas W. Stricter, "Stricter's Letter Suggests Educational Changes," *Advance*, 13:7, May, 1966.
28. *A Lutheran Stance Toward Contemporary Biblical Studies*, as given in *Convention Work Book*, 1967. pp. 395-396.
29. Edward H. Schroeder, "Is There a Lutheran Hermeneutics?" in Bertram, *The Lively Function of the Gospel, op. cit.*, p. 97.
30. Lloyd E. Sheneman, "Look Again Prof. Jordahl!" *Lutheran Forum*, 2:10, August, 1968.
31. Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 20.
32. Carl F. Henry, "Inspiration," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), p. 287.
33. *Ibid.*

34. *Good News for Modern Man* (New York: The American Bible Society, 1966), pp. 477-478.
35. Henry, *op. cit.*, p. 287.
36. Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
37. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von John Georg Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), XX, 775, 28.
38. *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1897), VII, 308ff.
39. G. Ernst Wright, "History and Reality: The Importance of Israel's 'Historical' Symbols for the Christian Faith," Bernhard W. Anderson, editor, *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1963), p. 179.
40. John Warwick Montgomery, *Crisis in Lutheran Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), I, p. 120.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

Walter F. Brunn, a layman, with experience in both the business world (U.S. Steel) and church, has performed a service for the Missouri Synod by translating his great-grandfather's catechetical studies. Pfarrer Friedrich Brunn's masterpiece of devotional-confessional literature comes to life at a most suitable time when many of our problems are the same as they were a century ago. Battling rationalism, this courageous confessor and father of the Missouri Synod had to hide in the woods to survive persecution from civil and theological authorities. Still he carried out his pastoral duties in Steeden (Saxony), Germany, and trained 242 pastors for American congregations. Among his students was Dr. F. Pfothenauer, who later would become LCMS president.

His colorful career is eclipsed only by his writings. Here is a truly brave man, speaking out on issues such as Holy Scripture and inspiration, law and gospel, the threefold purpose of the law. Let the reader judge for himself.

"The second pattern is a bit more subtle, but just as dangerous . . . These people seemingly perceive and recognize God's Word, the divine revelation, as the sole basis and source of Christian faith. In spite of this, however, they are unwilling to accept all of Holy Writ outright as God's Word. Indeed, in a similar manner to the other older and coarser Rationalists, these newer theologians also want to differentiate the divine from the human in the Scriptures. This, they say, will make things more credible to reason. After all it is the purpose of Holy Scripture to reveal to us only the divine truth, the right faith, goes the argument, and thus it is quite consistent with this purpose to accept as the real word of God in Scriptures only that which actually belongs to and concerns itself with the revelation of divine Truth, but not other only external items as, for instance, historical or geographical information. . . . Yet . . . if we must differentiate in any way in Scripture between the divine and the human, just who is to be the judge? That can be none other than human reason." (pp. 14-15)

Friedrich Brunn's *God's Word and Luther's Doctrine* (Volume 1), a series of essays, 74 pages long, is available from Our Savior Lutheran Church, Mt. Lebanon, Pittsburgh, Pa. The translator, Mr. Brunn, is also a member of the Missouri Synod's Board for Higher Education.