

Thy Word is Truth

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" T H Y W O R D I S T R U T H "

At long last, Martin E. Marty has expressed himself publicly and definitely regarding the theological battle going on within his church body, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In an article in the liberal Christian Century,¹ of which he is an associate editor, he clearly aligns himself with the so-called "moderates" and unlooses several theological barrages against the synod's embattled president, J.A.O. Preus, and his supporters. Marty says of this battle that "the antagonists live in different worlds," and that "the struggle reveals two world views, two mentalities, two intentions, two spiritual and psychological casts" -- an evaluation with which we are fully inclined to agree.

What lies at the heart of the struggle? Marty leaves no one in doubt: "While there are side issues, the heart of the matter is the Preus faction's defense of biblical inerrancy -- even in matters geographic and scientific." The moderates would be quite willing to subscribe to a general doctrine of Biblical inspiration and Scriptural authority, but let no one insist that they subscribe to the total infallibility of Holy Scripture! In his article, Marty takes numerous pot shots at the doctrine of inerrancy, all of which combine to suggest that this doctrine can in no way be accepted by enlightened Christians. He admits that the synodical forefathers "did speak the language of inerrancy," but states that they "derive this concept from 17th century scholasticism," rather than from the Bible. The insistence upon inerrancy, he charges, "does not do justice to the gospel," but rather impairs true evangelical freedom. And those who are fighting for this doctrine are showing their "anti-intellectualism" and revealing a spirit of "legalism." Marty maintains that Luther "found errors of fact and argument and grammar in biblical documents," and asserts that the Lutheran Confessions, while describing the Bible as infallible in matters of salvation, nowhere speak of scientific errorlessness. What is more, there are, according to Marty, no passages in Scripture, not even John 10:35, which teach inerrancy, so that such a doctrine cannot be affirmed as an article of faith.

When all this is said by a man so prominent in learned

Lutheran circles as Marty, and when he states it in so positive a fashion, he surely invites a response from what he calls the theological "hinterland." And so we shall respond, lest our silence on this question be construed by anyone as agreement with his conclusions. Yet the paragraphs below are not designed primarily as an answer to Marty. Therefore some of the statements that we make may not apply specifically to him. What follows is our confession of faith in what we believe Scripture says of itself, namely, that it is God's verbally-inspired Word of truth, wholly free from human fallibility and factual error. We would join Christ in asserting of this holy Book, "Thy Word is Truth."

Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy -- A Matter of Faith

We speak of our belief in verbal inspiration and inerrancy, for we recognize that these doctrines, like the Gospel itself, cannot be received by the natural mind of man. In a context which speaks both of the Gospel of Christ and of verbal inspiration, the Apostle Paul states as a general principle that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor. 2:14) Such spiritual discernment involves, not only an objective revelation of the truth by the Spirit, such as we have in Scripture, but the creation of true spirituality in the heart through a Spirit-given faith in Christ.

Theologians of the Reformed school, in defending the twin doctrines of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, are at times inclined to stress the reasonableness of these truths. They submit "proofs of inspiration," based on such premises as "the character of God," and state that "a high view of God seems to require a correspondingly high view of inspiration."² While we indeed concur in the substance of such proofs, we do not agree with the method. For in themselves such proofs do not possess the ability to create belief in the divine character and infallibility of the Bible. Such faith, as all true faith, involves the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Christ.

This, then, is how a man comes to accept Scripture for what it is. God comes to us in the Good News of salvation, and through that Gospel supplies our deepest and most compelling needs. We find ourselves sinners, with guilty con-

science and the dread awareness of the Law's condemnation, and He reveals to us the blessed fact that "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" and that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (1 John 1:7; Rom. 8:1) We see the effects of sin in our body and fear the coming of mankind's "last enemy" and "the king of terrors," Death, and God assures us that through our Lord Jesus Christ we have "victory" over this cruel foe and "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven." (1 Cor. 15:26; Job 18:14; 1 Cor. 15:57; 1 Pet. 1:4) By thus solving, through the Gospel, these most urgent problems of our earthly existence, sin and death, God wins our confidence. And then, when He comes to us in the Bible and tells us that the Old Testament and the New Testament are His Word in all of their words, and that all of Scripture is therefore completely reliable and without error, we believe it, for He has won our confidence. Any man who is able to join the Psalmist in confessing, "My heart standeth in awe of thy word," should recognize and treasure such a conviction as a precious gift of faith, worked in his heart by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel! (Ps. 119:161)

Scripture -- The Word of God

But someone may ask, Does the Bible indeed speak of itself as being the Word of God, as a whole and in all its words? It is our complete conviction that it does. In a brief article such as this, it would in fact be utterly impossible to present all the Scriptural evidence on this question. For "a thousand times Scripture says that the writings of the prophets and apostles are God's own Word."³ Theodore Engelder, who makes this statement, quotes in support these words of Prof. James B. Green: "The Law and the Prophets, the teaching of Jesus and the preaching of Paul, these are declared to be the Word of God. It has been estimated that the Bible in various ways asserts its own inspiration some three thousand times. How often does the Bible have to say a thing before men will believe it?"⁴

The writers of the Old Testament spoke and wrote with the full awareness that they were serving as the instrument of the Lord in conveying His Word to the people. We are told that the Spirit of God came or fell upon these holy men of God, that they received the Word of God and were under constraint to utter it.⁵ In their writings they indicate

clearly that they were fully conscious of coming to the people with nothing less than the Word of the Lord. Again and again they begin their utterances with such expressions as "Thus saith the Lord," or "Hear ye the word of the Lord," or "Thus hath the Lord God showed unto me," or "The word of the Lord came unto ..." Repeatedly they show themselves to be the very mouthpieces of the Lord. "In many of their discourses in which the Lord is introduced as speaking, the prophets suddenly turn from the use of the third to that of the first person, without any transitional 'saith the Lord.' In other words, they surprise the reader by beginning to speak as if they were God. Cf. Isa. 3:4; 5:3ff.; 10:5ff.; 27:3; Jer. 5:7; 16:21; Hos. 6:4ff.; Joel 2:25; Amos 5:21ff.; Zech. 9:7; etc. This would be unexampled boldness on the part of the prophets, if they were not absolutely sure that God was putting the words, which they were speaking, into their mouths as His own."⁶

The New Testament gives copious testimony to this verbal inspiration of the Old. We find numerous formulas like the one used by Matthew in the first chapter of his Gospel: "Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ..." (1:22, NASB) In Matthew 7:10-13, Christ not only identifies Moses as the writer of the Pentateuch, but testifies that he spoke "the word of God." In Luke 24:44, He seals the entire Old Testament with His divine authority when He says to the Emmaus disciples: "All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Paul, in Romans 3:2, alludes to the Old Testament Scriptures as "the oracles (sayings) of God"; and in 9:16 he tellingly identifies Scripture with the Word of God: "For the scripture saith unto Pharoah, Even for this purpose have I (the Lord) raised thee up ..." The apostle Peter tells us that he was an eyewitness to the majesty of Christ at the transfiguration, but he adds that we have something even more sure than such direct confrontation with God,⁷ namely, the prophetic Word of the Old Testament, spoken from God by the holy writers as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit: "And we have the even surer prophetic word, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from

God." (2 Pet. 1:19-21, NASB with margin) And there is, of course, that locus classicus for the doctrine of verbal inspiration, 2 Timothy 3:16: "All Scripture is inspired by God (lit., God-breathed)." (NASB with margin)

That this divine inspiration is verbal, should be manifest to anyone. For the speaking and writing of God through the holy men of God necessarily involved human language,⁸ which is made up of words. The words are the thing, as is illustrated more than once in the Bible. To Christ the very "jot and tittle" were matters of exceeding importance.⁹ In John 10:34ff., which we shall discuss below in greater detail, He points to an individual word of Scripture as being divinely authoritative and inerrant. And Paul, in Galatians 3:16, cites even the grammatical form of a word in order to underscore what he is saying: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."¹⁰

But verbal inspiration is ascribed also to the writings of the New Testament. In His high-priestly prayer, the Lord Christ points to the apostles as the ones who would convey the Word of God to future generations: "I have given them thy word; ... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." (John 17:14, 20) This Word was to consist of nothing less, and nothing more, than His own authoritative words, for He enjoins them prior to His ascension to "make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19f., NASB) That the proclamation of these apostles would be safeguarded from human fallibility was guaranteed by His effective promise: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. ... When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: ... and he will show you things to come." (John 14:26; 16:13) And that truth which the apostles received from God they not only proclaimed orally, but also wrote down, as the following passages testify: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." (1 John 1:3) "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." (2 Thess. 2:15) "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Cor. 14:37)

Furthermore, we are to regard, not only the message of the apostles, but the very words in which this message is clothed, as taught by the Holy Spirit. For Paul speaks thus concerning the apostolic message: "Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." (1 Cor. 2:13, NASB) So authoritative, therefore, are the writings of the apostles, that they are placed on a par with the writings of the Old Testament, as we see in such passages as 1 Peter 1:10-12,* where the Holy Spirit is said to be testifying through both the prophets and the apostles; 2 Peter 3:16,** where the writings of Paul are included with the Old Testament writings in the term "scripture"; Ephesians 2:20, "the foundation of the apostles and prophets"; cf. also 2 Peter 3:2,*** and Hebrews 1:1f.

We hesitate not at all, therefore, to confess with full assurance that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the verbally, word-for-word, inspired Word of God. This doctrine is not a subtle theological construction of the 17th century dogmatists, but is a clear teaching of the Bible. And what the Bible claims for itself we confidently accept, for through the Gospel it has won our trust!

Scripture -- Inerrant

The Bible, then, teaches that whatever a holy writer

* "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

** "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction."

*** "That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour."

recorded, he wrote by direction of the Holy Ghost and in the words chosen by Him. From this truth it follows, as a necessary and easily drawn consequence, that the Bible is also inerrant, that is, free from human fallibility and factual error in all matters that it treats.¹¹ Simple Christians find no trouble in arriving at this corollary, and it betokens their childlike faith in Scripture -- which faith is to be praised, even as Christ does praise it.¹²

But the learned theologians, including some of those who claim to accept inspiration, seem to have great difficulty in arriving at this inescapable conclusion. There are those who claim to find "contradictions" or "mistakes" in the Bible, and who must therefore assume that inspiration was a hit-or-miss, on-and-off kind of process. Others, who wish to retain plenary inspiration at least in theory, speak of degrees of inspiration, so that some passages are "more inspired" than others. It would seem that they would have to conclude that the Holy Spirit became a bit careless at times, permitting less worthy passages to enter in among the truly divine. To us it seems evident that any denial of a uniform, full, and all-inclusive inspiration could easily involve a type of blasphemy against God.

This is especially true in that the Bible actually claims inerrancy for itself. A concordance will reveal how often the quality of truth is ascribed to the holy writings, a quality attaching even to the individual words. We think, for example, of passages like John 17:17, where Christ says in prayer to His Father: "Thy word is truth"; or John 8:31f., where He states: "If ye continue in my word, ... ye shall know the truth." And that this freedom from error attaches to the very words of Scripture is seen in John 10:34ff., in which Christ defends the one word "Gods" on the basis of the principle: "The scripture cannot be broken." Such passages indeed present a formidable obstacle to those who refuse to accept Biblical inerrancy, and they have therefore expended much effort to becloud or deny their clear import. But their efforts are, in our opinion, wholly unsuccessful. To illustrate what we mean, we shall look more closely at two of these passages, John 17:17 and John 10:35.

John 17:17: "Thy word is truth."

It is particularly the word "truth" (ἀλήθεια) that we are interested in here, the word which occurs so frequently

in the New Testament as a descriptive attribute of Holy Scripture. We are told by some theologians that we dare not read our 20th century concept of factual accuracy and errorlessness into this 1st century Greek word when it is used of the Bible. They assure us that the apostles meant something quite different, namely, that the Word of God is thereby characterized by a quality of "faithfulness," for it witnesses to a God who is faithful and dependable in His dealings with men -- or, put in a somewhat different way, that God's Word is "truth" inasmuch as His dealings with men invariably correspond to His Word.

James Barr, in his book, The Semantics of Biblical Language,¹³ explores the meaning of ἀλήθεια in a detached linguistic fashion, and concludes that the word suggested to 1st century Greeks a meaning which is little different from the common meaning of the word "truth" in our day. He cites random passages from Homer, Herodotus, Plato, Thucydides, Josephus, the Septuagint (Judges 9:15), and the New Testament (Luke 22:59), and then states: "Surely it is beyond dispute that in such a series there is a basic semantic contrast between what is 'true' and what is falsehood, pretence, insincerity, outward appearance, and half-truth; and that neither do the Greek examples refer to 'abstract and metaphysical truth' nor do the Jewish-Christian ones refer to 'the reality of God in covenant-relationship, God's being true to himself, truth grounded upon God's faithfulness' or anything of the sort. It is because the basic semantics of the Greek word was not its relation to abstract and metaphysical thinking but the contrast pattern between 'true' and 'false' or 'unreal,' a contrast pattern which was normal and living in the actual speech encountered, that the Seventy were able to use the word quite naturally in their translation."¹⁴

Arndt and Gingrich recognize the same thing when in our passages they contrast ἀλήθεια with ψεῦδος ("lie" or "falsehood").¹⁵ This opposition appears in a very evident fashion in a passage like John 8:44-45: "Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." In connection with this passage, J.A.O. Preus states: "Jesus speaks of Himself as telling the truth and as being the truth. To Him it is very important whether a thing is

in accord with facts or not. ... Here [John 8:44-45] lying and truth are put in contradistinction. This is an absolute antithesis, unless we are to assume that Satan is not completely a liar and Christ is not completely truthful. Christ is here speaking of His message, of all that He says, in direct opposition to Satan, the father of lies. In John 8:45 Jesus points out that He not only is the truth but that He speaks the truth: 'I tell you the truth.'"¹⁶

When we say, now, that ἀλήθεια would have suggested immediately the meaning "truth" (as opposed to "what is false") to the Greek readers of the New Testament, we do not thereby imply that the contexts in which this word is found would not suggest additional theological concepts.¹⁷ Indeed, the modifiers and adjuncts of a word do bring in such additional concepts. But we are transgressing a basic principle of sound linguistic practice if we add such concepts to the semantics of the word, and then assume the presence of these additional meanings in other passages where the word is found. We do wrong, therefore, when we inject into the meaning of ἀλήθεια a theological construction which may indeed be valid in itself, but which is not part of the semantics of the word. While it is a teaching of Scripture that God is faithful in His dealings with men, a faithfulness to which His Word gives ample witness, we are not justified in concluding that the basic meaning of ἀλήθεια in its New Testament usage is "faithfulness." A second linguistic error is committed when we in addition deny the common meaning which the word had for the original readers of the New Testament.

There are theologians who have made such linguistic mistakes in their treatment of ἀλήθεια. Hoskyns and Davey are two of them.¹⁸ They admit: "Now the Greek ἀλήθεια in the spoken Greek of the first century A.D. did mean very much what the English adjective true means to the ordinary Englishman today. It meant something genuine and not counterfeit, without emphasis on any particular standard by which a statement or thing may be judged true or false." But then they proceed to supply such a "standard" for ἀλήθεια in Scripture, which for them was "a transcendent God," to whom "the idea of steadfastness, 'true to one's self', came naturally to be applied."

Rudolf Bultmann has committed both of the linguistic errors mentioned above. In his article on ἀλήθεια in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, he speaks of the word as "subsuming" concepts in its various

contexts.¹⁹ In the paragraph treating our passage, John 17:17, Bultmann stipulates: "For ἀληθεια naturally does not mean the formal truth of the facts in question. ... It would be a gross misunderstanding to take it here in the general and formal sense." What does the word mean in this context? "Revelation," says Bultmann. But lest we take this word as an objective body of divinely revealed truth, he immediately tells us that "the Word of revelation is not a complex of statements or ideas," but rather "an address fulfilled in a concrete encounter" -- an existential confrontation with God!²⁰ Anyone who has read Bultmann knows what truth value he would ascribe to the written Scripture. He finds so much of the mythological in the Gospels, for example, that he feels compelled to conclude: "I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus."²¹

According to Barr, this faulty linguistic method of replacing the actual semantic content of a word with some theological construction, rightly or wrongly drawn from the context, is found all too frequently in Kittel's Theological Dictionary. In a detailed chapter, entitled "Some Principles of Kittel's Theological Dictionary," he criticizes this work for being founded upon the faulty linguistic principles promoted by Cremer in his Lexicon, and for then employing these principles again and again in articles on individual words. The result is that the user of Kittel is often not led to a better understanding of the actual semantics of a given word, but is instead given a resume of the author's own understanding of the passages in which the word occurs. The danger lies in the fact that the user of the Theological Dictionary may easily substitute the author's interpretation for the actual meaning of the word. Barr concludes his chapter with the observation that the linguistic method of Kittel may ultimately do much damage in the area of Biblical studies: "It may well be that TWNT [the Theological Dictionary] will do more harm through its bad linguistic conceptions than it will do good through the useful material compiled in it, and in particular that those aspects of its linguistic philosophy which I have criticized, and which were foremost in the mind of the editors, may become widespread far beyond the range of the actual readers of TWNT. I do not doubt that this has already come to be so."²² We shudder, also, to think of the "contribution" that a man like Bultmann may make to Lutheran theology through his articles in the Theological Dictionary!

The primary function, surely, of a New Testament Greek dictionary should be to present the meaning, or "pool" of meanings, that a given word had for Greek-speaking people of the 1st century -- meanings which would have been present to the mind of the original readers of the New Testament. A secondary function of such a dictionary might be the presentation of the etymology, or semantic history, of the word. Proper linguistic practice suggests that the exegete, in translating a passage, should examine the context of that word and then make an appropriate selection from this "pool" of meanings. One abuse involves what is referred to by Barr and others as "etymologizing." Such etymologizing occurs whenever the exegete reads into a word some "attractive" meaning which may lie somewhere in its semantic history, such as the root meaning, but which the word does not have in actual usage. Another abuse, a theologizing approach, involves the setting aside of the common meanings of the word in 1st century Greek, and the giving to the word of some theological sense, which may be found in other contexts, but which would not have been present to the mind of the original readers of the New Testament. Even Arndt-Gingrich at times goes beyond the proper function of a dictionary, as for example when it suggests as two broad meanings of ζωή in the New Testament "1. of life in the physical sense," and "2. of the supernatural life belonging to God and Christ, which the believers will receive in the future, but which they also enjoy here and now."²³ It is quite unlikely that the word ζωή, as an indicator of meaning, carried with it the full-blown theological concept expressed in the second category. Such a concept belongs, not to the word ζωή itself, but to some of the contexts in which it is found. We must make this kind of distinction if we are to avoid a subtle kind of eisegesis -- reading into a passage a meaning which may in itself be quite Scriptural, but which does not lie in the passage we are treating. Such practice can lead in time to the gross abuse of Scripture which we have seen in Bultmann above.

But let us return to ἀλήθεια. Surely it is a highly arbitrary exegetical procedure, and linguistically irresponsible, to empty a word of the semantic content it undeniably carried in 1st century Greek, and then replace it with a theological construction of one's own choosing. And that is precisely what some theologians have done. There can be no doubt that ἀλήθεια in its general usage referred to the "truth" or facticity of the matters in question, and even

Bultmann is forced to recognize the existence of such a "general and formal sense."²⁴ We may be sure, then, that the original hearers and readers of the apostles brought this meaning into the contexts where ἀλήθεια is used -- including the context of John 17:17: "Thy word is truth." Let us, then, not hesitate to use this passage, and the many others which are similar to it, as proof passages for the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy!

C. Kuehne

(to be continued)

FOOTNOTES

1. "Showdown in the Missouri Synod," issue of September 27, 1972, p. 943ff.
2. Henry C. Thiessen, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 81ff.
3. Theodore Engelder, Scripture Cannot Be Broken (Mora, Minnesota: Hope, Inc., n.d.), p. 51. This excellent volume is again available in a reprinted edition..
4. Ibid.
5. Cf. L. Berkhof, Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), p. 42f.
6. Ibid.
7. On the words "more sure," cf. George Stoeckhardt, Lectures on the Second Epistle of St. Peter (Lake Mills, Iowa: Graphic Publ. Co., Inc., 1967), p. 19f. Cf. also Berkhof, op. cit., p. 45.
8. "human language," yet inerrant; cf. the next section of this article.
9. Cf. Matt. 5:18. The NASB conveys the sense of the passage effectively: "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished."
10. Berkhof points out here: "This argument of the apostle has been attacked on the ground that the Hebrew word to which he refers cannot be used in the plural to denote posterity. Cf. Gen. 13:15. But this does not destroy the validity of his argument, for the writer of Genesis might have used another word or expression in the plural. And even if it did, the passage would still prove that Paul

believed in the inspiration of the individual words."

Op. cit., p. 47.

11. The inseparable connection between inspiration and inerrancy is treated in a more philosophical fashion by J. W. Montgomery, Crisis in Lutheran Theology (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1967), vol. I. In an article entitled "Inspiration and Inerrancy: A New Departure," he states: "Note carefully that I have not said merely (as others have said) that inspiration and inerrancy should not be separated (i.e., that they can be separated but for various biblical and theological reasons ought not to be), but rather that scriptural inspiration and inerrancy cannot exist apart from each other (i.e., that to separate them results not just in error, but in plain and simple meaninglessness)." p. 18.

12. Cf. Matt. 18:1-6: "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receive me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

13. James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Barr is Professor of Old Testament Literature and Theology in the University of Edinburgh.

14. Idem, p. 189f. It is significant that, according to Barr, a similar semantic content can be found in the corresponding Hebrew word, 'emeth.

15. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 35.

16. Jacob A. O. Preus, It Is Written (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971), p. 24f. The entire chapter, "Christ Regarded the Scripture as True and Reliable," is well worth reading.

17. Cf. a verse like John 14:6, where Jesus says "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

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18. Cited by Barr, op. cit., p. 195.
19. Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964 -), vol. I, p. 244.
20. Idem, p. 246. How improbable Bultmann's remarks here are, is indicated by a comparison of John 14:26 and 16:13. The content of "truth" in the latter verse would surely seem to be the "things" of the former, namely, the facts of Christ's words and works.
21. Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 8.
22. Barr, op. cit., p. 262.
23. Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 340. See Barr's discussion of Bauer's Wörterbuch, op. cit., p. 254ff. The linguistic procedures of Bauer have, of course, been carried over into the translation by Arndt and Gingrich.
24. Kittel, op. cit., p. 246.



" T H Y W O R D I S T R U T H "

The attacks upon the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, also by liberals among the Lutherans, continue unabated. A pastor of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, F. Dean Lueking, recently addressed the membership of the American Lutheran Church in this fashion:

"The doctrine of inerrancy was clearly taught by one of the most revered and forceful leaders of Missouri's past, Franz Pieper. He forged this strong emphasis during years of controversy with fellow Lutherans in the U.S. and against the whole background of Protestant liberal theology from the 1880's through World War I and the 1920's. Pieper was the president of the Missouri Synod, president of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, and the most capable organizer of Christian doctrine the synod has had.

"But another strand of Missouri's tradition has pointed out one embarrassing fact: the Bible nowhere makes such claims for itself. Faithful men, whose life work is not to organize doctrines about the Bible (important as that is) but whose task is hearing the message of the Bible itself, tell us that inerrancy, in the sense of scientific precision in all matters of chronology, geography, etc., is a human prop which the Bible does not need. In fact, it's an obstacle."¹

Are we really to believe that the convictions of the Old Missouri Synod regarding Scripture were based on nothing more than unfounded dogmatic inventions of men like Pieper? Are we really to believe that the Bible has absolutely nothing to say about its own inerrancy? We are reminded of Satan in the garden, who boldly asserted the very opposite of the facts to a gullible Eve. Indeed, "zu behaupten ist nicht zu beweisen" -- to assert something does not mean to prove it!

In the last issue of this Journal,² we began a discussion of the doctrine of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. We had opportunity there to demonstrate how this high view of Scripture is a matter of faith, and is therefore a fruit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was shown that Holy

Scripture in numerous passages of both the Old and New Testaments speaks of itself as the Word of God, not only with respect to the doctrines which it teaches, but also with respect to its very words! We then suggested that inerrancy, the freedom from human fallibility and factual error in all matters that the Bible treats, follows from such verbal inspiration as a necessary and easily drawn consequence. With the aim of showing that Scripture predicates also such inerrancy of itself, we continued with a discussion of the word ἀλΐθεια, as found in such passages as John 17:17: "Thy word is truth." And we now resume this same topic with a study of John 10:35.

* * * *

JOHN 10:35 "The scripture cannot be broken." This verse comes to mind immediately in any discussion of Biblical inerrancy. For it has been, perhaps, the locus classicus for this doctrine. Those who would do away with the doctrine must, therefore, dispose somehow of this verse. Dr. Martin Marty, in the article which precipitated this series in the Journal, states categorically: "The verb translated 'broken' does not have that intention and effect [namely, to affirm inerrancy]." ³ It may well be that he was thinking of a novel interpretation of this passage by Richard Jungkuntz, which came to light several years ago in an article in the CTM. ⁴ Whether or not it was Dr. Jungkuntz's intention to remove John 10:35 from the sedes for inerrancy does not appear from the article. But it is evident that, should his exegesis be accepted, we would have to strike this passage from all of our confessions which treat this doctrine. We would not be unwilling to do this, if we could be convinced of the correctness of his interpretation. But he has not convinced us.

The New Approach

Dr. Jungkuntz begins his article with some comments on what he calls the "modern" and the "traditional" interpretations of John 10:34-36. (In the KJV, the entire passage reads: "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of

God?") Jungkuntz states that both interpretations are based upon the presupposition "that behind Jesus' words lies the intent by means of unanswerable formal argumentation to refute or at least to silence His opponents, the Pharisees, who have charged Him with blasphemy for claiming to be divine."

The "modern" interpretation, according to Dr. Jungkuntz, suggests that Jesus is here making use of an exegetical technique commonly employed by the rabbis. Through the use of Psalm 82:6 ("Ye are gods") and the literalistic understanding of this verse by the Jews ("the scripture cannot be broken"), Jesus would be trying to show His opponents that it cannot be blasphemy for Him to claim the title of divinity even though He is a human being. Jungkuntz objects to this "modern" interpretation for two reasons. First, Jesus would, through such a rabbinical technique, be using an argumentum ad hominem, by employing Jewish literalism without having to subscribe to it Himself; and, secondly, He would thereby not be meeting the chief objection of the Jews, namely, that He claimed to be God in very essence.

The "traditional" interpretation, Dr. Jungkuntz states, reaches as far back in time as Chrysostom, and includes among its proponents such more recent exegetes as Stoeckhardt and Lenski. It suggests that Jesus is trying to prove to His opponents by syllogistic argument that He is rightly called God in the highest sense of the word. Jungkuntz finds difficulty with this interpretation also. He feels that either Jesus would be guilty of equivocation, by using the word "God" in both a lower and a higher sense within the same argument; or He would be begging the question, by assuming as true a premise which the Jews would be unwilling to accept, namely, that He was "sanctified and sent into the world" by the Father.

Inasmuch as he finds all previous interpretations of John 10:34-36 unacceptable, Jungkuntz offers a new approach which he feels is "both hermeneutically justifiable and textually defensible." He begins with a reinterpretation of the clause οὐ δύναται λυθῆναι ἡ γραφή -- "the scripture cannot be broken." The traditional interpretation makes this statement equivalent to "Scripture cannot be denied; if Scripture says something, that something is a fact." Such an understanding, he feels, overlooks the "natural" sense of λῶ, both etymologically and in its New Testament usage.

In trying to establish the correct meaning of this verb, he points to the fact that etymologically λῶ means

"loosen, unbind, unfasten," and hence "undo" -- a meaning which he finds in both Ephesians 2:14 ("Christ hath broken down the middle wall of partition") and John 2:19 ("destroy this temple"). He proceeds then to examine passages in which λύω is used with reference to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Matthew 5:17f. becomes very important in his argument: "Think not that I am come to destroy (καταλῦσαι, a synonym of λύσαι) the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil (πληρῶσαι)." Particularly from this verse he concludes that "in contexts such as these, where the Law or the Old Testament Scriptures are under consideration, the antonym to λύω, 'undo,' is πληρῶ, 'fulfill.' Consequently, in such contexts the meaning of λύω must be 'to undo' in the sense of 'render incapable of fulfillment,' 'keep from being fulfilled,' 'prevent attainment of the goal or intention.'" Jungkuntz argues, then, that the statement "the scripture cannot be broken" may best be interpreted to mean: "Scripture cannot be undone, cannot be kept from going into fulfillment."

In the remainder of his article, Dr. Jungkuntz indicates what relevance he believes this statement has with regard to the rest of the passage in which it stands. Fulfillment, he states, implies a prior promise or prophecy. What is the prophecy to which Jesus alludes in John 10:34-36? That is indicated by the quotation from Psalm 82:6, which is addressed to the unjust judges, or rulers, of Israel. Because they are judges, standing in God's place among the people, they are referred to as "gods"; but because they are unjust in their judgments, they "shall die like men." According to this, and so many other related passages in Scripture, God will depose them, inasmuch as they have been false shepherds, who have viciously tyrannized the flock. And He will set up over His people a Shepherd (cf. the "good shepherd" of John 10), who will judge the people in righteousness.⁵ According to Jungkuntz, then, Jesus in John 10:34-36 is proclaiming to His opponents that the prophecy of Scripture concerning their judgment and His own establishment as the promised Judge and Shepherd is being fulfilled, even as it must be. In conclusion he states:

"Finally, it may be noted again that for the unbeliever this reply of Jesus does not prove His deity. But neither is it intended to. It is a preachment of God's Word. It is Law or it is Gospel. It is Law in that Jesus says: The Scriptures told you the Judge would

come; in rejecting Me you reject God and His Word. It is Gospel, however, in that Jesus says: The Scriptures told you the Judge would come; here I am, hear what I say, see what I do -- and believe."

A Reaction to This New Approach

Dr. Jungkuntz states that the key to a proper understanding of John 10:34-36 is the meaning of the word λῶναι, "be broken." He comes to the conclusion that λῶναι, in passages relating to the Word of God, means "keep from being fulfilled," or "render incapable of fulfillment," and he bases his interpretation upon this alleged significance.

Can we accept the meaning which he places into λῶναι? Let us look more closely at the method whereby he arrives at this meaning. He engages, first, in a bit of etymologizing,⁶ a procedure which has more than once led to faulty exegetical conclusions. The meanings of words can and often do change over the course of years, and it is linguistically unsound to assume that the original denotation of a word is a safe guide to its current usage. It might, for example, be tempting to translate 1 John 3:1 as follows: "Behold what other-worldly love the Father hath bestowed upon us," inasmuch as the word ποταπός, a late form of ποδαπός, originally meant "from what country." But it is highly unlikely that the Koine readers of the New Testament understood anything other than "of what sort," or "how great," when they read this word. Or notice how the meaning of the word "prevent" has changed most markedly since the days when the KJV was translated. The fact that it originally meant "come before" helps little in arriving at its 20th century usage. An argument from etymology does not seem, then, to bear much weight.

Dr. Jungkuntz then explores the usage of λῶναι in those contexts of the New Testament which treat of Holy Scripture. He regards Matthew 5:17-18 as very significant in ascertaining the meaning of this term. He assumes that the verbs καταλῶναι (= λῶναι) and πληρῶναι are antonyms, and therefore concludes that the meaning of λῶναι must be "keep from fulfillment." We note that if he had applied this procedure to the next verse of the same chapter, the results would have been somewhat different. That 19th verse reads: "Whosoever therefore shall break (λύσῃ) one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do

(ποιήσῃ) and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Using the argument from antonyms, λῶω would here take on the meaning "keep from doing." Applying this method to a verse like 1 John 4:2f. (cf. the variant reading), would yield yet another meaning: "not to confess" or "deny." Does it not seem that the validity of Jungkuntz's conclusion regarding the meaning of λῶω must be questioned?

But let us for the moment accept his suggestion that λῶω means "keep from fulfillment" in contexts relating to the Word of God. Would this meaning fit well in all such contexts? Let us test his new meaning in one of the very passages he uses to establish it, namely, Matthew 5:17. Substituting his meaning for the "destroy" (καταλῦσαι) of the KJV, we have: "Think not that I am come to keep the law, or the prophets, from being fulfilled: I am not come to keep (them) from being fulfilled, but to fulfill." We doubt that anyone in Galilee, whether friend or foe, would have thought that Jesus came to render the Old Testament incapable of its God-intended fulfillment. The charge of setting aside or breaking the law or the prophets would, on the other hand, not be at all unexpected. We go on to verse 19, where λῶω itself occurs, and again make the substitution: "Whosoever therefore shall keep one of these least commandments from being fulfilled, and shall teach men so, he shall be least in the kingdom of heaven." Should a man indeed be capable of frustrating the fulfillment of God's precepts? He might break them or set them aside, but he could hardly keep them from a Scriptural fulfillment! Or compare John 7:23, which Jungkuntz also uses in his discussion. Making the same substitution we have: "If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be kept from fulfillment ..." Did the Jews indeed obey the Sabbath law so as not to render it incapable of fulfillment? In their legalistic formalism they were quite concerned about not breaking or setting aside the Sabbath law, but they seemed quite unaware that it was but a passing type which had its Scriptural fulfillment in something far greater.

In these and similar contexts, the meanings "set aside" or "break" seem far more appropriate. And these meanings have the support of those men who have studied the semantics of the word in Koine Greek. Moulton and Milligan accept the meanings "set at naught" or "break" for contexts like Matthew 5:19 and John 7:23.⁷ And Arndt and Gingrich indicate

the following meanings in passages which speak of commandments, laws, and statements: "repeal, annul, abolish," in the sense of "doing away with."⁸ In his booklet, It Is Written, Dr. J.A.O. Preus, who is undoubtedly aware of Jungkuntz's article, affirms confidently: "We may go one step further in discussing Jesus' belief that Scripture is true and without error. In John 10:35, not long after His wonderful discourse on His own truthfulness in the 8th chapter of John, Jesus says, 'The Scripture cannot be broken.' The key word in this verse is the term 'broken,' the basic meaning of which is 'to loose,' 'to break,' or 'to destroy.' In classical Greek this word has the meaning of annulling or repealing a law, of rescinding a vote, of revoking a will (a meaning contemporary with the time of Christ). [Our emphasis.] It is also used of breaking a legal agreement or a treaty. Jesus in Matthew 5:19 uses it in this way: breaking a law. Thus Biblical scholars have been wholly within their rights in understanding that Jesus here means that Scripture cannot be annulled or deprived of its legal, binding character. There is no appeal and no escape from it."⁹

If the meaning of $\lambda\acute{\omega}$ is not what Jungkuntz believes it to be, then his entire interpretation must fall. It does not seem necessary, therefore, to discuss it at greater length. Suffice it to say that the allusions to the Old Testament which he suggests in his interpretation do seem rather remote. It is unlikely that the Jews standing before Christ would have made all the "right" connections. If Jesus had really wanted to direct these Jews to the prophecies concerning the rejection of the unjust judges and the establishment of a divine Shepherd as righteous Judge over God's people, would He (Jesus) have indeed cited a verse like "Ye are gods"? Jungkuntz can apparently find only three men in two thousand years of exegetical history who lend support to his new approach, and he admits that their writings contain only "intimations" of his interpretation.

Another Look at John 10:34-36

But is there an understanding of John 10:34-36 which recognizes the commonly accepted meanings for $\lambda\acute{\omega}$, and which nevertheless avoids the problems which Jungkuntz finds in the "modern" and the "traditional" interpretations? We believe that there is.

It is helpful to look with some care at the Greek text of this passage:

34. ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· οὐκ ἔστιν
γεγραμμένον ἐν τῷ νόμῳ ὑμῶν ὅτι ἐγὼ εἶπα·
θεοί ἐστε;
35. εἰ ἐκείνους εἶπεν θεοὺς πρὸς οὓς ὁ λόγος
τοῦ θεοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ οὐ δύναται λυθῆναι
ἡ γραφή,
36. ὃν ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασεν καὶ ἀπέστειλεν εἰς τὸν
κόσμον ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι βλασφημεῖς, ὅτι
εἶπον· υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ εἰμι;

In arriving at any interpretation, we should surely note two points of emphasis, or contrast, in the conditional sentence of vv. 35-36. They are as follows: 1) The object clause, ὃν ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασεν..., is placed forward in the apodosis, giving it therefore a degree of emphasis, and contrasting it with ἐκείνους, the equally emphatically placed object of εἶπεν in the protasis.¹⁰ 2) The pronoun ὑμεῖς is added to λέγετε as the subject of the apodosis, suggesting a strong antithesis to the subject of εἶπεν in the protasis, which subject may well be an implied ὁ νόμος from verse 34. We would, therefore, suggest the following translation, which must of necessity be somewhat awkward, because of the syntactic complexity of the Greek: "If it (the Law) called those men 'Gods' to whom the Word of God came -- and the Scripture cannot be broken -- Him now whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, are you saying of Him: 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

Let us now consider these verses in their context. We should notice that the Jews have just accused Jesus of blasphemy: "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." Vs. 33. Jesus responds by pointing out to them that in one place (Psalm 82:6) Scripture, which cannot be set aside, gave the name "Gods" to men, to the ones whom God had appointed as His human representatives to rule over Israel: "Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?" Vs. 34. And then follows the conditional sentence, which we could paraphrase as follows: "If Scripture, which as you know cannot be set aside, ascribed the name 'Gods' to those men whom He had appointed, are you now charging with blasphemy that One whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, because He claims to be the Son of God?" With these words, we believe, Jesus asserts His deity and

invites the hostile Jews to give careful thought to that charge which they have made against Him. If Scripture itself gives the name "Gods" to mere men, how could Jesus be blaspheming when He calls Himself "the Son of God"? For He is far more than those human judges in the Old Testament whom God appointed -- He is the One whom the Father set apart to be the Messiah and whom He has sent into the world. May the Jews not themselves be guilty of blasphemy? Let them seriously consider this possibility! Following this warning, Jesus points to "the works" which He has been doing, and pleads with them to believe in His divine origin because of His works, since they are finding it so difficult to accept His words. Vv. 37-38.

John 10:35 and Inerrancy

This, we believe, is the simplest and most direct understanding of an admittedly difficult passage. But let us now look again at the important sentence contained within it: "The scripture cannot be broken." Recognizing the commonly accepted meaning of $\lambda\omega\omega$ as correct, we wonder how anyone can say that this verse does not imply the inerrancy of Scripture. Surely if Scripture is in error, it can be set aside. The liberals should be the first to agree with this proposition, for they have a way of conveniently setting aside any passage which they regard as fallible. But as soon as we admit the truth of the foregoing proposition, we are compelled to accept its contrapositive: If Scripture cannot be set aside, it is not in error. Inasmuch as Christ in our passage affirms that Scripture cannot be set aside, it follows of necessity that it is not in error!

We indeed do find it most difficult to understand how Marty, Lueking, and others can claim that John 10:35 has nothing to say on the subject of Biblical inerrancy. Surely their theological opponent, Dr. Preus, reveals a better understanding of the import of the passage when he writes:

" ... The point Jesus is making -- and the principle He is laying down -- is that if Scripture says something, it must be so. Scripture, even the Book of Psalms, a poetical book, has the factual, binding character which attaches to wills, treaties, and other documents which cannot be broken or twisted. And what is true of Psalm 82 Jesus applies in a categorical sense to all of Scripture.

"It has been argued that the concept of 'breaking Scripture' applies only to the authority of the Bible, but not to its factuality. However, the two go together. It is obvious from the context that Jesus treats the Scripture as having authority, but the authority depends upon the fact that Holy Scripture speaks the truth. It is significant that Jesus in this passage refers to the inerrancy of Scripture and does so on such a small point. The implication is that if Scripture speaks the truth on such a matter, it speaks the truth on all matters."¹¹

At times an example from everyday life can help to clarify the significance of a word such as λύω -- "break" or "set aside." If I should set aside the express meaning of another person's last will and testament, and construe the words of that document according to my own liking, would I not be guilty of breaking it? Or if I should set aside a section of the will because I did not believe it to be the words of the testator, but of someone else, would I not again be guilty of breaking it? Consider now what the liberals are doing with the Bible. Whenever they come upon something which goes against their theological egos, or conflicts with their supposedly enlightened understandings, they either deny its literal sense and read into it some notion of their own, or they deny its divine authorship and label it as the fallible word of man. Do these practices not involve a breaking or setting aside of Scripture? For they say, in effect, that this or that passage cannot stand as the Word of God!

We conclude the discussion of this verse with a quotation from William Arndt:

"The Bible student knows that Jesus here speaks of the use of the term 'gods' with respect to the judges of Israel. It is a strange usage, but it must stand as correct and proper, says Jesus, because the Scriptures have it, and they cannot be broken, that is, be declared false or erring. The truth is implied that whatever the Scriptures say is inviolable, that nothing of what they utter, let it appear ever so insignificant, may be regarded as erroneous."¹²

* * * *

CHRIST AND
INERRANCY

Several portions of the Old Testament have been especially subject to being "broken" by negative critics of the Bible. We have in mind those passages which speak of the six-day creation, the great flood, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the story of Jonah, and such like. Interestingly, and significantly, Christ attests the historicity of many of these very targets of the critics. As Theodore Engelder states:

"And just such portions of Scripture as have been put on the black-list have been vouched for by Christ. Did Moses write the Pentateuch? 'Moses wrote of Me,' John 5:46. Is the creation story a myth and old wives' tale? Read Matt. 19:4. Is the story of the Flood history or mythology? Read Matt. 24:37ff. Was Abraham a legendary figure? 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day,' John 8:56. Is the story of Lot's wife true, and the story of Jonah in the whale's belly? Read Luke 17:32 and Matt. 12:40. Every story related in the Bible, every circumstance of it, and every single jot and tittle shall stand. Jesus guarantees the truth of it."¹³

Surely this must be an embarrassing situation for those who wish to deny the aforementioned passages, and who yet wish to present Christ as a believable object for Christian faith and trust. For at this point they simply cannot accept Christ's words as they stand. To save face, Christ's face, they have suggested either 1) that Christ accommodated Himself to the faulty theological and scientific views of His day, or 2) that in His state of humiliation (the kenosis) He refrained from knowing any better. Both suggestions don't help much in preserving Christ's image, and both of them are subject to serious criticism.

The Accommodation Theory

What about the argument that Christ accommodated Himself to the errant viewpoints of His day, the so-called "accommodation theory"? It is hard to believe. For in the aforementioned passages, it is not Jesus' friends or foes who have injected into the discussion such topics as the creation or Jonah. No, it is Jesus Himself who brings these subjects up and comments on them. According to the accommodation theory, we would have to charge Jesus with thereby furthering their faulty ideas.

But more can be said regarding this theory. When we

look into the Gospels we find that Jesus hesitated not at all to correct the wrong concepts which the Jews had concerning the Old Testament.

"Jesus had no fear in telling the people of His day that they erred: the Pharisees in their understanding the true meaning of the Law of Moses, the Sadducees in the doctrine of the resurrection, Pilate in thinking his power came from Caesar, the common people in pitying Him, His disciples in failing to understand that the Scriptures referred to Christ Himself. Like Jesus, also Paul, John, Peter, and the other writers of the New Testament are not at all hesitant to correct people for wrong theology. Paul corrects the Galatians for their misunderstanding of Jewish history. But nowhere do we find Jesus or His disciples disagreeing with the Jews of that day on matters such as have been discussed here [namely, the six-day creation, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the story of Jonah and the fish, and such like]."¹⁴

For these reasons, and others, we must reject the accommodation theory as subtile sophistry.¹⁵

The Kenotic Argument

Is the kenotic argument any better? On the contrary, it is worse, for it is fraught with even graver dangers. For if Jesus in His state of humiliation was fallible when He spoke of the events of the Old Testament, might He not have been fallible also when He spoke of the events relating to our salvation? Perhaps we must set aside, then, also such passages as John 3:16! The kenotic argument invariably leads to a questioning of the truth of everything that Jesus said.

We need to add, furthermore, that this argument reveals a failure to make a rather obvious distinction. There is a vast difference between not using His knowledge on certain occasions (the kenosis) on the one hand, and speaking falsehood on the other. Scripture affirms the first of these, but emphatically denies the second. Christ specifically says: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.¹⁶ Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." John 18:37.

The refusal to accept Christ's words as true, as infallible, as the very words of God, is a mark, not of en-

lightened theological scholarship, but of unbelief. For as Christ again says: "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." John 8:45ff.

* * * *

VERBAL INSPIRATION AND IN-
ERRANCY -- THE UNIVERSAL TERMS

In rounding out this discussion of the Bible's own claims to verbal inspiration and inerrancy, we need to underscore the universal terms that it uses in connection with these claims. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul does not say that some parts of the Bible are God-breathed but others are not; he says rather: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." In 2 Peter 1:20f., Peter does not restrict the activity of the Holy Spirit to portions of the Old Testament, but includes "every prophecy of Scripture (πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς)" in this activity. In Romans 15:4, Paul affirms that "as many things (ὅσα) as were written aforetime were written for our learning." In John 10:35, Jesus says: "The scripture cannot be broken," the ἡ γραφή encompassing the entire Old Testament Scripture. And in John 17:17, He affirms: "Thy word is truth" -- not "contains" truth, but "is" truth.

With what right, with what confidence, with what joy ought we not therefore join in confessing:

We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord;
And though assailed on ev'ry hand,
Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.

Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure,
The teachings of the Word endure;
Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word;
His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord.

And again:

But still Thy Law and Gospel, Lord,
Have lessons more divine;
Not earth stands firmer than Thy Word,
Nor stars so nobly shine.

Thy Word is everlasting truth;
How pure is every page!
That holy Book shall guide our youth
And well support our age.

C. Kuehne

(to be concluded)

FOOTNOTES

1. "Moment of Truth for Missouri," The Lutheran Standard, Jan. 16, 1973, p. 12.

2. Journal of Theology, Dec., 1972, p. 22ff.

3. "Showdown in the Missouri Synod," Christian Century, Sept. 27, 1972, p. 943ff.

4. "An Approach to the Exegesis of John 10:34-36," Concordia Theological Monthly, Oct., 1964, p. 556ff.

This article by Jungkuntz is recommended "for further study" by the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in their recently issued doctrinal statement, "Faithful to Our Calling--Faithful to Our Lord." This recommendation follows a discussion in which the full inerrancy of Holy Scripture is set aside as untenable.

5. Jungkuntz's argument employs many citations to the Old Testament, and is therefore difficult to summarize adequately. Those who desire the details are referred to the article itself.

6. Cf. Journal of Theology, Dec., 1972, p. 32, concerning such "etymologizing."

7. James H. Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1972), p. 384.

8. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 485.

9. Jacob A. O. Preus, It Is Written (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), p. 27.

10. Cf. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and revised by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), paragraph 478; and H.A.W.

Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1884), p. 105f.

11. Preus, op. cit., p. 27f.

12. In Theodore Engelder, Scripture Cannot Be Broken (Mora, Minnesota: Hope, Inc., n.d.), p. 4.

13. Idem, p. 71.

14. Preus, op. cit., p. 39.

15. For other arguments, cf. Preus, op. cit., p. 39f.

16. On the meaning of "truth," cf. Journal of Theology, Dec., 1972, pp. 28-33.



" T H Y W O R D I S T R U T H "

"In our teaching and preaching we rely wholly upon the Bible, the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We regard this Book of Books as the Word of God, verbally inspired and wholly without error as written by holy men of God. We consider our mission to be that of communicating the words and message of this Book to those who will hear them; and we know of no other divine source of true doctrine and instruction in the way of salvation and in God-pleasing living."¹

This is and remains our church body's confession and belief with respect to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture. In the last two issues of this Journal,² we have demonstrated the Biblical origin and basis of this faith of ours in the full, self-authenticating authority of Scripture. In this present issue we shall direct our attention to several remaining topics -- all of which are important, inasmuch as they are part of the current theological debate concerning inspiration and inerrancy.

* * * *

WHY THE It is no secret that the authority of the
DENIALS? Bible has come to be widely denied, also
 within churches which one or two generations
ago fully shared our confession. What are the reasons
for these denials? Have discoveries in the areas of
science or history so undermined the message of the Bible
that it is no longer fully credible? Have contradictions
been found in the sacred record which are so serious as
to discredit it as the divinely revealed Word in all its
statements and utterances? We shall address ourselves
now to these questions.

The Alleged Contradictions

The search for contradictions and other internal inaccuracies in the Biblical record is almost as old as

Christianity itself. The "index of errors" was begun by such pagan philosophers as Celsus and Porphyry, and has been supplemented by infidels throughout the centuries. The scoffers Voltaire, Paine, and Ingersoll worked on it, and so also such rationalists as Lessing and Strauss. It is truly amazing that modern-day liberals among the Lutherans should choose to associate themselves in this Bible-destroying effort with such questionable company. But so they do. A recent president of the American Lutheran Church, writing in the Lutheran Standard, boldly proclaimed concerning the narratives of the resurrection of Christ: "To be sure, you will find discrepancies in the several Gospel accounts; but they are the discrepancies that belong to a many-faceted story that is truthfully [?] told by witnesses who come to it with varying backgrounds and points of view."³ When a letter to the editor subsequently protested this attack on the inerrancy of the Bible, the magazine replied: "One example of a 'discrepancy' is the time when the women arrived at the tomb. Mark says, 'when the sun had risen.' John says, 'while it was still dark.' Other questions involve the number of women or the number of angels."⁴

Robert Scharlemann is another of the growing number of Lutherans who have taken their stand among the skeptics and scoffers. In the Lutheran Scholar for April, 1963, he presented a series of anti-inerrancy arguments.⁵ It is noteworthy that Scharlemann came up with nothing at all new; his allegations were merely rewordings of oft-repeated charges against Scripture. John Warwick Montgomery observes: "The alleged factual errors and internal contradictions in Scripture which are currently cited to demonstrate the impossibly archaic nature of the inerrancy view are themselves impossibly archaic in a high proportion of instances."⁶

Anyone who is acquainted with the history of Christian apologetics knows that the various alleged discrepancies have been dealt with in a variety of honest, scholarly, and effective ways. Is there, for example, a real, irreconcilable contradiction between Mark and John on the time when the women arrived at the tomb? The Greek text of Mark 16:2 can be translated literally: "They (the women) come to the tomb as the sun is rising."⁷

The text of John 20:1 can be rendered: "Mary Magdalene goes early when it is still dark to the tomb."⁸ Surely William Arndt is correct in offering the following as a possible explanation for the alleged contradiction: "The difficulty is easily solved when the actual situation is looked into. To go to the grave, the women had to walk some distance. This was the case whether we assume that they lodged in Jerusalem or that they stayed at Bethany. When they left their quarters, it may have been still dark, and when they arrived at the tomb, which was outside the city walls, the sun may just have been coming into view. John is thinking of the time of departure for the grave, Mark of the time of arrival there."⁹

But what if we should come upon some apparent contradiction in Scripture for which we can offer no probable solution? Would we be thereby forced to abandon the doctrine of inerrancy? By no means. Johannes Ylvisaker well represents the answer of Christian faith to this question when he states in his Gospels:

"If we are to grasp the real significance of the Gospels, it is therefore a matter of the greatest importance that we understand the point of view and the purpose of the sacred writer. And since the evangelists do not presume to recount everything Jesus has spoken and done and suffered, we can not expect to find in their records the answer to all questions bearing upon chronology and harmony. But this does not give us the right to join hands with the spokesmen of destructive criticism and rear an insuperable wall of contradictions where no discrepancy really exists. Very frequently the men who exert all their energy and shrewdness trying to cover up divergences in the realm of secular history are just as eager to ferret them out in the Bible. This is very significant. Because our knowledge is imperfect, we shall encounter difficulties in the Gospels as elsewhere in the Bible, but real contradictions, never. And when obstacles sometimes arise, we should follow the example of Luther, remove our hat, go our way, and humbly admit that the Holy Ghost is wiser than we. We must often be content when we can say:

Thus it may be, even if we are unable to insist that it must be so."¹⁰

"He that believeth shall not make haste -- he shall not panic," says the Prophet Isaiah.¹¹ Christian faith is characterized by quiet patience and calm poise. It is willing to wait for that Day, described by the hymn-writer, when "all questions and doubts have been answered at last." (Lutheran Hymnal, 415:6) It is not shaken by problems encountered in the study of the Bible, for it recognizes that such difficulties are the result only of our own imperfect understanding. To charge the Bible with error because of seeming contradictions, as has become so fashionable among many theologians, is surely not a mark of such humble and confident faith. It is a manifestation, rather, of arrogant intellectual pride!

Alleged Problems from Science and History

It is, we would suppose, commonly thought that the findings of science are becoming increasingly hostile to claims for an inerrant Bible. The typical high-school or college biology text, for example, treats organic evolution as if it were a well-founded and indisputable fact. Treatises on geology confidently assign to some of the inorganic materials of this universe ages of over four billion years. Such extravagant claims have won a large following, and theologians by the thousands have felt compelled to modify their old beliefs in the direction of theistic evolution.

Meanwhile, however, we find a small, but increasingly larger number of scientists who have been publicly declaring their agreement with a literal understanding of the creation account of Scripture. An open and unprejudiced evaluation of scientific evidence has convinced them that evolution is no longer tenable as a theory of origins. Such evidence, they believe, fits far better into the framework of Biblical catastrophism -- the creation, the deluge, etc. The publications of the American Scientific Affiliation, and more recently the Creation Research Society, have done much to expose the fallacy of the evolutionary hypothesis. It seems strange

indeed to find an increasing number of scientists accepting a six-day creation, while more and more theologians are capitulating to some form of evolution!

Why do we mention these things? Not because we suppose that the data of science can ever instill in man's heart a belief, a fides divina, in the creation account as it is recorded in the Bible. For "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3), and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). But we do think that there is less reason now than even a generation ago for raising questions about the trustworthiness of the Biblical record with respect to the scientific assertions which it makes.

The same is true also in the area of historical studies. Archeological finds continue to demonstrate the accuracy of Biblical history. "In point of fact, ... the present climate of research is more hospitable to an inerrancy approach than was the nineteenth century or the early decades of the twentieth. Archeological work daily confirms biblical history in ways which liberal criticism would have regarded as patently impossible a few decades ago."¹²

The higher critics of the last century devised elaborate theories to "prove" that the apostolic writings of the New Testament were of late date and reflect a long period of theological development in the primitive church. But then fragments of papyri from very early copies of the Gospels are discovered in the caves of Qumran and in Egypt, and give the lie to such theories. Indeed, the very stones cry out against them! Again, the form-critical techniques of Wellhausen, Bultmann, Dibelius, and their followers have raised doubts concerning the authenticity of many books of the Bible. But applications of these same techniques to secular literature have been sufficiently unsuccessful as to raise serious questions as to their validity. "All in all, the traditional position on inspiration is able to command more respect today than it has during any generation since the advent of rationalistic higher criticism."¹³

The Philosophical Bias

In view of such considerations, one would think that the denials of verbal inspiration and inerrancy would be on the decline. But just the opposite is found to be true. Statistical surveys of religious belief in our country indicate a rapidly increasing breakdown in people's confidence in the authority and reliability of Holy Scripture. We have tried to show in the preceding paragraphs that the reason for this does not lie in the weight of any new factual evidence against the dependability of the Bible. Criticisms based on alleged internal contradictions are as old as Scripture itself, and have been adequately answered by believing scholars of the Bible. And if recent findings in the areas of science and history indicate anything, they tend to support the reliability of Scripture. Why, then, the pronounced falling away? The answer, as some have suggested, would indeed seem to lie in a philosophical bias, a naturalistic conception of reality which would deny that God can and does enter directly into the events of the world and the affairs of individual men. It is not the existence of God that is rejected, but rather the direct intervention of God in the on-going affairs of time. According to this dualistic naturalism, God is God, and history is history, and ne'er the twain shall meet -- at least not directly! Supernatural events simply must not be placed into the historical chain of natural events.

That such naturalism should be captivating the minds of people is hardly surprising, for the Bible itself has foretold that this particular kind of unbelief would characterize the thinking of men in the last days of this world. We read in 2 Peter 3:3-7:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed

with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

Note the targets of these scoffers -- divine creation by the almighty Word of God, the deluge as a direct judgment of God upon the unbelief of men, and the coming of Christ in glory on the Last Day. Men prefer to believe that all things occur in a uniform, undisturbed fashion, according to purely natural laws and processes which have been in operation since the beginning of time. That God has broken into the course of history in the past, and shall continue to do so in the future, is not only denied by them, but becomes the target of their mockery. And note also that the apostle characterizes their unbelief as willful ignorance. They refuse to believe what Scripture says, in spite of all external evidences for the fact of God's intervention in history. Their wills are perverted, and they therefore reject even those telling facts that stand directly before their very eyes!

How does this relate to our present subject, the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture? Those whose minds are captivated by this unbelieving philosophical bias are, of course, forced to deny the supernatural occurrences in the Bible as literal history. The giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the story of Jonah, the predictive nature of much Scriptural prophecy, the incarnation and virgin birth, the miracles of Christ, the resurrection -- all such things are either set aside as the imaginings of unenlightened people, or they are reinterpreted in some naturalistic fashion. And, of course, the miracle of verbal inspiration must also go, for that the Spirit of God could have employed the holy writers in such a way that they wrote only His thoughts and His words, that the eternal Word of God should be revealed through the medium of human language, is just too much for them to accept!

* * * *

LUTHER AND INSPIRATION The liberals among the Lutherans do not want to give up their confessional label. They would like to be known as genuine followers of the Reformer. And so they assert that Luther did not teach the absolute and complete inerrancy of the Bible. He took a much freer attitude toward Scripture, they say, regarding only that as inspired and inerrant which related directly to Christ and the Gospel.

It is indeed baffling how men of scholarship can depict Luther's beliefs concerning the Bible in this fashion. For in reading his commentaries, sermons, and letters, one becomes convinced that he held a very high view of Scripture, a position no different in essence from that of the 17th-century Lutheran dogmaticians and of our own theological forefathers, such as Franz Pieper and Adolf Hoenecke. It is true, of course, that we do not find in Luther's writings a long and exhaustive treatment on this subject, nor would we expect it. For the inspiration of the Bible was in his day not really in dispute.¹⁴ But we do find abundant remarks in which the Reformer reveals to us clearly and unmistakably his attitude toward Scripture.

Luther and Verbal Inspiration

The technical term, verbal inspiration, had not been devised by the time of Luther, but he indeed did teach the doctrine denoted by this term. And he reveals a belief in such inspiration in some of his earliest writings. In his Lectures on the Psalms, 1513-1516, Luther frequently expressed his high regard for the Scriptures. Dr. Reu has assembled a series of quotations from these lectures: "They [the Scriptures] are the fountain from which one must dip. Each word of the same is a source which affords an inexhaustible abundance of water to everyone who thirsts after the saving doctrine. God's will is completely contained therein, so that we must constantly go back to them. Nothing should be presented which is not confirmed by the authority of both Testaments and agrees with them. It cannot be otherwise, for the Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks and they are His Word."¹⁵ Reu points out that already in these

lectures "Luther regards the expressions, 'God speaks,' and 'the Scriptures speak,' as convertible. To hear or read the Scriptures is nothing else than to hear God. They are His sanctuary in which He is present. Therefore we dare not despise one single word of the Scripture for 'all its words are weighed, counted, and measured.'"16 In one place, Luther did not hesitate to use even the term calamus (writing-reed, pen) in speaking of the Biblical writer as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in inspiration.17

Again and again Luther points to the Holy Spirit, or God, as the true Author of the Bible. In his Table Talk, he alludes to the fact that "the Holy writings contain histories that are certainly written very briefly but very well. They exhaust everything with one word.... Few words about matters of great importance, because here the Holy Spirit is speaking."18 In his second reply to Jerome Emser (1521), Luther defends the Apostle Peter's view of the New Testament priesthood because "St. Peter's words are God's words, which permit none other than the one universal priesthood to stand."19 In the spring of 1522, he published a booklet in which he exhorted his readers to avoid the doctrines of men and briefly explained a number of passages frequently misused in the interest of such human teachings. In this booklet he asserts: "And the Scriptures, although they too are written by men, are neither of men nor from men but from God."20 Again in 1522, in his exposition of 1 Peter 3: 15, he recommends: "If people refuse to believe, you should keep silence; for you have no obligation to force them to regard Scripture as God's Book or Word. It is sufficient for you to base your proof on Scripture."21 Several years later, in his Confession Concerning Christ's Supper (1528), Luther sharply rebukes those who deny the clear meaning of the words of institution: "For if they believed that these were God's words, they would not call them 'poor, miserable words,' but would prize a single tittle and letter more highly than the whole world, and would fear and tremble before them as before God himself."22 In his Commentary on the Fifteen Songs of Degrees (1531-1533), Luther complains about the unintelligible Latin translation of Psalm 127:3, and then

adds: "Not only the words (vocabula), but also the manner of speaking which the Holy Spirit and Scripture use, is from God."²³ In 1532, as he introduces his Commentary on the 51st Psalm, Luther states: "Where is there a man who could speak about repentance and the forgiveness of sins the way the Holy Spirit speaks in this psalm?"²⁴ Several times in his sermonic Commentary on the 15th Chapter of 1 Corinthians (1533), Luther clearly identifies the Bible and the Word of God: "Scripture, or God's Word."²⁵ How much more strongly could Luther speak concerning the inspiration of the Bible than when he says in his preface to a book by Urban Rhegius: "The Bible ... is the Holy Spirit's own special Book, Writing, and Word."²⁶ In his Commentary on Galatians (1535), Luther says under Galatians 1:9: "Nor should any other doctrine be presented or heard in the church except the pure Word of God, that is, Holy Scripture."²⁷ Again, in his Sermons on the Gospel of John (1537-1540): "For Holy Scripture, which is God's Word, says so; and I abide by what it states.... Holy Scripture did not spring from the soil of the earth (ist nicht auf Erden gewachsen)."²⁸ Near the end of his comments on the Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Faith (1538), Luther says: "There is not a superfluous letter in the Scriptures (kein Buchstabe in der Schrift vergeblich ist).... They are God's Scriptures and God's Word, which no man is supposed to or can interpret."²⁹

Luther found many things in the book of Genesis which seemed to be of a common and even contemptible nature. But he repeatedly urged in his lectures (1542) that also such passages are designed for our learning and comfort, since they too are the Word of God. On Genesis 29:1-3: "Nor should you reflect or wonder why the Holy Spirit takes pleasure in the description of these servile and despised works. But listen to St. Paul when he says (Rom. 15:4): 'Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.' If we believed firmly, as I do, even though I believe weakly, that the Holy Spirit Himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this book and of such unimportant matters, as they seem to be to the flesh, then

we would have the greatest consolation, as Paul says."³⁰ On Genesis 30:14-16: "One must always keep in view what I emphasize so often, namely, that the Holy Spirit is the Author of this book. He Himself takes such delight in playing and trifling when describing things that are unimportant, puerile, and worthless; and He hands this down to be taught in the church as though it redounded to the greatest edification."³¹

Luther retained this belief in verbal inspiration throughout his life. In 1543 he wrote a Treatise on the Last Words of David, in which he confesses, on 2 Samuel 23:2-3: "We sing in the article of the Creed concerning the Holy Spirit: 'Who spake by the prophets.' Thus we attribute to the Holy Spirit all of Holy Scripture and the external Word and the sacraments, which touch and move our external ears and other senses.... David remarks that the Spirit of the Lord has spoken through his tongue Therefore these words of David are also those of the Holy Spirit, which He speaks with David's tongue." Later in this treatise, he cites the Gospel of John and then drops the following remark: "This is the speech of St. John, or rather, of the Holy Spirit."³² In the year following (1544), continuing his Lectures on Genesis, he emphasizes: "We should know, then, that the sacred accounts must be scrutinized a little more deeply than the profane histories and the deeds of the heathen.... Now, however, one must note that the author of this book is someone else, namely, the Holy Spirit."³³ In the preface to a book written by M. Joh. Freder (1545), Luther again identifies the Bible and the Word of God: "God's Word or the Holy Scripture."³⁴

So central was the fact of inspiration in Luther's thinking, that he was led several times to allude to it in personal inscriptions in books given to his friends. "Holy Scripture is God's Word, written and (as I might say) lettered and formed in letters."³⁵ "This is the Holy Spirit's book, namely the Holy Scripture."³⁶ "This is surely a comforting passage [Is. 55:11], if only we could believe that God is speaking to us, and that whatever we read or hear in the Bible is God's Word. Then we would find and feel that it is not read or heard without fruit or in vain. But our accursed unbelief and our

miserable flesh does not let us see or notice that God is speaking with us in Scripture, or that it is God's Word. Rather we think that it is the word of Isaiah, Paul, or some other mere man, who has not created heaven and earth."³⁷

Nor did Luther limit this divine inspiration to those portions of the Bible that treat of Christ and salvation, as do so many of his errant followers. In his Table Talk (1538), he says regarding the book of Jonah: "This story of Jonah is so great that it is almost unbelievable, and it seems as absurd as one of the tales of the poets. If it were not in the Bible, I would laugh the whole thing off as a lie."³⁸ But he didn't, for it was God's Word that was here involved! In 1541 Luther published a chronology of world history, in the preface of which he states concerning secular historians: "I make use of them in such a way that I am not compelled to contradict Scripture. For I believe that in Scripture the God of truth is speaking."³⁹ Thus he recognized the Bible as authoritative in those matters of history which it treats. In 1535 Luther began his great Lectures on Genesis. In the first chapter of this book he was, of course, confronted with statements of a scientific nature. Did he suggest that in these matters it was not necessary to yield to the Scriptural account? Quite the opposite. He states as a matter of principle: "We Christians must, therefore, be different from the philosophers in the way we think about the causes of these things. And if some are beyond our comprehension (like those before us concerning the waters above the heavens), we must believe them and admit our lack of knowledge rather than either wickedly deny them or presumptuously interpret them in conformity with our understanding. We must pay attention to the expression of Holy Scripture, and abide by the words of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁰ In his preface to the Sermons on Genesis (1524), Luther says bluntly: "When Moses writes that God in six days created heaven and earth and all that is in them, let it stand that it was six days ... But if you can't understand how it was six days, then accord to the Holy Spirit the honor that He is more learned than you. For you should treat Scripture in this way that you think of how God Himself

is saying this."⁴¹ Surely the epistles of Paul contain items that are quite far removed from the Gospel message proper, yet everything that the apostle says is to be heeded: "God forbid that there should be one jot or tittle in all of Paul which the whole church universal is not bound to follow and keep!"⁴²

Did Luther believe in what we now call verbal inspiration? How can there be any doubt about it? Says Engelder: "It is one of the mysteries of the ages how theologians who claim to be conversant with Luther's writings can give credence to the myth that Luther did not teach Verbal, Plenary Inspiration.... Read only volumes I - IX and XIV [of the St. Louis ed.], and, says Pastor W. Bodamer in the article 'Luthers Stellung zur Lehre von der Verbalinspiration' (Theologische Quartalschrift, 1936, p. 240ff.), you will find 'more than a thousand statements' of Luther which unequivocally assert Verbal Inspiration and identify Scripture and the Word of God." But Engelder realizes that the liberals are very set in their ways, and he therefore sighs: "The moderns are going to believe the myth [that Luther did not teach full inspiration] till doomsday."⁴³

Luther and Inerrancy

We have already seen that Luther regarded the historical and scientific statements of Scripture as authoritative and true. How far he was from charging even a single passage of the Bible with error! "As for me, every single verse makes the world too narrow for me."⁴⁴

Luther moreover specifically spoke of Scripture as being inerrant and free from contradictions. "Scripture has never yet erred." "Scripture cannot err." "It is certain that Scripture cannot disagree with itself.... For it is established by God's Word that God does not lie, nor does His Word lie."⁴⁵ And still another strong assertion -- which might indeed fit also some of Luther's professed followers: "It is impossible that Scripture should disagree with itself, which thing can happen only among the senseless and obstinate hypocrites."⁴⁶

It is not that Luther did not at times find difficulty with some passages of the Bible, The chronology in

the case of Arphaxad (Gen. 11:11) seemed confused to him, but he did not charge Scripture with error: "Some give one answer, others another.... As I stated above, our faith is not endangered if we should lack knowledge about these matters. This much is sure: Scripture does not lie. Therefore answers that are given in support of the trustworthiness of Scripture serve a purpose, even though they may not be altogether reliable."⁴⁷ An even more perplexing chronological difficulty arose in connection with the story of Abraham: "In the instance of Abraham himself we are sixty years short." But he refused to ascribe error to the inspired text: "It is senseless to imitate the foolhardy geniuses who immediately shout that an obvious error has been committed whenever such a difficulty arises and who unabashedly dare emend books that are not their own. As yet I have no real answer for this question, even though I have carefully computed the years of the world." He humbly admitted his own lack of knowledge, recognizing that "it is the Holy Spirit alone who knows and understands all things."⁴⁸ Luther had trouble also in harmonizing the accounts of Matthew and John on the purging of the temple. Again he did not accuse the apostles of making a mistake, but offered a tentative solution and added: "Be that as it may, whether it happened sooner or later, whether it happened once or twice, this will not prejudice our faith."⁴⁹ As to the differences in the wording of the four records of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Luther suggested that the Holy Spirit purposely ordered it so: "The Holy Spirit studiously arranged that no evangelist should agree with another in exactly the same words."⁵⁰

In spite of copious evidence that Luther believed in and taught the full inerrancy of Holy Scripture, repeated attempts have been made by opponents of this doctrine to show that he on several occasions wavered in this conviction. Dr. Reu and other Luther scholars have examined these attempts, and have demonstrated that any such charges against Luther are lacking in substance. For while he may on a couple occasions have said that a certain holy writer produced a confusing passage, he did not charge him or the Spirit with being confused. Such confusion he attributed rather to his own lack of under-

standing, and not to the mind of the Spirit or the writer. Chapters five and six of Reu's treatise, Luther and the Scriptures, are well worth reading in this connection. The titles of these chapters reveal Reu's conclusions: "Luther Never Admitted Any Error in Scripture ... Even Those Parts of Scripture That Do Not Concern Our Salvation Were Considered Errorless by Luther."⁵¹

Luther recognized well what is involved when Scripture is charged with error at even one point: "For it is certain that whoever does not rightly believe in one article of faith, or does not want to believe (after he has been admonished), he surely believes no article with an earnest and true faith. And whoever is so bold that he dares to deny God or to accuse him of lying in one word, and he does this maliciously in opposition to that about which he was once or twice admonished and instructed, he also dares (and he certainly does it, too) to deny God in all of his words and to accuse him of lying. For this reason we say that everything is to be believed completely and without exception, or nothing is to be believed. The Holy Spirit does not let himself be divided or cut up so that he should let one point be taught and believed as trustworthy and another as false."⁵² And what happens to one's faith when the inerrancy of Scripture is called into question? "No one will ever persuade me that a person should be able to believe with earnestness a book or writing of which he would be convinced that even one part (not to speak of three parts) would be false."⁵³

Luther has been most sadly misrepresented by those who wish to destroy his testimony concerning the full inerrancy of the Bible. They allege, for example, that only that in Scripture was binding for him which proclaimed Christ. The fact of the matter is that all of Scripture was binding for Luther, simply because it all did proclaim Christ. "Every Christian can see how Scripture agrees throughout, and how all examples and histories, yea, the entire Scripture from beginning to end (durch und durch), aims at this, that one come to know Christ."⁵⁴

* * * *

THE CONFESSIONS
AND INSPIRATION

True, we admit that the Lutheran Confessions do not contain separate articles devoted to a discussion of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. We do not need the liberals to point this fact out to us. Nor would we expect the Confessions to contain such articles, for the divine authority of Scripture was not a major issue of controversy during most of the 16th century. Robert Preus points out: "Before the rise of the Jesuit controversialists in the late sixteenth century Lutheran theologians had never considered the inspiration of Scripture as a separate locus, although Chemnitz, for instance, expended a great deal of effort on defending the Lutheran position regarding canonicity and authority of Scripture in his celebrated polemic, Examen Concilii Tridentini. Huelsemann [1602-1661] also adds the interesting remark that the Augsburg Confession, although it does not specifically treat of a doctrine of inspiration, nevertheless presupposes that Scripture was the inspired Word of God. This is also the judgment of Leonhard Hutter [1563-1616] in the preface to his Libri Christianiae Concordiae. Hutter was acquainted personally with the framers of the Formula of Concord. He says that the sola scriptura principle cannot be upheld unless the inspiration of Scripture is predicated. According to the dogmatists, the inspiration of Scripture, as taken for granted in the confessions, becomes a confessional principle."⁵⁵ (Cf. also the quotation from Preus cited below under "The Dogmatists and Inspiration -- The Historical Background").

One surely does not have to read far in the Confessions to recognize that a belief in verbal inspiration and inerrancy lies in them implicitly, if not explicitly. Doctrinal statements are based on individual passages of Scripture, and often a theological argument turns on the meaning of single words. Nor is the authority of the Bible limited to teachings which are directly concerned with Christ and the Gospel. It should hardly be necessary to illustrate these obvious facts with specific quotations.

But is it true, actually, that the Confessions have nothing at all to say on the matter of inspiration and inerrancy? We think that they do. Consider, for example,

the full implication of the following broad principle, enunciated by Luther and subscribed to by the Formula of Concord: "The Word of God alone should be and remain the only standard and rule of doctrine, to which the writings of no man should be regarded as equal, but to which everything should be subjected."⁵⁶ (The Latin text significantly uses "the sacred writings" as a synonym here for "the Word of God.")

Lut us note well what this sentence states: The writings of no man should be regarded as equal to the Bible; all things should be subjected to the Bible. What are we to do, then, when modern-day science contradicts the creation account of Genesis 1? Our Confession says, Follow the Bible! Or what are we to say when learned scholars assure us that the New Testament is in error when it points to Moses as the writer of the Pentateuch? Again our Confession says, Follow the Bible! Surely Montgomery is correct when he says concerning the above quotation from the Formula of Concord: "Clearly, the Bible is held to stand in judgment over all other books -- in all fields -- and no man is permitted to judge Scripture in any particular."⁵⁷ Could the Bible occupy this supreme position of judgment if it were not infallible? The answer should be obvious!

* * * *

THE DOGMATICIANS AND INSPIRATION

The Lutheran dogmaticians of the 17th century, including such theological giants as Gerhard, Calov, Quenstedt, Baier, and Hollaz, have been much misunderstood and maligned, not only by their theological opponents in the Catholic and Reformed churches, but also by liberals among the Lutherans. In our own day also it has become popular to label the doctrines of verbal inspiration and the infallibility of Scripture as an invention of these German theologians. Because of their frequent use of the term dictatio in describing the mode of inspiration, they have been charged with teaching a theory of mechanical dictation, in which the holy writers were passive and unthinking as they penned the words of the Spirit. Beyond this, they have been criticized by

some as leading the church toward a type of dead orthodoxy, in which Christian faith and piety were neglected through an overemphasis on pure doctrine.

Robert Preus has made a valuable contribution toward a correct understanding of the so-called age of orthodoxy through the publication in 1955 of the volume, The Inspiration of Scripture.⁵⁸ In this well documented and scholarly treatise, he not only presents the words and thoughts of some twenty of the 17th century Lutheran dogmaticians on this vital doctrine, but also shows how their efforts were in large part a response to the theological needs of their day.

The Historical Background

During most of the preceding century there were no serious or large-scale attacks against the inspiration of Scripture, its authority, inerrancy, or clarity. But by the end of the 1500's the situation was rapidly changing. Catholic theologians, in an effort to destroy the Lutheran doctrine of sola scriptura, began to question these doctrines. If it could be shown that the Bible was not the Word of God in all its statements and words, or that its teachings concerning salvation were unclear or incomplete, then there would indeed be a need for some extra-Biblical authority in the church, such as tradition, the pope, or councils. A victory by the Catholics on this crucial issue concerning the nature and authority of Scripture could destroy, not only the entire work of the Reformation, but also the glorious spiritual freedom of believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Dr. Preus states: "In his Vindiciae S. Scripturae John Huelsemann [1602-1661] asserts that had it not been for the rise of the Jesuits the inspiration and divinity of the Scriptures would not in his day have been questioned. Except for a few rather free-thinking Catholic theologians like Erasmus and Albert Pighius most Catholics before the seventeenth century spoke of the origin of Scripture in terms very like those employed by the seventeenth century Lutheran dogmaticians."⁵⁹

As the 17th century moved onward, such able and scholarly Jesuits as Bellarmine, Huntlaeus, and Bonfrere

became ever more subtle and persuasive in their attacks, making it necessary for the Lutherans to respond with increasingly precise, and lengthy, formulations of their beliefs. But these dogmaticians were finding it necessary to defend the full inspiration and authority of Scripture against enemies from other quarters also. During the half century after the death of Faustus Socinus, Socinianism, with its rationalistic approach to Scripture, experienced a remarkable growth. Then additional troubles arose within the Lutheran camp itself, with the syncretism of Calixt (d. 1656) and the Helmstedt school of theology. Thus during the 17th century "the formulation of the doctrine of verbal inspiration as it was presented by the old Lutheran dogmaticians underwent a definite development which at the close of the century culminated in Calov, Quenstedt, Baier and Hollaz. Although all the old dogmaticians held the same view concerning inspiration, the later representatives of this orthodox Lutheran tradition go into the subject in much more detail. For instance, they are more explicit in teaching that the very words of Scripture were inspired, and they are quick to avoid embracing a mechanical theory of inspiration, whereas the earlier dogmaticians, while certainly not teaching such a doctrine, made less conscious an effort to reject it. This high degree of doctrinal formulation has its origin at least partly ... in the polemical tendency of the day and in the ever-present threat of Romanism, syncretism, Socinianism, Arminianism, and mysticism."⁶⁰

Monergism and Dictation

The dogmaticians indeed stressed the monergism of the Holy Spirit in the process of inspiration. Yet this doctrine, according to the dogmaticians, "does not imply that God dehumanized his amanuenses and reduced them to mere mechanisms. They spoke consciously and out of understanding and experience and they wrote in the same way.... Not only did the writers write consciously, they were enlightened intellectually and spiritually so that they understood very well what they wrote under inspiration.... This monergistic doctrine does not imply that

the amanuenses were forced to write Scripture. They wrote willingly, but not of their own free will. God made them willing penmen. As Christians whose wills were ruled by the Spirit of God they wrote willingly. They themselves chose what they would write. Therefore the apostles and prophets had the same purpose in writing Scripture as did God. God did not violate the wills and personalities of His penmen but conditioned them and made them what they were. He prepared their intellect and incited their will to write what they did.... This mon-ergistic doctrine of inspiration does not imply that the amanuenses lost their identity or that they did not retain their various stylistic differences.... The obvious diversity of style between the various books, written by different authors, is explained by the fact that the Holy Spirit accommodated Himself to the circumstances, abilities and natural endowments of the amanuenses; in such a way a musician might adjust himself to the various chords and tones of a musical instrument, and yet the notes which all musical instruments play are the same."⁶¹

The dogmaticians repeatedly used terms like "pens" and "hands" in referring to the holy men of God. They did not wish thereby to dehumanize them, but desired only to exclude any kind of cooperation on the part of the writers which would make Scripture a divine-human product. Through such terms they sought "to emphasize their conviction that God was in fact the auctor primarius [primary author] of Scripture and the apostles and prophets the means or instruments through whom God reduced His Word to writing."⁶²

The word dictatio as used by the dogmaticians does not mean what its English derivative, dictation, implies, but suggests rather the idea of Eingebung. Therefore when they state that the writers of Scripture could record only what was dictated to them, they do not mean that they wrote as lifeless automata, but rather that they wrote only those words which the Holy Spirit actually imparted to them.⁶³

The Piety of the Dogmaticians

Dr. Preus quotes extensively from the dogmaticians

during the course of his book, and from these quotations we have become even more fully convinced that these men ought not be charged with a furthering of dead orthodoxy. Their faith and piety is often manifested through the things they say.

Consider, for example, this beautiful statement from Calov: "This article [sola scriptura] is to be used in the following manner: (1) We are to recognize and accept without reservation the holy Scripture -- all of it, the Old Testament no less than the New -- as the Word of Almighty God, and we are to regard and cherish it as the most precious of treasures. (2) We are devoutly to give audience to God speaking in the Word, we are to reflect upon His Word day and night and we are to explore it with true piety and utmost devotion. (3) We are to turn neither to the right nor to the left from Scripture, nor are we to suffer ourselves to be moved to the slightest degree by the solicitation of others or the desires of our own flesh, lest in some way we introduce something in doctrine or life which is contrary to better knowledge or against our conscience. (4) We are to accord faith to the Scriptures in all [their utterances] and place our trust only in the Scriptures, or the Word of God, and bravely fight with them as with the sword of the Spirit against whatever temptations may arise. (5) We are to gain comfort from them alone in every necessity of body and soul, and through patient consolation of the Scriptures have a sure hope of life and remain steadfast to the end of life."⁶⁴

* * * *

THE DANGER OF DENIALS	The liberals employ many specious and fine-sounding arguments in defense of their freer attitudes toward Holy Scripture. They claim, for example, that their approach, which allows for discrepancies and inaccuracies in the non-Gospel portions of Scripture, makes it easier for people in our day to come to faith. An insistence upon verbal inspiration and inerrancy, they say, can serve only to drive thinking individuals away from the Bible. Such subtle sophistry serves to cover up the dread
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danger that lies in their attacks upon the trustworthiness of the Bible. At stake is nothing less than the sola scriptura principle, which God restored to us through His servant, Martin Luther, and for which the Lutheran dogmaticians fought so valiantly. If indeed there are errors in the Bible, then there is need for some authority outside of the Bible to separate these errors from the truth. Who is to perform this necessary service for us, fraught as it is with eternal consequences? Shall we entrust this task of separating the chaff from the wheat to seminary faculties or synodical conventions, even as congregations in some large Lutheran bodies are doing? Then we are back once more to the popes and councils of Catholicism. Or shall we employ our own reason and common sense in the effort to find the divine in Scripture? Then nothing in the Bible would long be safe, as the history of rationalism clearly shows.

But, the liberals say, we give you a principle whereby you can indeed isolate the truth in Scripture: whatever involves Christ and the Gospel is most assuredly true! To which we respond, What proof can you offer us for the validity of this principle? Or how can we determine just what doctrines of the Bible do pertain to Christ and the Gospel? We listen for their answer, and we hear none, for they have none to give. For by this time they have come to realize that any such proof or answer, to be convincing, would have to come from the Bible itself -- the trustworthiness of which they themselves have called into question!

Luther surely understood the matter far better than these rebellious children of the Reformation who still wish to claim him as a father, but who are in fact opposing him with the weapons of a Bellarmine and a Socinus. With Scripture, it is an all-or-none situation. Either the entire Bible is divinely authoritative, or none of it remains certain. But let Luther express it, in his own simple and inimitable way:

"We must be able to 'stand against the wiles of the devil,' for the devil does not come in a gruesome black garb and say: I am the devil, beware of me!

No, he slinks like a serpent and adorns himself with high sounding words from the Bible and the name of God. He quotes the Scriptures and Bible verses which we love and upon which we base our faith; he feigns piety and devotion and appears like a faithful and god-fearing preacher, who seeks nothing else than God's honor and the salvation of souls. He asks only that we grant him his own opinion in a little word and unimportant doctrine here and there.

"If we grant (Satan and the errorist) but one doctrine, he has then gained the victory. It is as though we have granted him a right to change every doctrine, and we have lost Christ. For all (doctrines) are bound together like a golden chain where, if one link is broken, the entire chain is torn and everything falls apart.

"The articles of our faith are clearly and firmly based upon every Word of God. We must hold fast to them and not let them be explained away by man-made interpretations nor be twisted so as to make them agreeable to human reason. But when they (the errorists) come with human reason and thereby attempt to make you uncertain in your faith, then you must say to them: Here is God's clean (dûrre) Word and my faith in it. By these I will remain nor will I enquire further nor investigate whether it will agree with what man thinks nor will I listen to others, regardless of what verse and passage they bring and apply according to their brain and contaminate by their drivell.

"The connivers come with the false argument that one should not be so exacting about one little article of faith and thereby disturb Christian love. If there is only one little error, while there is agreement in all other points, one can give in a little and so retain brotherly and Christian unity and fellowship. No, my dear man, don't talk to me about peace and unity at the cost of yielding God's Word, because with such loss we have lost eternal life and all things. Here we cannot yield to please you nor any other person, be he friend or foe.

Besides, the Word has not been given to establish outward and worldly unity, but to give us eternal life. The Word and doctrine itself will create unity and fellowship. Where there is agreement in these, the rest follows. Where there is no agreement in these, there no unity can be maintained. So don't talk to me of love and friendship, where one wants to shorten the Word of God, for we are told that not love, but the Word gives us eternal life, God's grace, and all heavenly treasures."⁶⁵

Indeed, much is at stake in the present controversy. We do not speak at all too strongly when we profess as a church body: "We therefore reject as sacrilegious and destructive every effort by which the intellect or science of man would modify or set aside a single inspired word. We deplore the widespread apostasy, now common even in former 'conservative' church bodies, which reduces the Bible to the status of a human document containing errors and myths."⁶⁶

May our faithful God graciously forgive us any sins of carelessness, indifference, or unthankfulness in the use of His Word, and through the Gospel of His Son preserve us in the confession:

"Speak, O Lord, Thy servant heareth,
To Thy Word I now give heed;
Life and spirit Thy Word beareth,
All Thy Word is true indeed.
Death's dread power in me is rife;
Jesus, may Thy Word of Life
Fill my soul with love's strong fervor
That I cling to Thee forever."

(Lutheran Hymnal, 296:1)

C. Kuehne

FOOTNOTES

1. "Statement of Faith and Purpose of the Church of the Lutheran Confession," p. 2.

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2. Journal of Theology: Dec., 1972, pp. 22-35; March, 1973, pp. 1-15.
 3. Lutheran Standard, April 24, 1962, p. 6.
 4. Idem, July 3, 1962, p. 20.
 5. Cf. John Warwick Montgomery, Crisis in Lutheran Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), vol. I, p. 19.
 6. Ibid.
 7. The aorist circumstantial participle, ἀνα-τείλωντος, can denote action simultaneous with the main verb of the sentence, ἔρχονται. This is particularly true of such participles when they follow the main verb. Cf. Mark 15:30: σώσον σεαυτὸν καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ, which can be rendered in English: "Save yourself by coming down from the cross."
 8. It is common knowledge that the verb in question, ἔρχεται, can have the sense of our English verb "go." Cf. John 21:3: "Simon Peter says to them: 'I am going (ὕψαλω) fishing.' They say to him: 'We too are going (ἔρχόμεθα) with you.'"
 9. W. Arndt, Does the Bible Contradict Itself? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), p. 82. It is to be regretted that this useful booklet has gone out of print and has not been reissued.
 10. Joh. Ylvisaker, The Gospels (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932), p. 4. The minor improvements in the translation of this passage were made by Prof. Geo. O. Lillegard.
 11. Isaiah 28:16. The idiomatic translation, "shall not panic," is suggested by H.C. Leupold in his Exposition of Isaiah (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), vol. I, p. 443f.
 12. Montgomery, op. cit., p. 20.
 13. Idem, p. 21.
 14. Cf. Ewald M. Plass, What Luther Says (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), vol. I, p. 83, f.n. 22: "In fact, even the authority of Scripture was, in theory, never officially impugned by Rome, however badly Rome's practice nullified her public profession."
 15. M. Reu, Luther and the Scriptures (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 17. We agree with Montgomery's evaluation of Reu's book, that it presents an "impeccable

historical case" for the fact that Luther believed in the full inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. (Montgomery, op. cit., p. 36.) It is unfortunate, however, that Reu, in the closing chapters of his treatise, speaks of a "human activity and cooperation" in the process of inspiration. The word "cooperation" is subject to misunderstanding, such as that the Bible is a divine-human product. Nor is such a word consistent with the words ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ("being borne along by the Holy Spirit") of 2 Peter 1:21. The dogmaticians of the 17th century rightly emphasized the monergism of divine inspiration, and they did so without reducing the holy writers to unthinking automata.

16. Idem, p. 17f. Luther's Latin reads: "Omnia verba Dei sunt in pondere, numero, mensura."

17. Idem, p. 114.

18. Cited in Plass, op. cit., vol. II, p. 651.

19. St. Louis ed., 18:1361.

20. American Ed., 35:153.

21. Idem, 30:107.

22. Idem, 37:308.

23. St. Louis ed., 4:1960; Weimar ed., 40 III:254.

24. American Ed., 12:303f.

25. St. Louis ed., 8:1111, 1129.

26. Idem, 14:349.

27. Idem, 9:87.

28. American Ed., 22:6, 484; St. Louis ed., 7:2095.

29. American Ed., 34:227f.; St. Louis ed., 10:1018.

30. American Ed., 5:275.

31. Idem, 5:352.

32. Idem, 15:275f., 299.

33. Idem, 7:314.

34. St. Louis ed., 14:413.

35. Idem, 9:1770.

36. Idem, 9:1775.

37. Idem, 9:1800.

38. Idem, 22:1424.

39. Idem, 14:491.

40. American Ed., 1:30.

41. St. Louis ed., 3:21.

42. American Ed., 36:25.

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