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THE DOCTRINE OF THE  
VERBAL AND PLENARY INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE

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THE DOCTRINE  
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As one surveys the controversy swirling about the doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration in the Visible Christian Church, it fills one with a sense of dismay and wonder. Why should such a controversy exist in the church of all places? Outside the church, one would expect almost any type of criticism, but to have it centered in the church is a very troubling matter, for its consequences reach into the spiritual lives of our children and grandchildren and their descendents.

In order to understand more fully the controversy, I have divided this paper into first of all the Why of the controversy. In this section, I will try to present some of the basic factors that lead to the modern position on Inspiration. Secondly, I will try to show what the Scriptural Doctrine of Inspiration is not. Thirdly, I will review the Scriptural Doctrine of Inspiration.

I. Why the Controversy?

To achieve some sort of positive result from such a study as this, it is necessary that we all approach the matter from that which is common to all men. The one thing all men share in common, the one thing all men possess, is the natural knowledge of God. If man belongs to the Aborigines in Australia, to the pygmies in Africa, the hill tribes of India, or the richest families in the world, he still is very much aware of God and worships and lives accordingly.

Man by virtue of his natural knowledge of God, in general, knows right from wrong, at least, according to his society. If we were to ask where these rules come from, we would find that they arose from within the reason of the people of the group,

being an outward expression of an inward God-implanted knowledge. God has placed this knowledge in man and has given him the gift of reason so that as he beholds the sky, the trees, and considers the awesome vastness and completeness of the universe, he can and does through the use of his reason know in addition, certain qualities of the Being called God. He can see and feel His power, His terrifying presence, His preservation, His perfection, His loathing for anything imperfect. Man knows that he should fear before God, but though he knows of God in this way by conscience and nature, God still remains unknown as to His essence and His will for men. This tragedy develops further, in that, man in seeking to serve God, perverts the glory of God into something reasonable and acceptable to himself. He, thus, fears and bows before anything he feels contains a demonstrable power over man or life. Man's perverted reason centers the cause of God's mercy in man and thus forever forces man to seek by works to feel that he has evoked a sense of pity and acceptance in God. At the same time reason causes man to wonder eternally whether he has done enough to be a recipient of God's grace and blessing. We might call this end result the natural religion of man.

As mentioned earlier, the natural knowledge of God from the universe and conscience is common to all men, and that in this condition, because of sin, they pervert even this natural knowledge. It is then simply impossible for man by nature to know God's will both as to Law and Gospel. In fact, by nature, the Bible tells us that man can know and understand nothing of God's grace and salvation as revealed in Scripture. It is absolutely necessary, therefore, that we turn to the Bible and ask it of itself, for without God's Word to guide us and instruct us, we are in a hopeless condition. Our reason will only lead us astray and cause us to pervert the truth of God.

When we then turn to the Bible we cannot help seeing that it is different from any other book of religion. It centers everything in God, His love and grace, and nothing in man. All other religious books are different. Pick the ones you please, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Veda and Vishnu of the Hindus, the Book of Mormon of the Mormons, Science and Health with the Key to the Scripture of the Christian Scientists, the various lodge rituals of the assorted lodge members. Pick any one, or all, and you would find that all are the same, for all teach of meriting favor here or beyond the grave, through works. All are on the horizontal plane, we might say, teaching that in the interaction of man to man, man becomes capable of patterning or choosing his own eternal destiny. Man then is the key, he reaches out to God in these religions. The blasphemous words of one of Edgar Allen Poe's poems illustrates the man-centered theme of such religions, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul."

Before one can adequately appreciate the Bible's unique message and power in the chaotic maze of religious books, ideas, and teachings prevalent today, it is necessary to understand thoroughly that the natural religion of man is based on man and his ability to achieve godliness and earn mercy before God. The moral code of natural religion is empty and constitutes nothing more than a minimum acceptable to the society in which man lives. The future of such natural religion is a total void, one of despair and hopelessness beyond the grave. Simply to say, "It makes no difference what you believe, all religions are the same, they are all trying to go to the same place," is

truly the catch-all-cure-all phrase of a spiritual ignoramus, for it denotes an unbelievable inability and immaturity in spiritual thinking. This much is true, all religions based on man and his works, whether claiming to base themselves on the Bible or not, are indeed trying to go to the same place, but the place they are in quest of, whether they realize it or not, is the place where one drop of water would be very welcome.

Sad to say, this natural religion of man has infected all the Christian churches of today in greater or lesser degrees. Accordingly, the message of the Bible is twisted and distorted according to the beliefs and practices of the groups involved. There are three avenues of approach used. One way is that the Bible is interpreted according to the pronouncements of the Pope, councils, traditions of the councils and reason. This is the Roman Catholic road. Another way is that the Bible is interpreted according to reason. This is the road for the majority of Protestants today. The other way, is that the Bible is interpreted with the Bible, using no reason, but only the Bible. This is the Scriptural and Lutheran road, and what a blessing it has been to us. You and I ought to fall on our knees and thank God for it, for this has been the strength of the Lutheran Church through the years. It has enabled the Lutheran Church to speak with certainty, to say with the apostles and prophets, "Thus saith the Lord." When you interpret the Bible with the Bible, it remains the Bible, God's holy, inspired and infallible Word. When you, however, place into the picture your reason which is the chief exponent of natural religion in man, the Bible has only this dubious degree of honor, that it is your pulpit. Because of these differences in approach to the Bible, we have the 300 plus denominations of today and the controversy in regard to what the Bible is.

We might well ask what is the Bible? Very simply stated, it is a collection of 66 short books through which the Triune God reveals to lost and sinful mankind the way He has prepared for their salvation. All of it was written by about 40 authors verbally inspired by the Holy Ghost. If you begin with Moses and stop when the last book was written, it took about 1600 years to write it. There are two main sections in it, 39 books in the Old Testament which was written in Hebrew, and 27 books in the New Testament which was written in Greek. The Old Testament portrays to man the creation of the universe and man, man's fall into sin, and the promise of a coming Savior which was repeated with ever greater clarity through the spoken and written words of the prophets as time progressed. The Old Testament also portrays the giving of God's Law to man. These two main teachings, Law and Gospel, then, are interwoven throughout the Old Testament so that man would know his sin from God's written Law and of His Savior from the written promises given him by God.

The New Testament begins with four Gospels or accounts of the Savior, Jesus Christ, which are followed by a brief history of the spread of the early church, the teachings of Christ as written in the Epistles, and then the New Testament closes with a prophetic book. In the New Testament, the Law and Gospel are focused for man in spectacular brilliance in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Man's sin, and God's grace in Christ is the one theme of all of Scripture, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. (II Cor. 5:19) No works, no reaching of man to God, but rather God in infinite love and pity reaching to lost and fallen man, to forgive him and bring him to God Himself in Heaven, the abode of God. Such is the Bible and the message of the Bible.

When man, having both the natural knowledge of God and the revealed knowledge of God, misuses the natural knowledge of God with his sinful reason and begins following it rather than the revealed knowledge of God, a clash is inevitable between the two. Natural religion employs reason and because of sin, reason is so perverted that it must change the glory of God into something that it feels can be understood and grasped. This has tragic consequences for man, for as my father-in-law said shortly before he died, "When you and I feel we can understand God, He has ceased to be God and we have become god. God is and remains God only so long as we cannot understand Him." This is very true, for it is ever the mark of the greater that he is able to understand the lesser, never vice versa.

This evident and basic fact in the relation of Creator to created, modern man's perverted reason refuses to concede, namely, that God is infinite and man only finite, and thus completely unable to understand or grasp God fully. Man thus sets out on a furious and futile effort to ascertain God. The source at which to begin is, of course, man's beginning. Here finite, modern, and scientific man after using his little brain and looking at the rocks and skeletons declares one of two things, that there either was no creation at all, that things just evolved, and hence there is no God, or that God started all the various developmental and life processes and then merely guided them in their evolution. All living things, therefore, proceeded from a common earthly and visible source going from the simple to the complex over a period of millions of years. This not only took place in flora and fauna, but in thinking, in beliefs, and in knowledge as well.

The next step is, of course, inevitable for man's reason, and that is that this also happened in regard to religion. The theory of evolution and the very dubious processes by which its tenuous and false premises stand are dubbed scientific, and these give rise to a desire to use such scientific processes on the Bible. The tremendous clash of evolution and Genesis 1 and 2 gives rise to the ingenious and conscience-licensing theory of theistic evolution. The chapters themselves become poetic myths shrouded in the mists of antiquity. Of necessity, then, that which is stated as true and factual in Scripture must be reconsidered and re-evaluated in the light of scientific findings. This is, then ingeniously reconciled by applying to Scripture, the Old Testament in particular, the basic premise of evolution, that the simple becomes more complex in the passage of time. When this is done, then the stage is set for the declaration that there can be no absolute truth in Scripture and hence a denial of Verbal inspiration follows. This step is inevitable for those who walk this spiritual road, for religious evolution has accepted fully the false premise that man and the universe is progressing and changing, and hence it avidly maintains the truths of Scripture must also of necessity advance and change to keep pace with modern man, to be and remain relevant to the intellect and reason of modern man.

The undeniably great technological advances of science lead man's perverted reason into a further step, and that is that he places an inordinate amount of emphasis upon material achievements and prosperity. His hopes and dreams begin revolving around science and he comes to look upon it as the determining factor of his prosperity

and life. Thus science assumes the place that God alone should occupy, and the fruits of science no longer are considered as gifts and blessings of God for which man should thank and praise God. Materialism comes to hold sway. Science seems certain, science can be demonstrated, why concern oneself with the super-natural? The super-natural in the past has not kept away fear, hunger, disease, war and hate. Science, that which man controls, this is the answer. It is concrete. The God of Scripture is too abstract, too fantastic.

This path, sad to say, is the one European theology has blazed for the Christian world. When such a religious climate prevails in the world, religious education cannot but be affected by such thinking. Since in science there are seemingly no absolutes, therefore, man's reason determines that this is also the way in which one should instruct people in the truths of Scripture. The deductive method of teaching, in which the certainties of God and His Word were taught, gives way to the inductive method in which the student of theology is taught to work out his own answers to most questions, in which he is granted perhaps general but no specific absolutes. The Concordia Theological Monthly puts it this way:

In our complex and rapidly changing society, we believe that the emphasis must rest on the inductive method, on the "how to think" approach. If a student is not trained to think, he will find himself at the mercy of so many new ideas and "isms" that he may well turn out to be an active promulgator of liberal or reactionary ideas and tendencies, unaware that he has left his confessional and Biblical moorings. This method, however, also has certain obvious disadvantages. Some students who are trained this way may refuse to recognize even the boundary lines to independent reasoning drawn by Scripture and the Confessions. Others may become so infatuated with the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake that they never become true servants of the Master. The use of the inductive method makes it more difficult to certify the theological position of a man at the precise moment of his graduation, since it is not always possible to predict where a student will finally end his theological search; but perhaps this is primarily the business of the Holy Spirit rather than of a neatly structured course syllabus.

Man's perverted reason brings in yet one other factor and that is his fear of the God of Scripture and his fear of man. The eternal, immutable, almighty, all-wise, holy and redeeming God just simply cannot, He dare not exist. He is too great, too powerful, and too wise. He simply confounds man's reasoning abilities and does away with all man's goodness, making him a sinner in need of redemption. To believe in such a God, in unchangeable truths, in sin and grace, salvation and damnation, heaven and hell, is simply not being scientific and modern. These things are not relevant and he who clings to them will be laughed at and considered obsolete. After all, look at all the modern theological greats like Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, etc. They claim that

Scripture must be interpreted in a more modern fashion, that the traditional ways of regarding the Bible are obsolete and need to be modernized. When all these factors gather themselves together in regard to Scripture, the result is an attempt on the part of man to evaluate the Bible scientifically and make it relevant to modern man. Some time ago I read an example of the result of such thinking in a book of a few years ago called "Rediscovering the Bible" by Bernhard W. Anderson.

Dr. Anderson approaches the Bible with a biased mind. He is convinced that God is not the author of the Bible, but that the Bible is a collection of fragments, myths, etc., of human writers who wrote their impressions of past, current, and future events in the light of their concept of God, man and this world. Somehow Dr. Anderson, after claiming all this, still claims that God speaks through His acts recorded by this welter of confused human authorship, and he says that every part of the Bible is purposive.

Thus Creation and Eden, though a myth, and the figment of an imagination forms a beginning which shows man to be less than he should be. The Old Testament with all its myths and folklore becomes a series of writings which show God's dealings with men through historical events. The New Testament ushers in a new era begun by Jesus who was probably the physical son of Joseph. His miracles are a result of oral tradition. His resurrection is puzzling, but he apparently could only be seen by those who had faith in Him. His ascension is dubious. He came to establish God's kingdom on earth. Judgment Day is a myth. We are then to live onward thrilled by the thought that God intervened in history in Jesus and that, as we follow Jesus, He will lead us into newer and newer truths.

Dr. Anderson is but another victim of "scientific Biblical research." He has been completely captivated by the evolutionistic J. E. P. D. Theory. This theory is truly the fulfillment of the saying, "If you want someone to believe a lie, tell a big one." The theory is naive, ridiculous, fantastic, contrary to any kind of reason and rivals anything in the Arabian Nights. It can best be described as devilish, for its primary aim is to reduce the Bible from being the infallible and divine Word of God to the fallible and human word of man.

Imagine, if you please, sitting down and carefully examining copies of ancient documents claiming to be authored by men up to about 5,000 years ago. After reading them you decide that those indicated as being the authors could not have been that wise because then men had not evolved as far as we have, they were simple, and hence were not as mature in religious and scientific thinking as we are. This being so, there had to be other authors. You don't know who the authors were so you settle on the letters J. E. P. D. J. refers to Jahweh, one way of saying God, E. refers to Elohim, another way of saying God. P. refers to Priestly laws, and D. refers to other sections, historic, statistical, poetic or legal. Now, whenever Jahweh is used, J. spoke, whenever Elohim is used, E. spoke, whenever Priestly matters are spoken of, P. spoke, and whenever other historical or legal or numerical or poetic matters are spoken of, D. spoke. This must hold true even if they are found in one passage side by side. All those fragments were drawn together by a fellow named R. who somehow managed to

make sense out of them. In this way the J. E. P. D. theory reduces the whole Old Testament to the word of man. Everything is changed from the date of authorship to the person of the author, and even to the purpose of the book. No crueller hoax has ever been placed before Christians than the J. E. P. D. theory for it robs them of the Word of God and instead tells them to rejoice, that now that they are freed from that terrible strait-jacket of God's Word, they should be happy in the blissful freedom of possessing writings of men which tell them about what God had done in the history of this world. They should, therefore, study the Bible hard, because then maybe in some part they will have the wonderful thrill of hearing God speak to them through the words of some men of old.

When one reads wordy drivel and tripe like this book it is easy to understand why the world laughs at Christianity today. The unbelievers don't have to lift a finger to tear down the Christian Church, Christian pastors and professors are destroying it themselves by throwing away the Word of God through the study of it. This they, in the light of their own perverted reason, are doing by subjectively saying what was and what was not in the past. God and His Wisdom and Glory is completely set aside. Inspiration is considered impossible. Why? Because of a conceited bigoted notion that since we are so modern, scientific, and reasonable today, therefore, we know such things just could not have been. Biblical research is destroying the church through this type of literature. It is tragic but true, for this type of literature is dedicated ultimately to the glory of man, not to the glory of God.

One thing that such a book shows as an absolute, however, is that you and I today live in a world that is predominantly un-Christian. We live in a world that is becoming more and more un-Christian day by day. We live in a tragic world, a world where people called Christians are indeed making the church of God an object of mockery before the world by denying the truth and authenticity of the Bible through a denial of the fact that God gave it to men through Verbal and Plenary Inspiration for their salvation. Actually, when you stop to think of it, there is nothing more tragic for the Christian Church, than to say to the world, "You know, world, you're really right, we've been trying so hard to get you to join us that we've been exaggerating. But we've stopped this, and now we're trying hard to be relevant. We admit that the Bible isn't really all God's Word. It's man's word as you've said all along, but it's what men wrote about what they thought God was doing in history. We realize the Hindu's Vishnu and Veda, and the Mohammedan's Koran, and the Mormon's Book of Mormon claim the same thing, but ours is different, it's better, it has some Word of God in it, not necessarily in words, but in acts. The others don't have this. Study it and somewhere in it you'll find that you'll feel God talking to you. Don't let the many mistakes and contradictions bother you." Let me give you an illustration of this type of thinking and witnessing to the world.

Some time ago I read a conference essay on Scripture by Prof. Benz of Wartburg Seminary which he delivered to the South Pacific Conference of the A. L. C. on Nov. 4-7, 1963. It is entitled, "What is the Word of God." He used the term "Dynamic" in



regard to his concept of Revelation, and Inspiration. Listen to some of his words in regard to the Written Word:

Since most of us--I hope--are predisposed to equate the Bible with the Word of God, it seems sensible to me to begin with it. So I ask, "Is the Bible the Word of God?" The answer, of course, is, "Yes, certainly, the Bible is the Word of God." But there is far more to say than this.

When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, we are in effect making two dramatic claims. We are issuing notice that we hold those 66 books, which we claim to be God's Word, in a class all by themselves. There is no other writing, we say, that can compare with them. They are unique. They are different. They are the Holy Bible.

When we make this strong claim for the Bible there lurks below the surface of mind the desire to ascribe to the Bible all manner of attributes to which it makes no claim. We tend to give it, for example, an authority which makes it a paper pope. Someone has facetiously stated, "The Word of God became print and dwelt among us." The sentence fits and I wonder if we, the heirs of the Reformation, have not taken the claimed authority of the vicar of Christ and transferred it to the Bible. When Luther spoke of sola scriptura, wasn't he speaking out of the context of Roman evaluation of tradition and Scripture? Luther's claim was that Scripture stands above tradition because the living Christ speaks in Scripture. That gives the Bible the sole authority.

"The Bible is the Word of God," is a claim which limits the Word of God. The Bible as we have it is a library of only 66 books. These possess a quality which makes them divine. Only these 66 books we say have this divine quality. Only they are Word of God.

This point touches on the question of Canon. The Catholics after the Council of Trent did the Lutherans one better. They did not limit the Word of God to 66 books. They included the Apocryphal writings, therefore, they have a bigger Bible than we and hence a less limited Word of God. In reality our Confessions make no statement on canon. Luther did not discard the Apocryphal books, he only separated them and placed them into a group between the Old and New Testament. True, he described them as inferior to the other 66, but he also said that they were profitable for reading and edification. Maybe our Canon is not closed and we have a larger written Word of God than we thought.

When we say that the Bible is the Word of God, we are limiting God's Word in a second way. We are confining the active dynamic word to the printed page and imprisoning it between two covers--paper or cloth back. Our action tends to ossify the living, powerful Word. The Word of God on the printed page is a limited Word of God. God be merciful to the Christian Church if this is in any way her general idea about God's Word.

Finally, the limitation of the Word of God reduced to writing results in an incarnation of a sort. The books of the Bible were written by humans, "inspired men of God, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," yes, but still very human. They wrote in their own style, employing vocabularies they had mastered. They left their mark, each one, on the material they wrote. The Bible is a human book as well as it is the inspired Word of God.

Is it possible that on this point, too, we stamp the Bible with a supernaturalism that we ought not? We do it when we forget that the Bible was written by humans conditioned by ideas which change as time goes on. For example we know today that the world is round. It is not a flat table top with bumps. We know that the earth is not surrounded by the waters above and the waters of the deep, which are held at bay only by the closed windows of heaven and the sealed fountains of the deep. We super-naturalize the Bible when we fail to see in it several literary types used by the writers. Yes, there is historical narrative, but also poetic structure, hymn, saga, mythology, parable, allegory, liturgy, etc. If we claim that liturgy is true history, or poetry must be interpreted literally, then we in our own way limit the Bible.

We have been discussing the relationship of the Bible and the Word of God. Let us conclude by stating that the Bible is the Word of God. The fact that it is, is wonderful for us because, God bless them, the custodians of the texts and the writers themselves have passed on a heritage that today becomes alive for us as we study that written Word of God, just as it became dynamic for our fathers. This written Word of God testified to Christ as He claimed. Our expanded Bible in a greater measure testifies of the love God manifested in Him who came to uphold all the law and the prophets. At the same time let us bear in mind that the Word of God as a written word is a limited Word of God.

Why, why should such thinking be so popular today? We have noted a number of basic factors that have caused this situation. There is another reason though. We find this in God's picture of the last times of this earth, immediately preceding Judgment Day as prophesied in His written and verbally inspired Word, the written Word which

always is and must be fulfilled. God's Word gives us a rather comprehensive and complete picture of the condition of things both within and without the church before Judgment Day. Let us note them briefly. In Matt. 24:6, 7, Luke 21:9-11 and Luke 21:25, 26 we see that rather than achieving peace upon earth, the earth will constantly be afflicted with wars and rumors of wars and nation rising against nation. Men's hearts will be filled with fear and dread as to the possible consequences which could affect them individually and collectively. One has only to read a newspaper or magazine on current events and the truth of these passages becomes almost startling. Talk to the man on the street, and the bald fear that grips him becomes apparent very quickly.

Add to the complete chaos among nations the great natural disturbances which have been and are occurring again and again, such as the earthquakes, hurricanes, drouths, floods, etc., and the truth of Scripture is borne out before this very generation.

Perplexing and disturbing and fearful as such surroundings may make people who live today, Scripture shows that forces will be directed against the Church from the outside. In Matt. 24:9, 10 and Matt. 24:21, 22 our Lord Jesus states that persecutions will arise on this earth. One can say that this passage refers to the persecutions of the early Christians, yet the persecution and martyrdom of God's people has never ceased. It goes on yet today and if communist forces would gain control, there would probably rise a persecution that would make that of the early days of Christendom seem like child's play. Our Lord states that instead of expecting things to improve in the last times the church will enter days of such tribulation and terror that unless God would shorten the days, no believers would be left. From the outside then, the church faces an ever increasing danger which will actively seek to destroy it.

Insidious and terrible as the forces allied against the church from without may be, the most destructive and evil force will be that which is found within the visible church in the last times, for the truth of God in the last days will be denied in favor of error. In Matt. 24:5, 11, 24 and Mark 13:22 the proponents of this error will be false prophets, false pastors and teachers. In I Tim. 4:1 and 2 Tim. 4:3, 4 the essence of their message is given with its horrible result. These will be prophets of sensationalism, despisers of sound doctrine, the exponents of spiritual untruths or fables, parading under the name of Jesus. As a result of their teaching the people will develop a love of the sensational, the palatable, they will develop itching ears, the love of many will wax cold, indifference will spread and with it such a spiritual lethargy that seemingly nothing will arouse the people.

Jesus compares these last days to the days of Noah. (Matt. 24:37-39) In those days the Word was present, but unbelief and indifference was so rampant that there was a total lack of concern or even awareness of the impending judgment which Noah proclaimed. They cared only for their daily existence. God and His Will did not matter. So Jesus says the last days will be. In fact, these days will be so evil and so trying for the believers that God (Matt. 24:21, 22, Mark 13:19-22) in grace and mercy will shorten them so that some living elect will remain. As Jesus thinks of these days he asks a haunting question in Luke 18:8, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

The cause of all these miseries which will beset the church in the last days is the spirit of Antichrist. Scripture gives a rather complete description of the Antichrist in II Thess. 2:3-12, I John 2:18-23, I John 4:3 and II John 7. The classic definition of the spirit of Antichrist has always been found within the Papacy which arrogates to itself that which belongs to God alone, even daring to change His Will and Word. However, Scripture speaks of many antichrists arising, not just one. The description of an antichrist is made very clear. Whoever denies that the Jesus of the New Testament is the Messiah of the Old Testament, and hence the Christ of the New Testament, is an antichrist. Whoever denies the physical life of Jesus, the Messiah, is an anti-Christ. Whoever then denies the Messianic content of the Old Testament Scripture is an antichrist. Whoever denies the incarnation of our Lord is also an antichrist. Whoever denies the Father and the Son is an antichrist. Thus, one who denies the Trinity is also an antichrist.

What do these things mean for our day? They mean a great deal. There has always existed a heresy that stems from Jewish days of the Kingdom of God being planted upon earth, that God's faithful will rule and govern in it. This is to take place before the end of time. This heresy has been called Millennialism or Chiliasm depending on the emphasis, time and duration one placed on the kingdom to be established. It has always been considered false and untrue.

It is, therefore, ironical to note that today that which has always been considered a heresy is boldly being pursued and vehemently fought for. I have reference to the Ecumenical Movement. It is boldly stated that the Body of Christ is the Visible Church and that denominations are sinful since they are a cause of division. Therefore, all denominations must die in merging into one large, glorious, united church bearing the name of Jesus. I have never been able to forget what an exponent of Ecumenicity stated, that when two churches merge, both must die. This admission is horrible, for from two dead bodies one cannot erect a living entity. Furthermore, if one just casually reads the books put out by the leaders of the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches, or the Lutheran World Federation, one is appalled at the open and downright false doctrine espoused in the name of Jesus. Scripture is denied, the Messianic content of the Old Testament is denied, Jesus the Savior in the flesh is denied, the resurrection is denied, the Trinity is denied, heaven is denied, hell is denied, the Sacraments are denied, the Holy Christian Church is denied. Yet the name of Jesus is held up crying, "Lord, Lord" without any connection to Him whatsoever.

These are the forces which surround us today and which are pressing us to relax, to conform, to become one, to break down the old barriers, particularly that of the Bible being God's verbally inspired Word. Already in the Lutheran Church we can see the leaven at work. The question is, how soon will it leaven the lump? What duty do we, as pastors who confess the verbally inspired Word of God, have over against our helpless and bewildered sheep? I am convinced the time has come for us to take a definite stand on this doctrine and to teach our people to stand firmly on the doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration. They should, therefore, also be taught what it is not.

## II. What the Doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration Is Not.

First of all the doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration is not a theory. All of us know that today there are many who claim that it is only a theory drawn up by theologians, and that it lacks the support of Scripture. If the claim that Verbal Inspiration is a theory is so, then certainly man has a right to challenge it, change it, or reject it. However, I cannot help feeling certain that one of the real reasons for the extreme vehemence against verbal inspiration being a doctrine is that as long as it is so regarded, there can be virtually no union endeavors. There can indeed be discussions, but whoever holds to verbal and plenary inspiration as a Scriptural doctrine will not find himself readily involved in church mergers in this day and age. As a doctrine it is a divisive factor in the fellowship efforts of today, for the union movements of today by their very nature seek a least common denominator, a compromise in doctrine and practice among the church bodies involved. The doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration is unyielding, uncompromising, and categorical. Strict adherence to this doctrine by a church body simply makes this church body a leper among those who want union. Strict adherence to this doctrine on the part of a church body is not a failing, however, it is rather a powerful witness to the authority and truth of the Bible which man of today does not want to accept as the written Word of God. Because verbal and plenary inspiration is a Scriptural teaching, it must ever be retained as a doctrine. It cannot and dare not be reduced to a theory for any reason, particularly for church union sake.

Secondly, the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration is not the same as the theory that the Bible is but man's commentary on the acts of God in history, or, in other words, that the Bible merely contains God's Word. They are so different that they simply cannot exist side by side, for each is mutually exclusive of the other. Verbal inspiration states flatly and categorically that God is the author of every written word of the Bible. Peter says, "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."<sup>2</sup> Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."<sup>3</sup> The authors wrote at such a time and in such a manner as the Holy Ghost desired, with the result that no part of the Old Testament or the New Testament is tainted by human authorship.

The theory, and it is a theory, that God revealed Himself in acts, and that these acts inspired men to write their thoughts and feelings and experiences for future posterity so that whoever reads of these acts might feel God speaking to him, is a figment of man's imagination and is theological drivel. This actually makes God dumb or speechless. God's only means of communication with vocal man, then, is, as it were, through the sign language of the particular act. In the "act theory," man becomes all important, God becomes actually little more than a silent, inscrutable Being who might and might not exist, of whose will, if He really has one, nobody can be really certain, for perhaps the writers' personal reactions and experiences connected with His acts were not correct.

Ultimately, this theory of "act inspiration" reduces the whole Bible to a group of literary forms which must be strained by man to find the nugget of divine truth that one hopes is there. Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and the European theologians have long since traveled this path of bleak theological emptiness and death. The emptiness and deadness

of the Christian Church in Europe is an eloquent witness to the horrible danger of such a belief and its inevitable effect on a church body that espouses it. This theory cannot but produce such a result in the church, for it is closely related to the philosophical school of existentialism, itself a philosophy of bleak emptiness and hopeless despair.

Thirdly, the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration is not the same as the theory that the autographa were inspired, but since then we have no certain Word and, therefore, the canon might not be true or complete. This theory says in effect that in the transmission of the Old Testament and the New Testament manuscripts from copyist to copyist, the books became so corrupted that we do not have the original message anymore. Archeology, alone, has all but dealt this theory a death-blow, as manuscript after manuscript has been found and compared with the accepted text in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Written copies of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament are admittedly of a comparatively recent age, the oldest of the Law not being older than 840 A. D. However, just recently with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 in a cave west of the Dead Sea, a few Hebrew portions of the Old Testament, including the Book of Isaiah, were found dating back 700-1000 years beyond any other manuscript. Almost all previously known Hebrew manuscripts had been written since the period of the Massoretes which extended from the 4th to the 10th century A. D. Yet these new Dead Sea manuscripts changed no teaching and variant readings were few. The scarcity of Old Testament manuscripts might well be due to a rule of the Old Talmudists, that all faulty or imperfect manuscripts of their sacred books should be destroyed. About fourteen hundred different Hebrew manuscripts have so far been found and examined by Hebrew scholars.

The Hebrew manuscripts are of two classes: those prepared for use in the synagogue services and those intended for private reading. The rules for preparing the manuscript copies of the Old Testament to be used in public worship were many and very strict. The parchment had to be made by a Jew, from the skin of an animal that was ceremonially clean. The writing had to be in columns exactly equal in length. If more than three words were off the line, the whole work had to be thrown aside. It had to be written with a black ink made according to a specific recipe, and the forms of the letters were minutely specified, as also the spaces, points and use of the pen. The work had to be carefully revised within thirty days after the copy was completed, and if then there was a letter wanting in a word, or if one letter touched another, the manuscript was condemned. Manuscripts for private use were subject to less rigorous rules. Although these rules must have been burdensome to copyists, they were very effective in promoting the preservation of a purer text of the Hebrew Scriptures as has been very dramatically demonstrated in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Old Testament canon was already established by the time of Christ, Jewish tradition placing its establishment in the time of Ezra. The Old Testament was referred to as the Law and the Prophets. Jesus also referred to it as "Moses and the Prophets."

The process of establishing the canon of the New Testament books followed the same general practice as that observed in establishing the Old Testament canon. The books accepted were those written by an apostle, or apostolic men, and must have been adopted for reading in public service. In the second century already the New Testament canon was fairly well established, and Christian writers refer to the "Scriptures of the Lord," or the New Testament writings, as of the same authority as the Old Testament. The Council of Carthage (397 A. D.) declared that "besides the canonical Scriptures, nothing is to be read in the church under the title of divine Scriptures." It then adds a list of the books accepted as canonical, which besides the Old Testament, includes the 27 New Testament books and no others.

The conclusion which must then be drawn is that the great body of early Christians, the visible church of Jesus Christ, of every speech, East and West, Syrian, Asiatic, African and European, devoutly seeking to know the mind of Christ, was led by the Spirit of God to fix upon these twenty-seven books and no others as the New Testament Scriptures as having divine authority, as the written Word of God. This is far more satisfactory, and gives us a much stronger attestation and assurance of the purity and authority of this collection as the Word of God, than if it had been made and decreed by a church council, or only by the early Christian Fathers, as Augustine, Jerome, Tertullian, Origen, Irenaeus, Cyril, Justin Martyr or Polycarp. They testify that the church universal, guided by the Spirit, did receive these books as the Word of God.

After the canon had been established various versions of the Bible were produced in various countries and languages. Thousands of New Testament manuscripts have come down to us, and yet, after diligent comparison, not one teaching of Scripture has been affected. Any variations in wording have been minor and insignificant. Thus the Bible we have today is as much the Word of God as it was when the writers penned it by inspiration. A serious and honest translation, therefore, certainly does not make the Bible any less the verbally inspired Word of God.

What then is the doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration?

### III. What the Doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration Is.

First of all, it is a doctrine. By this I mean that it is a matter that is clearly demonstrated by example and testimony in Scripture and set forth in Scripture as a fact. The basic facts of verbal and plenary inspiration, after all, are simple. The first is that there is a living God, who is a personal Being, having a mind and a will. Otherwise, God is like the wind, abstract, impersonal, uncaring, and unfeeling. The second is that there is a personal and verbal communicative relationship between God and man, or else God is dumb. The third is that God is able to communicate verbally either in speech or in writing with man, having the power, wisdom and desire to do so. Moreover, Scripture says He has done so in both spoken and written words. That all of these facts are true of the God of Scripture, no serious Biblical scholar will deny. This being so, the matter of verbal and plenary inspiration is a doctrine, a teaching based upon the clear example and testimony of Scripture, even though the term "inspiration" is said to be used only once in Scripture.

If after facing the clear testimony of Scripture, one insists that verbal and plenary inspiration is a theory invented by theologians, he must do so willfully, deliberately denying that which Scripture clearly sets forth. As I have stated before, the reason for this type of insistence is not based on Scripture but based purely upon man's sinful reason and nature which does not want to face the God of Scripture in all His glory and majesty, which does not want to be tied to any absolutes, which wants to found upon this earth the Millennium through the ecumenical movement, which, therefore, must find a least common denominator acceptable to all, namely, the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration demands the relinquishment of all these cherished man made goals. It stands as an immovable rock, as a divisive factor, for actually it is an article of faith. One either believes it and confesses it, in which case he stands firmly upon the eternal Word of God, or he does not believe it and denies it, in which case he stands upon sand, believing there is rock somewhere under him. Verbal and plenary inspiration cannot be compromised, it demands confession or denial, there is no in-between.

Secondly, when we speak of verbal and plenary inspiration we are speaking of the stand to which we are Scripturally and organizationally committed. By this we mean that we believe, teach, and confess that God is the author of every Word of the Bible so that every word in it is His Word, and not one word in it is man's word. We believe, teach, and confess that God's Word was given to man that man might be made wise unto salvation by beholding the love of God to him in Christ in spite of his sin. We believe, teach and confess that God inspired prophets, evangelists, and apostles to write His Word, and though they used some sources, though each wrote in his own style, every word and thought they put down was God's Word. This they did not mechanically but as they were moved to write, as they were borne along by the Holy Ghost. Because God did this, every word of the Bible is His, every word is true, factual. Thus the Bible is inerrant and will ever remain so, for God's Word never goes out of date or changes meaning or becomes wrong. The world may change, but men remain basically the same in their manner of thinking, speaking, and acting, particularly toward God. They remain by nature sinful and enemies of God. God's saving and Holy Word is the only unchangeable and unfailing thing that is with man on this earth. Since God has given to man His Word, the Bible, no man may change it, doubt it, deny it, or question its authority or truthfulness without sinning. If man disagrees with God's Word, the Bible, man has to change, not one word of the Bible has to change. This, in simple language, is what we believe, teach and confess. Is it so strange to have such a belief?

Turn to your Bibles and note the verses which so majestically and beautifully describe the creation and hence the beginning of all things, man included. Before man ever lived or breathed, God spoke saying, "Let there be." Before the creation of man, God named the various parts of the universe. Before man was ever created, God spoke about this creature to be and the wondrous privileges that would be his. One of these great gifts was the gift of a perfect knowledge, comprising both the ability to comprehend God's will and to keep it, and the ability to speak in holiness and perfection, both with his Maker, and about His creation. Adam shows this wondrous gift in his amazing ability to name all living things in a manner acceptable to God. He shows it in his beautiful comment and prophecy in regard to Eve and the married state of future men and women.



Turn to the fall of man, and there you will see the God of all glory speaking to both Adam and Eve, and you will hear them responding. Turn to the story of Cain and Abel, and you see not only the ability of the family to worship Him who created them in prayer and sacrifice for acceptance and blessing but the knowledge of sin and the consequences of sin in the conversation between God and Cain. Turn to the life of Seth, and you find people in vocal worship of God. Study the lives of the antediluvians, and you will see a people tremendously gifted, yet willfully rebellious and sinful in spite of the witness of Adam and the descendants of Seth.

Turn to the life of Noah, and you find God speaking to him, instructing him. Whether this was done in dreams, visions, or while awake makes little difference, it was done verbally. The act of the flood was merely the enactment of that which God had told man He would do. It served to underscore the truth of God's verbally committed Words. It told man no more than he already knew.

Turn to the life of the people of the Tower of Babel. God had told them that they were to scatter and replenish the earth. When they disobeyed, God performed the great and merciful miracle of creating in men all sorts of different languages, and thereby forced man to scatter. The act again merely underscored the necessity of obeying the verbally communicated Word of the Living God.

Turn to the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Again and again God spoke to these men, and when they acted in accord with His will, His blessing attended them. In Abraham God began a nation peculiarly gifted, treasured by Him above all nations, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. He told Abraham of their future stay in Egypt, of the bondage they would have to endure, and of their eventual deliverance and glory. In the bondage of Egypt, God kept the Israelites pure in race, and taught them to hope in His Word of promise which had been verbally given to Abraham. The Exodus was merely the enactment of this promise, and it served merely to underscore the truth of God's verbally communicated Words and Promises.

Turn the pages of Old Testament history, and here the oft repeated refrain of the prophets, "Thus saith the Lord." The Hebrew word for prophet, "Mabi" says what the prophet was, a forthteller, a speaker of a message that was not his own. Theirs was the high and sacred duty to speak a message that was in no way their own. The message they spoke was of God to their generation and all succeeding generations, and, therefore, they could fearlessly confront friends or foes, commoners or kings with the awesome words, "Thus saith the Lord."

Turn to the New Testament and hear the Lord Jesus speak of the Old Testament. He calls it the Word of God. Turn to the Apostles, those sent on a mission not their own, to speak a message not their own. Their message from God to the world was the Old Testament in its glory of prophecy and fulfillment. Again and again we find the Apostles emphasizing the fulfillment of the written Word of God, the Old Testament. The enactment of words and promises verbally given to the prophets in the coming of Christ was but the underscoring of the truth of the written Word in which God had

pledged Himself. The words which the Apostles spoke and wrote were also claimed by the Apostles to be the Word of God, and thus were given to lead to an acceptance of all God's Words and Promises on the part of men. When Peter by inspiration penned the words, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,"<sup>2</sup> and Paul penned the words, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,"<sup>3</sup> this was nothing new. This was merely the Holy Spirit emphasizing and underlining the fact that all the prophets of the Old Testament and all the apostles and evangelists of the New Testament wrote and spoke as they were moved to do so by the Holy Ghost. They were all forthtellers, men sent by God who spoke and wrote a message not their own. For this reason, and this reason only, the message of the Apostles and Prophets was to be received. They spoke God's Word. They wrote God's Word. He who denied it denied it at his peril; he who changed it changed it at his peril; he who would not receive it as it was in truth, the Word of God, did so at his eternal peril.

It is also significant to note that one of the reasons prophets and apostles were sent by God was because of the request of the terrified children of Israel that Moses speak to God and then speak to them. They felt that if God spoke to them directly they would die, and therefore they asked God for a mediator who would receive His message and then speak to them. All the prophets and all the apostles and evangelists fulfilled this role. It is very significant to note what God says of their task, "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save" the world.<sup>4</sup> God also spells out this task for us through the Apostle Paul, "Preach the Word, be instant in season and out of season."<sup>5</sup> God also speaks to us through the prophet Jeremiah and says, "He that hath my Word, let him speak my Word faithfully."<sup>6</sup> The emphasis is always on the Word, never on the acts, the acts are merely the glorious fulfillment, the underscoring of the divine Word which is ever true, ever infallible and ever faithful.

Exactly how the Holy Spirit inspired the writers we do not know, neither is it necessary for us to know. It is enough for us to know that He breathed into the minds of the writers the words and thoughts He wanted expressed so that even though they might have used sources, even though they spoke in their own vocabulary, they wrote God's message, nothing of their own.

The importance of this doctrine to the church today can hardly be over-emphasized. So long as the church clings to this truth that all the Bible is verbally inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God, it can confront the entire world with the message, "Thus saith the Lord." In this doctrine the church finds the certainty of its message, in this doctrine it finds the completeness of its message, in this doctrine the church finds the safeguard against any private interpretations. God at no time and in no place gave any man or organization the right in any way to change, modify or delete anything from His Word or to detract from the glory of the Word. Dr. Franz Pieper describes the results of the denial of the inspiration of Scripture as follows:

1. The knowledge of Christian truth is lost and in its place we get human illusion and ignorance. For if any man teach otherwise and consent not to the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ,

as we have them in the words of the Apostles and Prophets, he is bloated and ignorant, sick about questions and strife of words (I Tim. 6:3-4; John 8:31-32; John 17:20). If those who deny the inspiration of Scripture are not entirely engulfed in human opinions and ignorance, it is because inconsistently they disown their false principle and still cling to portions of the truth revealed in Scripture.

2. Faith, in the Christian sense, is relinquished, since Christian faith can exist only vis-a-vis the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17)

3. Prayer must be given up, since Christian prayer presupposes the continuing in Christ's words. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7)

4. Victory over death is rendered impossible. "If a man keep My saying, he shall never see death." (John 8:51)

5. If we deny inspiration, we relinquish the one effective means of doing mission work, which consists in teaching men to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded His Church. (Matt. 22:19) Whoever does not bring the doctrine of Christ should not be received or treated as a Christian teacher. (II John 9:10)

6. We lose the true Christian unity of the Church, which consists in faith in the Word of Christ (John 8:31-32; Matt. 28:19; Eph. 4:3) Luther: "The Word and the doctrine must effect the Christian fellowship and unity."

7. We relinquish intercourse with God, since God, remaining invisible to us in this life, approaches us only through His Word. He that does not commune with God solely by means of His Word is holding intercourse only with his own fantasies, with projections of his human Ego. (I Cor. 13:12, I Tim. 6:3-4)

8. We turn the Christian religion, which is the wisdom from above, the wisdom of God which has not "entered into the heart of man" and is a "mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now is made manifest by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God" (I Cor. 2:9; Rom. 16:25-26)--this wisdom from above we turn into a wisdom "of this world" since we let men decide for us what in the Scriptures of the Apostles and Prophets is God's truth and what is not God's truth, and how much of Scripture is to be accepted

and how much rejected. We demolish the divine Jacob's ladder, the bridge and the path, which unites heaven with this earth. In short, everything that makes Christians of us and keeps us Christians, we renounce in principle if we depart from the truth that the Holy Scriptures are by inspiration God's own infallible Word.

Walther, therefore, in 1886, a year before his death, induced by the attempt of modern theologians to make Luther the protector of their "liberal" attitude toward Scripture, wrote the following: "Suppose that Luther actually regarded the Bible as a book containing all manner of error, out of which only the scholars could lift the kernel of divine truth, that position would rob the Bible Christians only of Luther. But it is a most horrible thing that the theologians of the Modernist faith, including the Modernist Lutherans (without exception, it would seem) declare it to be a fact no longer debatable that the Scriptures contain, besides the 'good thoughts' of their authors, also 'hay, straw, and stubble,' which the fire consumes.' That stand robs the Bible Christians not only of a man whom they had heretofore regarded as a faithful witness of the truth, but it robs the Bible Christians of the Bible itself, a lamp to their feet and a light on their path forever, their rod and their staff in the dark valley of affliction, in the darkness of their last hour! We must say of this so-called 'divine-human nature of Scripture,' as the term is understood by modern theologians: Beware, beware, I say, of this 'divine-human' Scripture. It is a devil's mask, for at last it manufactures such a Bible according to which I certainly would not care to be a Bible Christian; namely that henceforth the Bible should be no more than any good book, a book which I would have to read with constant scrutiny in order not to be led into error. For if I believe that the Bible also contains errors, it is to me no longer a touchstone, but itself stands in need of one. In a word, it is unspeakable what the devil seeks with this 'divine-human' Scripture." (Lehre and Wehre. 1886)<sup>7</sup>

In this doctrine then the church also finds the starting point for any discussions in doctrine with other church bodies. Here is where the spirit of a church body must be tried. If this doctrine is refused, nothing can or will be gained by continuing such discussions. As Luther said at Marburg, so should we also be willing to say today, that the basic spirit in such cases of refusal to accept verbal inspiration is different. God's Word either is the Word of God and hence trustworthy in its entirety, or it is not the Word of God and is not trustworthy and is the word of man. If there is agreement on this doctrine, however, there could be agreement on all other doctrines.

In this doctrine the church also finds the guide for its polity, for it is God's Word which lays down the principles by which the church functions. In the world today

nearly all churches in organizational structure and polity, in greater or lesser degree are built upon Constantine's triangle. It is all important then that today every effort be made to avoid the misuse of power that this triangle inevitably leads to, for Constantine's triangle inexorably funnels more and more power into the church, making it less and less dependent on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, namely the written Word, the cornerstone being Christ.

In conclusion, the doctrine of Verbal and Plenary Inspiration is indeed a Scriptural doctrine. It is a doctrine of great beauty and power. It is an article of faith. It is of such magnitude and such importance to the church that actually it is not debatable in the Christian Church. God is the author of the Bible. The Bible is His Word. Who are we to say this cannot be and is not so? Dr. Pieper says of the Bible:

The Bible is a book truly unique. It is, in distinction from the millions of other books in the world, God's Word. It is in a class by itself. If we, in the external arrangement of the books in a library wished to show the importance and authority of the books, we should have to place the Holy Scriptures on one side and all the other books on the other side. True, many other books contain God's Word; for example, the writings of Luther. But what there is of God's Word in the other books is taken from the Bible. It is entirely true when Luther in his methodology for the study of theology says that no other book teaches eternal life (namely, correctly) but Scripture alone. Scripture is neither a human nor a "divine-human" report on God's Word and the "facts of the revelation," but is itself the Word of God. That is Luther's position as to Scripture. To quote, for the first, only two short words of Luther. He says: "You are so to deal with the Scriptures that you bear in mind that God Himself is saying this." And: "The Holy Scriptures did not grow on earth." As spokesman for the Old Lutheran dogmaticians, Gerhard writes: "There is no real difference between God's Word and Holy Scripture." There is no real difference, but only a difference in expression, between the two terms "Holy Scripture says" and "God says." "Holy Scripture and the Word of God are interchangeable terms."

We are at times apt to lose sight of this truth because the Holy Scriptures speak to us in such simple human terms and also dwell--especially in the Old Testament--on such ordinary affairs of life as the household, agriculture, stock raising, clothes, food, etc. For this reason Holy Scripture fares as did Christ in the days when He walked upon this earth. Because Christ was found in fashion as a man, the Jewish public took Him for a mere man, like John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. (Matt. 16:14) The same thing happens to Scripture. Because the Scriptures are written in human language, they are not regarded as

God's Word, but placed in one class with human books and are even criticized by men. For this reason Luther warns in the preface to the Old Testament, "I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and the stories that will often meet him here. He should not doubt that however simple they may seem, these are the very words, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God. For this is Scripture, and it makes fools of all the wise and prudent and is an open book to the small and foolish, as Christ says in Matt. 11:26. Therefore, dismiss your own thoughts and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be exhausted, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such foolish and simple guise, in order that He may quench all pride."<sup>8</sup>

--E. P. Kauffeld  
 Good Shepherd Lutheran  
 Church  
 Mankato, Minnesota

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Dec. 1964, p. 679.

<sup>2</sup> II Pet. 1:21.

<sup>3</sup> II Tim. 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. 1:21.

<sup>5</sup> II Tim. 4:2.

<sup>6</sup> Jer. 23:28.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Dogmatics I, 305f.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Dogmatics I, 216f.

PRACTICUM. Do you have any ideas which might help the brethren?... One neighboring pastor greets his people and visitors not only after service, but before services on Sunday morning. This permits him to speak at length to the visitors without creating the after-services traffic jam.

## SASSE LECTURES

Dr. Herman Sasse of North Adelaide, Australia, in this country for some special lecturing this winter, was guest speaker at a gathering of over one hundred pastors, teachers, and laymen in Mankato, Minnesota, on March 8, 1965.

The Lutheran Synod Quarterly staff is making an earnest effort to prepare a digest of Dr. Sasse's two well-received lectures, which digest will begin to appear in the June issue of this publication. To give our readers a little foretaste of what we hope to have in store for them we herewith submit the titles of these presentations. The first was on "The Impact of Modern European Theology on American Lutheranism with special reference to R. Bultmann's demythologization of the New Testament." The second had the general title, "The Lutheran World Today." --Ed.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Nils C. Oesleby, Your Neighbor's Place. A Defense of the Lutheran Division of the Decalog and an Exposition of the Seventh, Ninth and Tenth Commandments. (Mimeographed) Published by the author at 3310 Fern Court, Eau Claire, Wisc., 1963, 78 pp., \$3.95.

"How many commandments are there in the decalog? Ten, of course, because decalog means ten words and because, according to Deuteronomy 4:13, ten items of obligation were written on the two pieces of stone." So begins Pastor Oesleby's remarkable monograph on the ten commandments. Most of us would give the same answer to the question and would be acutely uncomfortable about our answer. We know that a large part of the church makes a single commandment of the ninth and tenth, and divides another commandment into two parts. Which is the right division? Is the Lutheran scheme of division correct? If there are two commandments dealing with covetousness, then what is the distinction between them? All of us have heard many unsatisfactory explanations.

We are accustomed to explaining each of the commandments in positive and negative terms--that which is commanded and that which is forbidden. We have taught that before an overt act of sin takes place desire, lust, covetousness has already smitten the heart. Then why the ninth and tenth commandments? If marriage is protected in the sixth commandment, then why the second reference to a man's wife in the tenth? Are the ten commandments repetitious? Are there, in fact, less than ten commandments?

Rev. Oesleby has faced these questions squarely and honestly and has emerged with a scholarly defense of the term decalog which leaves no doubt that there are ten separate and distinct commandments in the law of God. It is curious that the church has not been more diligent in its studies of the decalog; indeed remarkable, in view of the fact that nothing in Holy Scripture would seem to be better established than the

basic content of the commandments. Perhaps a careful study of the ten commandments has not been regarded as a serious theological problem and has not been a divisive denominational issue.

The study before us provides fresh insights into the problems dealt with and suggests a real clarification of an apparent inconsistency in the commandments. The work appears to have been a labor of love pursued over a period of many years. The references reveal an impressively wide reading in a broad range of sources. The material is well organized and written in a compressed style that brings solid substance into the compass of a relatively brief monograph.

The author calls our attention to the fact that there are at least four current listings of the commandments, Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran and that of other Protestants. If the number ten were not so indelibly linked with the commandments, some religious groups would probably list eight, others nine, and some even eleven. Some listings prefer the text in Deuteronomy 5:6-21; others Exodus 20:1-7. Interpretations of the decalog clash in distinguishing between "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" and in distinguishing between "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbor's." These are only some of the questions raised by the author. Surely, if Law and Gospel are significant concepts in biblical theology the problems suggested by the author deserve careful attention and earnest study.

After dealing with Luther's views on the question of the division and meaning of the commandments, and after calling our attention to the changes in Luther's position after 1528, the author goes on to consider the writings of a number of scholars who have been concerned about the problems connected with the decalog. The interpretations of Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), co-author of the Heidelberg Catechism, that of Philo, Origen and others, those of the Talmud, of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Canisius are considered. Luther had followed the tradition of Augustine and Aquinas up to 1528. After 1529 Luther was following the school of thought represented by Wycliffe and Richard Rolle who based their interpretation of the ninth and tenth commandments on the Exodus text. The views of several post-Reformation scholars are also considered in the author's survey of the literature of the problem of the commandments.

The body of the monograph now proceeds to a careful analysis of the meaning of the word covet. This is followed by a detailed consideration of the last six commandments. Rev. Oesleby sees in each of them the divine blessing given to man for the protection of a particular and specific treasure. The fifth commandment protects the treasure of life, the sixth the treasure of marriage, and the eighth the treasure of one's good name. Three commandments protect the treasure of property; the seventh, personal property; the ninth, the treasure of one's inheritance in the earth; and the tenth, one's labor force. These treasures are more briefly characterized as by the terms capital, land, and labor.



Sins against all of these commandments arise in the heart. The sin of covetousness is not only related to the ninth and tenth commandments. Evil desires precede the commission of the overt act in the others as well. The fact that covetousness is explicitly forbidden in the ninth and tenth commandments should not obscure the fact that, though only implicit in the others, it is no less a substantive prohibition in each of them and is equally designed to protect a specific treasure.

An important service rendered by this useful monograph lies in the clarity with which it distinguishes between the sixth and tenth commandments and its illuminating analysis of the three kinds of property protected by the decalog. These are classified in the three basic categories of wealth and the production of wealth. The seventh protects our capital, our money and goods; those things usually referred to as personal property. The ninth commandment deals with our inheritance, the home and land that is our birthright. The tenth commandment sees a wife, servants, and even domestic animals, as a labor force deserving of protection.

The author has, not improperly, found certain insights into the solution of his problem in a reading of the economic theory of Henry George. Though we can find no fault with the analysis of the distinction between the ninth and tenth commandments illuminated by the theory of Henry George, an appeal to this authority must be made with extreme caution in view of some implications of the theory that are not relevant to an interpretation of the commandments, and in view of economic implications that have generally been found unacceptable to the mainstream of American economic thought.

The monograph closes with concrete recommendations for revision of catechetical and instructional materials suggested by the re-interpretation of the decalog. These suggestions, and the monograph as a whole, deserve diligent study and a wide distribution. Everyone engaged in teaching the commandments will do so with greater clarity for having read Rev. Oesleby's careful and comprehensive study.

It may be predicted that a disinclination to trouble oneself over what may be regarded as minor questions will prompt an inclination to "let well enough alone" with respect to a reconsideration of the decalog. We believe that the author has done the church a service in accepting the challenge of apparent inconsistencies in our interpretation of the ten commandments. Everything in Holy Scripture is significant; not least the law of God. The Psalmist wrote: "I love Thy commandments." The monograph before us closes with the prayer: "May the Holy Spirit enlarge the hearts of many through faith in Jesus Christ to ever fuller and deeper appreciation of and obedience to each of the Ten Commandments and to an appreciation of Luther's Small Catechism as a faithful presentation of both law and gospel."

--N. S. Tjernagel

Harry N. Huxhold, The Promise and the Presence. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965, 252 pp., \$4.50.

After reading this book, one cannot but repeat the words of Jacob, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Genesis 27:22. The label of the publisher is Concordia, but it represents a new voice in preaching in the Missouri Synod; that voice is neo-orthodoxy. The book contains a series of sermons generally based on Old Testament texts. Several things struck the reader as odd. There is the word of appreciation in the Introduction, expressing thanks to a Hebrew rabbi for insights given into the Old Testament (p. 2). And the reviewer is not an anti-Semite! There is the constant emphasis that God reveals Himself through His acts. Even where the author speaks of Christ as the final Word of God, Scripture seems to be pointedly ignored, e.g., pp. 115-17. There is the constant emphasis on the confrontation of the sinner by God in many situations, so that the Gospel is presented in forms which are rather different from what has been done in the past. It would seem to this reviewer that this book of sermons is a study on what the so-called "Position Two" in the Missouri Synod's statement on inspiration and revelation means to preaching.

--Glenn E. Reichwald

#### BOOKS RECEIVED FOR REVIEW

Mention of the following books does not mean that they will not receive an extended review later.

F. V. N. Painter, Luther on Education. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d., 282 pp., \$1.95.

Friends of Christian education will be happy to see that Concordia has not permitted this old stand-by to go out of print but has issued it again in a paperback edition. If anyone does not know the importance of Christian education and the Christian's responsibility in this area, hand him this book to read.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, God's Heirs. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963, 244 pp., \$4.50.

Dr. Barnhouse, a noted Presbyterian preacher, presents a series of 21 sermons based on Romans 8:1-39.

Harry N. Huxhold, Responsive Table Prayers for Families. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964, 32 pp., \$.50.

The title explains the booklet.

Sherwood Eliot Wirt, Magnificent Promise. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, 129 pp., \$2.75.

Pastors looking for thoughts for a special series of sermons will find food for thought in this series of eight sermons on the Beatitudes.

Harry N. Huxhold, Bless We the Lord. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963, 123 pp., \$2.00.

This paperback contains a series of devotional guides for the Church Year, with Scripture selections, hymns, devotional emphases, and prayer emphases for each day.

E. F. Engelbert, A Still Small Voice. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1965, 216 pp., \$3.50.

This small volume contains 39 sermons, most following the church year, but also some for special occasions, written by Missouri Synod pastor who spent most of his ministry in inner mission work in Baltimore. The sermons are a delight to read.

Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Commentary: Zechariah. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963, 275 pp., \$6.95.

This conservative commentary on Zechariah is marred by its obvious chiliasm.

NOTE: All books reviewed in this periodical may be ordered from the Lutheran Synod Book Company, Mankato, Minnesota.