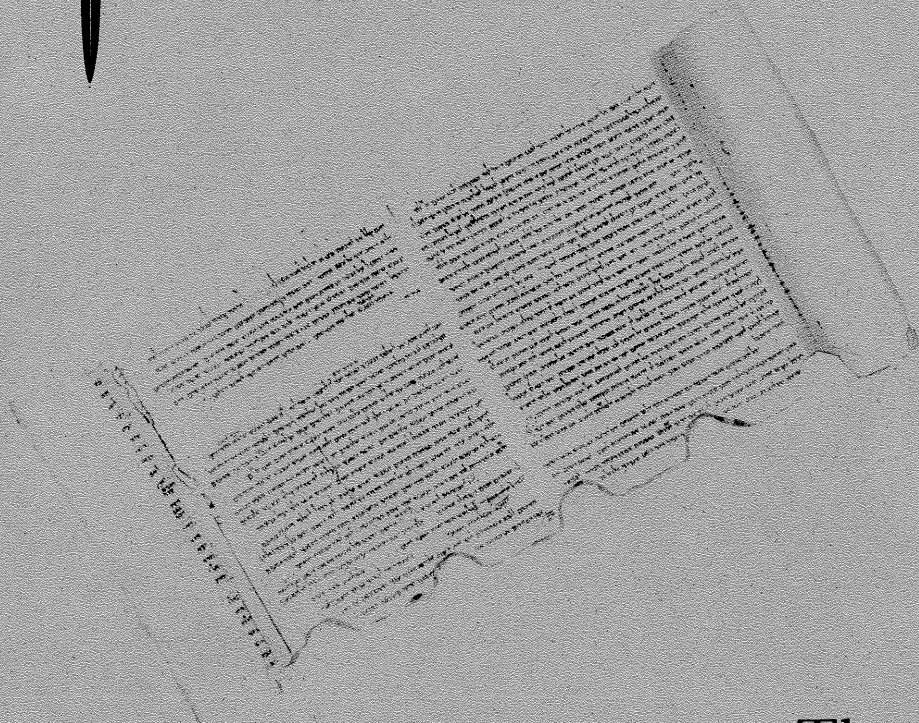
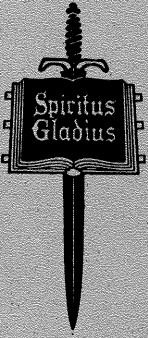


Volume VIII, No. 2
SPECIAL
Winter, 1967-68



The
Lutheran
Synod
Quarterly

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LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY

Theological Journal of the
Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Edited by the Theological Faculty of
Bethany Lutheran Seminary
Mankato, Minnesota

Managing Editor: M. H. Otto
Bethany Lutheran Seminary
734 Marsh Street
Mankato, Minn. 56001

Subscription price \$3.00 per annum payable to:

LUTHERAN SYNOD QUARTERLY
Bethany Lutheran Seminary
734 Marsh Street
Mankato, Minnesota 56001

REFORMATION JUBILEE LECTURES*

Author's Personal Note:

In these four lectures I have attempted, without posing as any sort of expert, to share with my fellow Confessional Lutherans some serious concerns about the crucial issues facing the Church of the Reformation on this 450 anniversary.

Modern attacks on the Biblical, Reformation doctrines of Scripture and of the Church call for ecclesiastical decision. What is at stake is all theology and Church life.

My leit-motif has been Dr. H. Sasse's admonition, in his profound and instructive 60th Letter to Lutheran Pastors (Lutherische Blaetter, December 1966, p. 83):

"It would be the best way to celebrate the coming Reformation Jubilee, if it were decided on all sides, for the once to see the actual situation of our Church completely honestly and without any illusion, and to give some thought to its future. Where do we stand? Whither are we going?"

* See Editorial Note at the end of these first two lectures.

I. TRUTH AND/OR CONSEQUENCES

The burden of this lecture is that Christians ought to believe that Christianity is true!

The fact that this self-evident commonplace has become problematical for modern Christendom, even in respect of the meaning of the very word "true," shows how radical is the chaos which has been devastating Protestantism for two centuries and which has since the Second Vatican Council been chewing at the papier maché rock of the Papacy itself.

Professor J. W. Montgomery says in his dynamically penetrating little volume, Crisis in Lutheran Theology:

the doctrinal problem which, above all others, demands resolution in the modern Church is that of the authority of Holy Scripture. All other issues of belief today pale before this issue, and indeed root in it; for example, ecumenical discussions, if they are doctrinal in nature, eventually and inevitably reach the question of religious authority--what is the final determinant of doctrinal truth, and how fully can the Bible be relied upon to establish truth in theological dialog? As the Patristic age faced a christological watershed, as the Medieval and Reformation churches confronted soteriological crises, so the contemporary Church finds itself grappling with the great epistemological question in Christian dogmatics. And, let it be noted with care: just as the Church in former times could have permanently crippled its posterity through superficial or misleading answers to the root-questions

then at issue, so we today have an equal obligation to deal responsibly with the Scripture issue.¹

Previous conflicts in the Church were about particular doctrines or truths of divine revelation; the present battle is about all doctrine and truth, yes, about the very possibility of doctrine and revelation. Not this or that dogma, but the very idea of such a thing as dogma is at stake today. Because the very foundations of theology are thus in dispute, it seems to me appropriate to refer to the present total war as the Prolegomenistic Controversy. It clamours to be settled by a new Formula of Concord!

The real issue at bottom is of course the authority of Holy Scripture, that which the Reformation expressed in the battle-cry: "SOLA SCRIPTURA!" Let us trace this crucial doctrine through various historical layers to its ultimate source, and then analyse its scope and meaning.

Beyond Fundamentalism

The impression is often given that the strict, classical view of Scripture (plenary, verbal inspiration, inerrancy) is a recent invention arising out of "Fundamentalism". By labelling the doctrine a sectarian extravagance barely a century old, it is suggested that tenacious insistence on things like inerrancy is contrary to the historic, Biblical faith of the Universal Church.

How heresy loves to cloak itself in the garments of catholicity!

This "Fundamentalist" trick is no doubt amusing as a rhetorical device, but as argument it won't do. Serious scholars will admit that, individual

aberrations aside, the "Fundamentalistic" notion of Scripture is none other than that which historic Lutheranism has shared with historic Calvinism and Romanism for four hundred years. The new "dirty word" then becomes "Protestant Scholasticism," a condition which was particularly acute in the seventeenth century.

A literally infallible Bible, an assumption implied throughout the Lutheran symbols, verbally inspired, is a view that has passed by the board for good. The authority of the Sacred Writings is no longer found in "the letter" and sustained by some artificial theory of divine inspiration, but in the appeal of its spiritual content.²

The doctrine of the complete inerrancy of the Bible upon which historic Lutheranism has built up a system of orthodoxy can hardly, without a loss of intellectual integrity and vitality, be today maintained in the light of the historical method of understanding the Scriptures. If this is so, Lutheranism must consider such a doctrine as non-essential to its character. It must be ready even to part company with Luther himself and with the great Reformers /!/ and remain true to that principle which insists upon conformity with the truth.³

Every conception of revelation involves a conception of inspiration. The scholastic conception of revelation has generally been accompanied by a theory of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible. Since God speaks propositionally in the Bible, and God is omniscient, every word of the Bible must be infallibly true.⁴

Another variation on the "Fundamentalist" theme is the claim that "inerrancy" is a recent word and therefore represents a recent doctrine. This is like the Jehovah's Witnesses' argument that the doctrine of the Trinity was invented at Nicaea in 325 A.D.!

Where people pay attention to substance rather than mere words, it will be readily admitted that inerrancy is not only implied but actually taught by the Lutheran Confessions. Consider the clear statement in the Large Catechism, Baptism, par. 57: "Verbum Dei nec potest errare nec fallere" (God's Word can neither err nor deceive). Can anyone honestly interpret this as anything other than inerrancy? This little clause was far more relevant to Dr. A. C. Piepkorn's ostensible topic, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?"⁵ than wandering stars and other exotica he dug up. Yet it is not even mentioned!

One of the strange, irrational factors haunting modern Lutheran discussions of inerrancy is an obsessive fear of being identified with "Fundamentalism" and its alleged distortions. Why isn't there an even greater fear of being identified with Liberalism and its apostasies? Attempts to "avoid both extremes" usually result in a pietistically sugar-coated Liberalism. If there is a tenable middle ground between "Fundamentalism" and Liberalism, it has not yet been pointed out. Where the praise of God is more important than the praise of men, theologians will not hesitate to stand unambiguously with the strict view of Scripture, and against the loose one. No compromise between these opposites is possible. It is no accident that Paul was not ashamed to identify himself fully and explicitly on a specific point of doctrine with the Pharisees (Acts 23:6)--whose basic aberrations were abhorrent to him--while on the other hand neither

Paul nor any other normative Biblical figure ever in a single instance sided with the worldly and latitudinarian Sadducees!

One of the best books to set the record straight about "Fundamentalism" is J. I. Packer's "Fundamentalism and the Word of God". This was a reply to G. Hebert's intellectually rather sloppy Fundamentalism and the Church of God. Martin E. Marty, of the Christian Century, gave Hebert's book high praise of course.⁶ Packer's is largely ignored to death. Yet Packer clarifies many misunderstandings. For example: "The 'dictation-theory' is a theological mare's-nest; it never existed at any time during the past century save in certain people's imagination."⁷

Finally, consider the curious tribute which Hebert unintentionally pays to "Fundamentalism":

Is (fundamentalism) unconsciously dominated by the materialistic intellectualistic view of truth which comes so readily to us in a scientific age? . . . Is this the reason why medical and science students take so readily to what is called Fundamentalism--that their minds are specially conditioned by their scientific studies?⁸

Now, on the one hand the abandonment of "Fundamentalism" is constantly being urged as a missionary and apologetic duty. We are told that "Fundamentalism" is an antiquated version of Christianity which must be got rid of, if the Church and her Faith are to be "relevant" to "modern man" in a "scientific age." And then, on the other hand, we are told that it is precisely this antiquated, "unscientific" form of Christianity which fascinates and attracts the modern, scientific mentality!

The truth of the matter is that neither scientific facts nor the scientific mentality as such are the real source of anti-"Fundamentalism". The opposition comes not from the "exact sciences" but from disciplines amenable to a maximum of interpretation, ideology, and subjective bias: philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, etc. These disciplines are nowadays largely animated by, indeed set in the framework of an evolutionary, materialistic metaphysics. Not science, but this "naturalist"-secularist dogma demands the liquidation of "Fundamentalism"!

We have neither time nor space to trace in detail the metaphysical superstitions of the times. One bright pink symptomatic fever spot from "historical science" shall suffice to show the scandalous degree to which sophisticated academic fashion is often alienated from observable reality. Prof. Henry Steele Commager has written in a recent New York Times book review: "We had been allied with the Soviet Union and China, and in one of the most remarkable shifts in history, we managed to maneuver ourselves into enmity with these. . ."9

It is fitting that the shining soap bubbles of modern theology should appeal to the uprooted, disoriented mentality which shapes so much of the "humanities" today. But people who think clearly, for instance, "medical and science students," will continue to need a theology which does not disintegrate the moment it is understood!

Beyond "Orthodoxy"

While it is not seriously questioned that the strict view of Scripture was that of "Protestant Orthodoxy," it has become very fashionable to say that Luther, at any rate, adopted a "freer"

attitude to the Bible.

Dr. F. Pieper's great Christian Dogmatics deals with this matter in detail. Pieper also demonstrates "the unscientific and loose manner of the neologists in quoting Luther."¹⁰ He shows, for example, how Tholuck, followed by Cremer, Kahnis, and Nitzsch-Stephan, argued from the famous "hay, straw, and stubble"¹¹ quote that Luther had a "liberal" attitude to Scripture, when in fact Luther was speaking not of the prophets' canonical writings, but of their uninspired commentaries thereon.

Another, even more painstaking treatment of the subject is found in M. Reu's classic monograph, Luther and the Scriptures.¹¹ In a special chapter Reu deals decisively with the still popular myth that Luther's view of the Epistle of James is proof of a liberal attitude to Scripture. Actually of course Luther merely made use of the ancient distinction between the undoubted books of the New Testament, and those whose authenticity had been questioned. Luther held that the Epistle of "James" was not an authentic apostolic document.

From Luther's Table Talk Reu cites these strong statements, not from the early Luther, but from the years 1542 and 1540 /?/ respectively:

The Epistle of James we have thrown out from this school. . .¹²

Only the Popists accept James on account of the righteousness by works, but my opinion is that it is not the writing of an apostle, especially because it calls faith body and the works, soul. This is apparently absurd and against Scripture. Some day I will use James /den Jekel/ to fire my stove. We can adorn and excuse it, but only with great difficulties.¹³

Contrast this with what Luther says about the real, canonical books, echoing St. Augustine:

I have learned to ascribe this honour /infallibility/ only to the books which are termed canonical, so that I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred; but the other authors, no matter how distinguished by great sanctity and teaching, I read in this way, that I do not regard them as true because they themselves judged in this wise, but in so far as they could convince me through the authority of the canonical writings or through cogent argument /probabili ratione/.¹⁴

It should be self-evident that to take what Luther says about a book whose inspiration and canonicity he denied, and to use this as evidence of a loose view of inspiration and of the inspired writings, is sophistry, and not worthy of serious attention. Two points, however, should be noted: (1) No Christian doctrine rests on James or on any other of the "antilegomena". (2) If the question of the inspiration and canonicity of James and other antilegomena was not a closed dogmatic but an open historical one at the time of Luther, it is still so today. The "experience of the Church, etc." is but another name for tradition, and cannot be dogmatically decisive.

Very significant is a recent (1959) book by E. Thestrup Pedersen. The English equivalent of the title and sub-title would be: Luther as Bible-Interpreter: I. A Study of Luther's Concept of Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Exegesis.¹⁵ Unfortunately this Danish book is accessible to me only through German summary printed at the end, and through a translation of a Swedish review in Svensk Pastoraltidsskrift.¹⁶ The review says:

It must be mentioned at once that Thestrup Pedersen's investigation is very responsible and confidence inspiring. It has a breadth more comprehensive than any other work of a similar nature. It comes to grips with the whole of the newer, more important scholarship in the field, represented by Karl Bauer, Gerhard Ebeling, Heinrich Bornkamm and Walther von Lowenich, and shows clearly to what extent the studies by these scholars are in need of completion. . . It is built on a very comprehensive and rich source material, where practically all of Luther's production comes to expression. . . Its only theological-scientific object is to determine "what the historical Luther, who appeared in the 16th century, really has written and said."

Pedersen shows that the modern picture of a "liberal" Luther is a caricature:

Luther's intention as interpreter of Scripture is not criticism of Scripture, but the positive use of Scripture in the proclamation of the Gospel and in a critical break with all human doctrine, religious and temporal, within and without the Church. Scripture is judge, and is not itself subject to any judgement. Scripture tests and criticises us, not we it. As sinner man possesses no criterion by the use of which he might be able to distinguish between God's Word and man's word in Scripture. Therefore Scripture must come to us primarily in the form of law and the letter, and say: this you must believe, because it is God's Word, also before it has accredited itself as such before your conscience.

Luther's belief in inspiration is not an unpurified scholastic element in his conception

of Scripture; it has its roots deep in the centre of his doctrine: the testimony of the justification of the ungodly through faith alone. Luther's concept of inspiration is a genuine Reformation idea, the belief in verbal inspiration is an indispensable piece of the Protestant doctrine of Scripture.¹⁷

Clearly Luther believed not merely in a so-called material authority of Scripture, but in its formal authority, to which Pedersen devotes a whole chapter. Not anything subjective, but external, objective words are Luther's authority. He clings to "a heteronomous literal belief, however terrible this may sound to the ears of a modern critical theologian."¹⁸

Pedersen places into the right perspective Luther's statement about "urging Christ against Scripture."¹⁹ Luther means that any interpretation of Scripture contrary to Christ and justification through faith in Him alone, is simply a misinterpretation of Scripture. The Christ Whom Luther would urge is not a Christ known independently of Scripture, but only the authentic Christ of Scripture, the latter being the place "where Christ teaches Christ most purely."

G. Gloege is thus completely wrong when he defends the radicalness of Bultmann's criticism with the triumphant exclamation: "Christus contra Scripturam--I don't know a single sentence which could surpass this one in radicalness, within the area of our problems."²⁰ Nor is Gloege being realistic when, despite some serious criticisms, he presents Bultmann's programme, at least in its fundamental intention (Ansatz) as a valid continuation of Luther's work, or a "transformation of the basic insight of Luther."²¹ The idea is that as Luther asserted the "faith alone" against the Law, so

Bultmann asserts it against "mythology" (that is, doctrine)! This continues Luther's work about as much as throwing out the baby "continues" throwing out the bath-water!

Pedersen writes:

Luther's belief in inspiration and the scholastic doctrine of inspiration differ, because Luther breaks with the whole monophysite framework of medieval theology. . . . also his conception of Scripture is determined by his confession of the Incarnation.²²

This sounds like the usual neo-liberal propaganda. But Pedersen means the opposite of what is usually intended by such language: Luther's view of Scripture is not looser, but stricter than that of scholasticism!

The earthly word in which God is near is not a sign, which points to a divine Word lying behind it, beyond the created world. . . .

Luther's "spiritualism" is, from his early years already, completely dominated by his "incarnationalism." Already the very young Luther saw through the essence of mysticism and enthusiasm: Man remains alone with himself when he is supposed to find God from within his own interior.²³

Scholasticism's "theology of glory" is offended at the stark, earthy simplicity of the concrete Biblical text, which it therefore seeks to evaporate into figures, allegories, significances. But Luther's "theology of the cross," his "incarnationalism," glories precisely in the solid, reliable availability of that concrete Narrative through which it pleases our Heavenly Father, in His

sublime accommodation to His children's weakness, to bestow Himself:

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 there. He should not doubt that, however simple they may seem, there are the very words, judgements, and deeds of the high Majesty, Might, and Wisdom of God; for this is Scripture, which makes all wise men fools, and is open only to the little ones and to the simple, as Christ says in Mat. 11:25. Therefore let go of your notion and feeling, and think of this Scripture as the highest, noblest sanctuary, the richest mine, which can never be sufficiently explored, so that you may find the divine wisdom, which God here exhibits with such simplicity and meanness in order to quench all conceit. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the Treasure, Christ, that lies in them.²⁴

The refreshing thing about reading authors like Pieper, Reu, and Pedersen on Luther is, to borrow Canon J. B. Phillips' phrase, the obvious "ring of truth." Luther is being quoted directly and extensively. The evidence is allowed, as it were, to interpret itself.

One gains a different impression from a volume like Pelikan's Luther the Expositor.²⁵ Although the book seems to be well documented, it is disproportionately short on facts and long on interpretations. Haziness results from an impressionistic treatment of evidence. The nature of the bias is indicated in a review by Dr. H. Hamann, Sr.:

As regards his general appraisal of Luther's theology, Dr. Pelikan is, to say it roundly, too greatly influenced by certain modern Luther scholars to be entirely reliable. For he has adopted the literary vice of some Lutherforscher who manage to walk, with eyes tightly closed, past dozens and hundreds of the clearest possible pronouncements of Luther in order to pitch and pounce upon some doubtful passage, on the strength of which they attempt to foist upon the Reformer teachings quite different from, and perhaps utterly opposed to, those which he actually professed and defended.²⁶

Dr. Hamann then proceeds to refute a number of cases in which neo-Liberal approaches are read into Luther's doctrine of the Word. Perhaps the strangest statement in the whole book is this one:

The "natural" or, as we would say, "historical" body of Jesus of Nazareth was, according to Luther, the symbol of that body which was given in the Lord's Supper.²⁷

On the face of it this is highly improbable. Zwingli and his followers would have exploited such a logical Achilles' heel to the utmost, had it been a part of Luther's position. Actually, a reading of the passage from the 1528 Confession on the Lord's Supper,²⁸ which Pelikan cites as evidence, shows that far from expressing his own position, Luther is simply subjecting Oecolampadius' notions to a reductio ad absurdum, by working out the necessary inferences.

Dr. Hamann's final point is a propos: "And, for that matter, where is the need of such a volume in an edition of Luther's works?"

Having referred to the controversy with Zwingli, it may not be amiss to add an observation about the stock objection that the strict view of Scripture is not Lutheran but "Reformed". A little thought will show that the reverse is true. The strict view holds to the literal meaning of the sentence: "Scripture is the Word of God." This is Lutheran. The loose view, even when it uses the word "is," really means it in the sense of "represents". And this is obviously Zwinglian, even though the historical Zwingli would not have applied to Scripture the "logic" he applied to the Real Presence. How dangerous the tendency is, and where it leads, should be evident from these comments under "Bible" in Mackey's Encyclopedia of Free-masonry:

The Bible is used among Freemasons as a symbol of the will of God, however it may be expressed. Therefore, whatever to any people expresses that will may be used as a substitute for the Bible in a Masonic Lodge. . . . Whether it be the Gospels to the Christian; the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Mussulman, or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea--that of the symbolism of the Divine Will revealed to man.²⁹ (my underlining)

Finally, something ought to be said about the passage in which Luther seems to attribute a "minor error" (levem errorem) to St. Matthew. If this passage is authentic, it is the only one I know which creates any sort of difficulty for the position set forth in this essay. Commenting on Zechariah 11:13 and the famous difficulty of Matthew 27:9, Luther says:

Here the holy writers torment themselves, and Jerome raises the question why the Evangelist Matthew cited this testimony from Jeremiah,

when it appears nowhere in Jeremiah, but in this Prophet Zechariah. Briefly, I have this to reply: The Evangelists do not generally cite the testimonies of the prophets verbatim, but reproduce only the sense. . . .

Further, to this that he cites the testimony as if it were from Jeremiah, I have nothing else to reply, than that common saying that perhaps the prophet had two names, or that in the manner of the other Evangelists, he cited in general, without any concern for the name of the prophet. This passage is treated painstakingly by Augustine, whom see. Nor would I easily believe that the books of the prophets had been confused owing to changed titles, since there were undoubtedly with Matthew holy and learned men full of the Spirit, who reminded him that this scripture which he quoted was in Zechariah and not in Jeremiah, so that reminded by them he could have corrected this minor error, if he had wished or if he had regarded it as of great consequence.³⁰

At least three types of issues arise at this point: (1) How authentic is this passage? (2) Can it be understood acceptably or, alternatively, (3) do we have here an instance where we must simply reject one of Luther's statements?

(1) The passage is alleged to have been part of Luther's lectures on the Minor Prophets, given in the years 1524-1526. However, the only evidence for this is the Altenburg manuscript, first discovered three and a half centuries after the event. It was first printed in 1886. This manuscript, moreover, was not written by Luther, but by a student who heard the lectures on Zechariah, in 1525. The Latin text is given in vol. 13 of the Weimar edition (1889), and our particular passage appears on p. 650. A German translation is given in vol.

14 of the St. Louis edition (1898), where our passage occurs in columns 2123-2124.

It may be of interest to note in passing that the St. Louis edition contains a host of valuable text-critical corrections of the Weimar edition. The critical material in col. IV-XXIII of vol. 13, for example, is very impressive.

It is significant that the only printed Zechariah commentary to appear within Luther's own life-time, contained nothing about any "minor error" in Matthew. Since Luther himself edited this commentary, and had it published in Wittenberg in 1528³¹ we must assume that it, rather than someone else's private manuscript version represents the position which Luther wanted to uphold.

At this point Dr. M. Reu's otherwise excellent treatment of Luther leaves something to be desired. Reu translates the short paragraph from the 1528 commentary,³² and then proceeds to discuss it. However, the German "ob er gleich nicht so eben den Namen trifft" is not quite the same as Reu's English version: "even if he does not have the correct name". The German text moves within the framework of exactness, not correctness.

Reu comments: "He admits that it would make no difference if Matthew had made a mistake here, but he avoids saying that he has really done so. He just mentions it as a possibility. . ." Perhaps the best refutation is provided by Reu himself, at the very same place:

Here the striking form of the question, why Matthew expressed himself in this way, shows that Luther does not intend to discuss the question as to whether Matthew has erred. . .

If Luther, indeed, has never directly admitted that an actual mistake is to be found in a Scripture passage, and if instead, when an incorrect historical allusion or a contradiction of another Scripture passage seems to be evident, he sought some expedient that might remove the difficulty and frequently in doing so ventured to propose daring hypotheses, he did not mean by his expressions, "that is a matter of no importance," or, "that does not affect the matter," that it was a matter of indifference to him as to whether an actual error occurred or not. This has frequently been asserted and at first glance seems plausible. But, aside from his entire habitual attitude toward Scripture, it is evident from the passages, when they are read carefully, that this is not the case. . . . In these statements Luther does not say that it is a matter of indifference to him whether they contain errors or not but only that his faith would not be endangered, if, in spite of his best efforts, he would be unable to solve the apparent contradictions or to prove the inconsequence of all skeptical questions. He dismisses the matter if he cannot prove it conclusively, but his inability to do so neither commits him to the opinion that these passages really contain error, nor is his faith in salvation thereby imperiled (emphases in original).³³

(2) Since Luther refers to Augustine's treatment, and specifically rejects any suggestion of an oversight due to ignorance, but says that Matthew wrote what he did deliberately and knowingly, it may be possible to take the expression "this minor error" as having ironic force, the kind of thing which would nowadays be indicated by quotation marks.

(3) If, however, the quotation is both genuine and

incapable of an acceptable interpretation, it will simply have to be regarded as an unfortunate lapse on the part of the great Reformer. There are statements in practically all great Christian writers which cannot be upheld, particularly in the light of later Christian history. Think only of some Christological expressions before Nicaea, and of many soteriological ones before the Reformation! As Luther himself excused St. Augustine and other great Fathers for occasional aberrations, so he too must be excused. After all, the great battles with Socinianism, rationalism, and scientism, which were to define the issues so clearly, lay still in the distant future when Luther's hearer jotted down the careless remark about a "minor error."

Even the encounter with the spiritualising enthusiasts of his own day caused Luther to formulate the Scripture principle with much more care than he had before.

To pit one single doubtful and certainly unrepresentative remark from 1525 against Luther's whole stand on Scripture, or, in Dr. Hamann's lively language, "to walk, with eyes tightly closed, past dozens and hundreds of the clearest possible pronouncements of Luther in order to pitch and pounce upon some doubtful passage," and to do all this in the interests of an attack upon the authority of that Scripture which Luther loved and revered absolutely as "God's Letter,"³⁴ is not only historically unfair, but theologically unfaithful!

We have already seen³⁵ that Luther excludes the possibility of any error in Scripture, in his Large Catechism, of 1529, which Lutheran pastors are sworn to uphold.

Since many people nowadays know such statements only in the mutilated meanings in which they drip

out of the Platonic-Kantian mincing machine (pret-
tily disguised under Luther-an sounding jargon
about "was Christum treibet, etc."), we should look
at a few statements which make it quite clear that
Luther knows nothing about a "theological truth" as
distinguished from "factual truth," but insists on
the factual inerrancy of the whole Scripture.

In 1541 Luther issued the first edition (improved
in 1545) of his Computation of the Years of the
World.³⁶ All his chronological calculations and
harmonisations are based on his stated conviction
that Scripture is inerrant also in these matters:

Concerning all the other historians /beside
Eusebius. K.M./ we complain, and they com-
plain among themselves that they lack an ex-
act reckoning of the years. Wherefore I have
set them aside and in this work I have desired
to gather the computation of the years mainly
from the Holy Scriptures on which we can and
ought to base it. . .

I did not entirely hold the historians in con-
tempt, but that I preferred the Holy Scrip-
tures to them. I use them so that I am not
compelled to contradict Scripture. Because I
believe that in Scripture the true God speaks
but in the histories good people according to
their ability show their diligence and fidel-
ity (but as men) or at least that the copyists
were capable of erring.³⁷

Already in 1523 Luther had written, in his intro-
duction to his sermons on Genesis:

Therefore when Moses writes that God created
heaven and earth, and whatever is in them, in
six days, then let it stand that it was in six
days, and you may not find a gloss how six

days were one day. But if you can't understand how it was six days, then do the Holy Spirit the honour that He is more learned than you. For you must so deal with Scripture that you think it is God Himself talking. But because God speaks it, it doesn't behoove you wantonly to bend His Word to where you want it, except when necessity would compel to understand a text otherwise than the words sound, namely, if the faith will not tolerate the sense which the words give.³⁸

And in his great Genesis commentary Luther says:

I would gladly imagine that the firmament was the highest system above all things, and the waters not hanging above but under the heavens and that they are the clouds that we see, so that the waters parted from waters could be understood as clouds divided from our waters upon the earth, but Moses says with clear words that the waters are above and below the firmament. Therefore I must bring my own ideas into captivity and assent to the Word even if I do not understand it.³⁹

Let Luther conclude with this dialogue-stopper, printed in 1539:

when you hear such people, who are so completely blinded and hardened, that they deny that what Christ and the Apostles spoke and wrote is God's Word, or doubt it, then just keep silent, don't speak one word with them, and let them go; only say thus: I will give you plenty of argument from Scripture; if you will believe it, good; if not, be gone. But you say: Oh, then God's Word must suffer shame. Command that to God.⁴⁰

Beyond the Church Fathers

At this stage of the argument we cross a kind of ecclesiastical "date-line," and suddenly gain a thousand years for the strict view of Scripture. For when it has to be admitted that Luther, after all, maintained the rigorous position on Scripture too, this is usually blamed on the "scholastic" system which he inherited, and which is generally traced to St. Augustine. Dr. H. Sasse puts it like this:

So it could happen that he /Augustine/, the Christian Neoplatonist, in answering the criticism of the pagan Neoplatonist Porphyry gave us a theory of inspiration that was the application of the concepts of inspiration and of divine writings current in the world of the fourth century.

The concession Augustine made to paganism becomes evident from the fact that he must ascribe the same divine inspiration to sibyls, prophetesses of ancient paganism. Still today the Requiem Mass has in the Dies irae the words teste David cum Sibylla, i.e. according to the witness of David and the sibyl.

The theory developed by Augustine and Jerome and confirmed and reformulated by Gregory the Great became the undisputed doctrine of the medieval church and was taken over by the reformers. It is a real tragedy that in this way a doctrine of Scripture that was not strictly Biblical but only a venerable human tradition based on the authority of the great doctors of the ancient Latin Church became the basis of Protestant theology. The task before the Lutheran Church today is to do what the reformers left undone, the reexamination of the old tradition.⁴¹

No doubt there are germs of truth in these remarks. (We have already seen that Luther's "incarnationalism" modified the scholastic view of Scripture-- but not in the direction of modern criticism!) What staggers one, however, is the radical grandiosity of the claim: No longer are we being asked to correct a recent sectarian speciality in the light of the doctrinal heritage of historic Christianity; we are now asked to correct that heritage itself! Not a hundred, or even four hundred, but sixteen hundred years of Christian history are to be reversed. We are asked to believe that on a vital, indeed constitutive point of Christian doctrine the unanimous teaching tradition of the Church, through more than three quarters of its history, has been consistently mistaken, and stands in need of correction, at this late, apocalyptic date, by our bankrupt twentieth century! I submit that this is, on the face of it, an unlikely proposition, and extraordinarily surprising, to say the least of it, as a product of Confessional thought, however routine such ideas may be among modernists. And what sort of "sky-hooks" will support the edifice of Christian doctrine while the foundations are being dug up for "re-examination".

Strictly hypothetically, of course, the situation alleged by Dr. Sasse is possible. But before even considering such a thing one would have to be sure of the strongest proof from Scripture itself. The trouble is that if such Scripture proof exists,-- does it really matter unless one already holds the "strict" view?--it is unlikely that nobody has noticed it until now! And the unlikelihood grows with each century, approaching infinity as the clock of Church history moves toward midnight! I certainly would not want to gainsay Chemnitz' fine boast, made in the course of his profound discussion of Christian tradition:

We also admit that we dissent from those who invent opinions which have no testimonies of any time in the Church: as Servetus, Campanus, the Anabaptists and others have done in our time. Indeed we hold that no dogma which is new and which conflicts with all of antiquity, may be received in the Church. What that is more honorific could be said and held about the consensus and the testimonies of antiquity?⁴²

Consider also St. Athanasius' biting ridicule of the Arians' theology-by-innovation:

Only see how they run to and fro and ask how they should learn to believe in our Lord Jesus Christ! Of course, if they had the true faith, they would not need to inquire, as if they didn't know what to believe. What an offence for the catechumens, what subject for the laughter of the pagans, that the Christians, as if they were now awaking as from a sleep, are inquiring how one must believe in Christ. What doctrine does the catholic Church lack, that she should now begin investigations about the Faith? And at the head of their explanations about the Faith they set the consulate of the present time, which has never happened among the Christians till now, and the month and day of the current year, to indicate to all intelligent people that their faith originated not before, but only now under Constantius. Yes indeed, it has only started there, and it is not the ancient catholic Faith which they have. This their new way of writing corresponds completely to their heresy. But if, according to them, the true faith has only begun now, what will the blessed martyrs and Fathers do?⁴³

Aside from these a priori considerations, Dr. Sasse's argumentation--which, be it said in fairness, is offset by powerful statements in the opposite direction, like: "It cannot be denied that our Lord and His apostles taught clearly that Holy Scripture is God's Word, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit"--needs to be questioned purely on the grounds of historical accuracy. Three objections in particular come to mind:

In the first place, there seems to be no good reason for singling out St. Augustine. To be sure he was the first great systematic formulator of Christian dogma in the Western Church. But what evidence is there to show that St. Augustine introduced extraneous novelties into the Christian doctrine of inspiration? Rudelbach, in his detailed study, said about the full, strict view of inspiration:

Hardly is there a single point with regard to which there reigned, in the eight first centuries of the Church, a greater or more cordial unanimity.⁴³

Secondly, the "theory developed by Augustine and Jerome" is precisely not analogous to the pagan ideas about the sibylline oracles, nor specifically expressive of Neoplatonism.

The ancient Church, while it maintained that there was this continued action on the part of the Holy Ghost in the composition of the Scriptures, strenuously repelled the false notions which certain doctors, particularly among the Montanists, sought to propagate respecting the activity of the Spirit of God, and the passiveness of the spirit of man in divine inspiration; as if the prophet, ceasing to have the mastery of his senses, had been in

the state which the pagans attributed to their sibyls. . . While the Cataphrygians held that an inspired man, under the powerful influence of the divine virtue, loses his senses. . ., the ancient Church maintained, on the contrary, that the prophet DOES NOT SPEAK IN A STATE OF ECSTASY. . . and that one may distinguish by this trait false prophets from the true. This was the doctrine held by Origen against Celsus . . .; as also of Miltiades, of Tertullian, of Epiphanius, of Chrysostom, of Basil, and of Jerome, against the Montanists.⁴⁴ (Capitals in original)

So far was St. Jerome from mechanical, mantic, or ecstatic ideas of inspiration, that he on occasion "permitted himself, while speaking of the style of certain parts of the sacred books, to use a language whose temerity will be censured by all pious persons".⁴⁵ Specifically, he attributed to St. Paul "solecisms in vocabulary" and an inability to render properly certain rhetorical devices "and to conclude a sentence."⁴⁶

And the main thrust of Neoplatonism would have been precisely against the strict view of inspiration maintained by St. Augustine. The typical Platonic emphasis on the extreme transcendence of the realm of the ideas and of divine truth, and its anti-historical tendency, would have worked strongly against the absolute identification of the humble, historical Scriptures with the eternal truth and wisdom of God! Had Augustine followed this philosophy rather than the Scriptures themselves, he would have arrived somewhere near the modern view "that all of the activities and products of man's religious life (scriptures, creeds, churches) are historically conditioned" and not "infallible or a direct, unmediated result of divine activity".⁴⁷

Thirdly, there is no need to see anything sinister or pagan in Augustine's attitude to the sibyls. By his time many Biblical, and particularly Messianic elements had been worked into the sibylline prophecies, and were being quoted by Christian apologists as evidences for the truth of Christianity. There was no source-criticism, and these references were considered to be genuine prophetic testimonies to Christ, on the part of the pre-Christian pagan oracles. How else but by divine inspiration could Augustine possibly explain the occurrence in supposedly pre-Christian pagan oracles of something as remarkable as that famous acrostic, "Jesus, the Christ, Son of God, Saviour," which spells "fish" in Greek, and explains the meaning of this symbol in the early Church? The surprising thing is that, unlike other writers, Eusebius and Augustine "do not hide their reservations about the probative value"⁴⁸ of the sibylline oracles. But what has any of this to do with the alleged introduction of pagan influences into Augustine's concept of inspiration? His judgment seems remarkably sound and Christian. On the other hand, one shudders to think how many sibyls might today populate the New Testament canon, had Augustine had no clearer idea of inspiration than the "was Christum treibet" notion, as understood by the cocktail theologians of our time!

And while disposing of pagan sibyls, let us also be done with all invidious comparisons with the Koran (which does not claim to have fallen from heaven ready-made but was compiled after Mohammed's death from "scraps of parchment and leather, tablets of stone, ribs of palm branches, camels' shoulder-blades and ribs, pieces of board and the breasts of men,"⁴⁹ and mechanically arranged according to the length of the chapters or suras), the Book of Mormon (which does not claim perfection but, to protect its fraudulent claims, explicitly

admits to "imperfections" and "the faults of a man"⁵⁰), and the Jehovah's Witnesses (whose cynical contempt and fear of Scripture is perfectly expressed in this piece of blasphemy from "Pastor" Russell: "not only do we find that people cannot see the divine plan in studying the Bible by itself, but we see, also, that if anyone lays the 'Scripture Studies' /by Russell! K.M./ aside, even after he has used them. . .--if he lays them aside and ignores them and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he had merely read the 'Scripture Studies' with their references and had not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light."⁵¹)

To return to the Church Fathers, the truth of the matter is that they derived their doctrine of Scripture from the same source as their Christological-Trinitarian dogma: from Holy Scripture itself! The historic doctrine of inspiration is not mere venerable tradition, but Biblical truth. Emil Brunner⁵² and John Baillie⁵³ in effect admit this when they trace what to them is the great aberration (the historic Christian idea of propositional, doctrinal revelation) to the "latest books" of the New Testament itself, i.e. to the Pastoral Epistles, particularly such texts as II Tim. 3:15 ff.! And Brunner criticises the old position as representing an "Old Testament level" of revelation! But unlike Brunner, the apostolic Church, following Christ and His Apostles, accepts the Old Testament, unconditionally, as the Word of God, and as "profitable for doctrine"--also the doctrine of revelation!

The issue of the Bible's own self-testimony would be a very simple one, were it not for a certain well nigh universal misconception of what it means

to "consult the Bible itself." For some reason it is thought that the "Biblical position" is obtained by submitting Scripture to a searching human investigation and then announcing the verdict as being "Biblical". Texts are noted which contradict some popular "scientific" notion, or which seem to be in conflict with some other statements of Scripture. From these and similar observations the conclusion is then drawn that the old doctrine of inerrancy is "too narrow to fit the facts," and that Scripture itself, taken "seriously" and "on its own terms," etc., does not claim inerrancy for itself.

The only trouble with this procedure is that Scripture has never been consulted on the question! What Scripture says about itself is watered down, explained away, or simply ignored, while all attention is perversely concentrated on Biblical difficulties (many of them artificially created through non-Biblical assumptions) which are then used as an empirical basis for deciding whether the Bible contains errors or not. In other words, what decides the issue is by no means Biblical authority, but human observation and theorising! In principle this is no less invalid and sacrilegious than "testing" for the Real Presence with microscope and chemical analysis!

Just as the Biblical doctrine of the Real Presence rests simply, a priori, on the clear Biblical texts which teach it, and not on any a posteriori speculations from human observations, so the Biblical doctrine of Scripture rests on Scripture's own explicit claims about itself, and on nothing else. Doctrine requires Scripture proof. Human speculation cannot produce doctrine. The doctrine of Scripture is no exception.

Once this is granted, it is not difficult to show

that Scripture indeed claims for itself full divine inspiration and inerrancy.

The Real Crux: "What Think Ye of Christ?"

It should be obvious that no one who believes in Christ as God Incarnate, i.e. no Christian can seriously entertain "interpretations" such as Bultmann's.

Our modern scholars quite patently and unashamedly show what is the basis and bias of their new interpretations. Robinson:

The whole scheme of a supernatural Being coming down from heaven to "save" mankind from sin, in a way that a man might put his finger into a glass of water to rescue a struggling insect, is frankly incredible to man "come of age," who no longer believes in such a deus ex machina.

Bultmann: "The kerygma (i.e. as we know it) is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete." And this for Robinson and Bultmann decides the matter. Modern science and modern philosophy make the old Gospel incredible. Therefore it must be reinterpreted. I hold that this is not honest--not honest to God, nor honest to man. The honest thing is to say: The old Gospel plainly taught by the apostles is incredible to us. The only way we moderns can use their terms and language is by demythologising it altogether and finding a different meaning for them. So we may describe the words of the apostles as a picturesque, but figurative, mythological expression of what we mean. But in reality they and we mean two different

things altogether. The modern scholar may still be right--this is said for the sake of the argument--in rejecting the Gospel, but he is certainly never right in calling his new teaching an interpretation. I cannot see with what face and with what honesty a Bultmannian can recite the Apostles' Creed when he holds the whole of it to be mythological except the phrase "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried."⁵⁴

The issue is very clear: if Bultmann and Robinson are right, then the historic Jesus and His Apostles were wrong, and vice versa. But are the alternatives equally clear-cut in the case of "milder" forms of Liberalism? Dr. Montgomery observes:

the God-is-dead movement takes its rise from the consistent appropriation and use of a central theme in Neo-Orthodoxy--the very Neo-Orthodoxy that many Lutheran and Reformed theologians here and abroad are naively embracing today. Perhaps this discussion will aid some members of the theological community to check their tickets more carefully before they board contemporary trains of thought.⁵⁵

Once any of the deadly virus, no matter how large or small the dose, is admitted, the disease must rage on relentlessly to the bitter end! And what is the precise nature of the virus?

The answer to this question was brought home to me a few years ago, at a Presbyterian pastoral conference, to which I had been invited as an observer. The lecturer, a Prof. Anderson of Brisbane, showed, with excellent documentation from the New Testament, that for Christ and the Apostles the Old Testament writings were unconditionally the revealed, inspired, and absolutely authoritative

Word of God. But then the Professor asked whether we today were bound to that view too. This he then proceeded to deny on the grounds that we today know much that Christ and the Apostles simply did not and could not know two thousand years ago!

This then is the real crux of the matter: What think ye of Christ? Even purely from the point of view of natural reason it is absurd to say that anybody two thousand years later could possibly have a better idea of what Christianity is supposed to be than its divine Founder and His chosen Apostles! And theologically such an assertion is simply blasphemous. And is it thinkable that if Christ was really God Incarnate, He could possibly have left His Church in error, ignorance, and superstition for nineteen centuries, in order to "enlighten" her with scepticism and agnosticism in the twentieth?

If Christ is God Incarnate, then His and His chosen Apostles' attitude to Scripture is normative. To attack His teaching at any point is to attack His Lordship, and thereby to reject the truth of Christianity. Nor is it possible to argue that since Christ's view of Scripture is available to us not directly, but only indirectly, through the reports and interpretations of the Evangelists, it may have been misrepresented. A "Christ" whose teachings are misrepresented in the very foundational documents of His Church, simply cannot be the Son of God! Christ and Scripture, Incarnation and Inspiration, are indivisible; they stand and fall together. Our Declaration and Plea (unanimously confessed by the Queensland District of the former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, on May 7, 1966) put it like this:

Because Christian faith submits with unquestioning obedience (2 Cor. 10:5) to Christ as

the only Lord and Teacher, and because He, both directly in His own words and example, and indirectly, through the inspired words of His chosen writers, guarantees the Bible as His Word (Matt. 5:17-19; Matt. 22:29; Mark 7:13; John 5:46,47; John 10:35; John 14:26; John 16:13; John 15:20; John 17:20; Acts 24:14; Rom. 3:2; 2 Tim. 3:15 ff.), we joyfully confess the entire Holy Scripture, as it was originally given by the Holy Spirit through the sacred writers, to be unconditionally the Word of God written down in human language. . .

We therefore reject, with heart and mouth, the whole liberal, modern-theological attitude to Scripture, because it, in the interests of an anti-Christian world view, attacks Christ's Lordship and teaching authority, rationalises away the offence of the Cross, and, by its disdain of the plain, simple facts of the Biblical narrative as it reads, fundamentally contradicts the very Incarnation!

It should be noted that according to 2 Tim. 3:16 it is "all Scripture" which is "God-breathed" or inspired. This means that Verbal Inspiration is not, as has often and thoughtlessly been said, an attempt to explain the "how" of inspiration. It has, in fact, nothing to do with the "how." It merely affirms the "what" of inspiration, i.e. that all Scripture without exception, and therefore each and every individual word, is God-given. The primary object of inspiration is the written text, not the writer!

Another clumsy objection arises out of the Timothy text: This can refer, it is said, only to the Old Testament, but not to the New. So then the Old Testament is verbally inspired, but not the New!

Apart from specific promises and claims like John 17: 8.14 and I Cor. 2:4.13, and apart from the facts that St. Paul in I Tim. 5:18 cites Luke 10: 7 as "Scripture," and that II Pet. 3:15.16 equates "all his epistles" (St. Paul's) with "the other Scriptures," the very relation between the two Testaments makes it quite impossible to regard the writings of the New Covenant as in any way inferior to, or less inspired than these of the Old. Gausson develops these points in detail in his classic Theopneustia, The Plenary Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.⁵⁶

The Old Covenant is to the New as prophecy to fulfilment, as the imperfect to the perfect (Heb. 7-10), as shadow to reality (John 1:17; Col. 2:17), as the temporary to the final and permanent (Heb. 1:1-3). The Apostles of God Incarnate rank not below, but if anything, above, the prophets of the Old Covenant. For although John the Baptist, as Way-Preparer for the Christ, ranks above those who merely predicted the Messiah's Kingdom, although he ranks, in fact, above all others born before him (Matt. 11:11), yet "he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"! And the New Testament writers are hardly "the least" in the New Covenant; quite on the contrary: Eph. 2:20! Their writings cannot therefore rank below the admittedly verbally inspired Scriptures of the Old Covenant!

"Inspiration, Ltd."?

It used to be taken for granted that given inspiration, inerrancy necessarily follows. Those who opposed inerrancy at least had the consistency to deny plenary inspiration too. The issue then was relatively clear: some said that the Bible merely contained the Word of God, while others said that

it was that Word itself. In the former case, room was provided by the "uninspired" portions of Scripture for the accommodation of human errors. Thomas Huxley described the process with biting sarcasm but with clear-sighted accuracy when he boasted, in 1893, that

apologetic effort, at present, appears to devote itself to the end of keeping the name of "Inspiration" to suggest the divine source, and consequently infallibility, of more or less of the Biblical literature, while carefully emptying the term of any definite sense. For "plenary inspiration" we are asked to substitute a sort of "inspiration with limited liability," the limit being susceptible of indefinite fluctuation in correspondence with the demands of scientific criticism.⁵⁷

That is just the point: "Inspiration, Ltd.," that is, an "inspiration" without inerrancy, is a term devoid of "any definite sense." It is a "clumsy form of sophistry", as Dr. Engelder remarked somewhere. Dr. J. W. Montgomery has brilliantly expanded this point, with the aid of modern logical analysis, into a whole essay.⁵⁸

Yet this meaningless "inspiration with limited liability" has become a shibboleth of that soft-headed, Barth-oriented theology which has, in the past few decades, proved so irresistible to pietistic Lutherans of conservative background, who still disrelish the harder accents of a more consistent Liberalism (e.g. Bultmann):

Every conception of revelation involves a conception of inspiration. The scholastic conception of revelation has generally been accompanied by a theory of the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Bible. Since God speaks

propositionally in the Bible, and God is omniscient, every word of the Bible must be infallibly true. The theory of God-acting-in-events has other implications. Since God confronts us through the meaning of events, any report or comment which powerfully conveys that meaning may be divinely inspired, whether or not it is factually inerrant. The Bible can thus convey a true revelation of God, and its writers can be God's inspired interpreters, while at the same time they are thoroughly human and fallible.⁵⁹

Prof. E. Kinder, in his 1961 Australian lectures, in effect admitted that this Barth-Brunner-Baillie notion of revelation, which he, Kinder, advocated, really gets rid of inspiration altogether. Wrote Kinder: "Thus the prophets and the apostles are inspired principally /no doubt the German "prinzipiell," "in principle," is meant. K.M./ in no other way than all true faithful Christians are."⁶⁰ Inspiration here is completely gone. All that is left is illumination!

Where the genuine Biblical idea of inspiration prevails, there will be no hesitation about saying that all Scripture is the very Word of God. Dialectical games with a Scripture which only "becomes" God's Word or "points" to it, deal with a play-inspiration. And it is impossible to be serious about calling something the Word of God, if one is at the same time prepared to accuse it of containing errors. Inerrancy is an effective index and criterion of Biblical inspiration.

But is all this merely "philosophy" and speculation, as the modern half pietistic, half positivistic mentality is wont to say, or is it the teaching of Scripture itself?

Before answering that question, we would do well to clear up a popular misunderstanding of what inerrancy means. It is often assumed that it means "precision," and offence is then taken whenever Scripture fails to cite a quotation verbatim or to give verbally identical accounts of the same events. But of course inerrancy means not precision or exactness, but correctness. Whether a point in time for instance, is identified by hour, day, month, year, or century indeed affects the precision or exactness of the statement, but certainly not its correctness. Or consider R. Scharlemann's pettifoggery:

A reporter could ask the question, "Was the Greek word houtos the first or last word in the superscription on the cross at Jesus' crucifixion?" From Luke (23:38) he would receive the reply, "It was the last." From Matthew (27:37) he would receive the reply, "It was the first." By any normal definition of error, either Matthew or Luke is in error concerning this reportorial matter; perhaps both of them are.⁶¹

Dr. Scharlemann evidently has forgotten the difference between a sentence and a proposition, which is explained in any beginner's textbook on logic. The same logical content, that is to say, the same proposition, can be given various verbal forms (sentences), without altering its meaning. Whether I say: "This is the King of the Jews" or "The King of the Jews is This" makes no difference logically. The two different sentences express one and the same proposition. And what the Evangelists report --quite inerrantly--is the proposition "This is the King of the Jews," not, as Scharlemann thinks, the proposition "'This' was the first (or last) word of the sentence"!

Many alleged Biblical "contradictions" can be resolved quite easily with a little attention to elementary logic. Now let verification follow clarification.

Biblical Truth Vs. Idealist Philosophy

Our Lord and His holy Apostles always treat Scripture proof as final authority, thus clearly assuming inerrancy. One of the clearest texts in this regard is John 10:35: "Scripture cannot be broken." Dr. Sasse remarks that the use of this text "as proof for the inerrancy seems to have been unknown to the older generations."⁶² Perhaps this impression is due to the fact that inerrancy was a more self-evident corollary of inspiration in former ages, and that the matter has not become a major controversial issue until our time. But whatever the terminology may have been, surely the substance of inerrancy was always recognised by orthodox theologians in John 10:35. The great Harmony of the Four Evangelists, for instance, begun by Chemnitz and continued by Leyser and Gerhard, takes our text as proof that all Scriptural prophecies must "infallibly"⁶³ be fulfilled. In another place the Harmony says:

Scripture cannot be broken, that is, no one may dare do dispute contrary to Scripture's authority, much less to accuse it of falsehood /!/ or blasphemy. . . Scripture cannot be broken, that is, it cannot be rejected, denied, invalidated, overturned, or made of no effect /rejici, negari, infringi, everti, aut irrita fieri/.⁶⁴

This is good exegesis. It clearly spells out the force of the Lord's words. And be it noted that Christ cites Ps. 82:6 not as a Messianic prophecy

to be fulfilled, but merely as a "proof-text," in the strict meaning of that term, for the unimpeachable correctness of His terminology. He is arguing from the lesser to the greater, and adds the statement "and Scripture cannot be broken" as a parenthetical axiom, too self-evident to argue! That little sentence from the Psalms "cannot be broken," that is, even the correctness of its formulation cannot be challenged, merely because it is Scripture, not because it conveys any stupendous "Christocentric" quintessence! The authority is purely formal, not material at all!

If then our text establishes the absolute authority of all Scriptural statements, as it undoubtedly does, then it also establishes their absolute inerrancy. To say that something is "absolutely authoritative" but still erroneous, is to use words without meanings. The moment I correct a statement, I no longer regard it as "absolutely authoritative." Authority and errancy are absolutely incompatible.

Another text which inescapably teaches inerrancy is John 17:17: "Thy Word is truth". To say that something is God's Word is to say that it is inerrant. A "Word of God" which is "truth" but which nevertheless may contain errors is a monstrous absurdity without any Biblical warrant.

Of course it will be objected that we have entirely misunderstood the "Biblical" concept of truth, which means "more" than inerrancy (yes, but can it mean less?), and which in any case is not "propositional" (the "Greek" idea), but "personal." In support of this tiresome rhetoric, John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," is generally cited.

It was in a very similar connection that Luther had to teach the Zwinglians proper grammar. In his Confession of the Supper of Christ,⁶⁵ of 1528,

Luther thoroughly refutes Zwingli's claim that "is" means "signifies" in sentences like "Christ is the Vine." "Who, then, is the true vine of which Christ is the image?", Luther asks. "So I really hear that Christ is supposed to be a sign or type of the wood in the vineyard? My, that would be a fine thing!" The figure, Luther shows, lies not in the word "is," but in the word "Vine," which has become a "new word."

The jugglery with the word "truth" is no less absurd than similar solemn nonsense to the effect that "I am the Door" proves that the "New Testament concept" of "door" is "personal," as opposed to the "Greek, materialistic, etc." notion of "door" as something wooden or rectangular!

When Christ says "I am the Door," He surely intends not to say something new about doors, much less to give us a new "concept" of doors, but to say something new and profound about Himself! Proceeding pedagogically from the known to the unknown, He assumes that His hearers already know what doors are. The proportion "Christ is to Heaven what a door is to a building" would be a meaningless and insoluble equation, if the term "door" were an unknown quantity! The same is true of "new words" like Bread, Way, Life, Lamb, Shepherd, etc. Why should "Truth," of all words, be the one lone exception?

James Barr has clearly and conclusively shown, in his book The Semantics of Biblical Language,⁶⁶ that there is no linguistic evidence whatever for the popular hocus-pocus about a "Hebrew" vs. a "Greek" "concept" of truth. The painstaking treatment, which includes special studies of such Biblical terms as "word," "truth," "faithfulness," etc., steps rather heavily on a few sacred cows' hoofs, including, incidentally, those of Kittel's

Theologisches Woerterbuch! Interesting is the charge that linguistic evidence is often used in a misleading way, owing to idealistic philosophical and theological preconceptions traceable to Schleiermacher!⁶⁷

This suggests of course that the philosophical shoe is on the other foot: it is just those who mutter portentously about "the propositional concept of truth"--one might as well deplore the "wet concept of water"--being "unbiblical," "Aristotelian," etc., who are themselves the victims of human philosophy!

Dr. Montgomery has traced the philosophical basis and bias of the whole modern-theological enterprise:

metaphysical dualism, which in one form or other has always claimed that the Absolute cannot be fully manifested in the phenomenal world. From Plato's separation of the world of ideas from the world of things and the soul from the body, to the medieval "realists" with their split between universals and particulars, through the Reformation Calvinists' conviction that finitum non est capax infiniti, to the modern idealism of Kant and Hegel, we see this same conviction in various semantic garbs.⁶⁸

It is this idealistic philosophy, not any Biblical material, which forces the Scriptures into the Procrustean framework in which nothing concrete and historical, neither Christ nor His Scripture, can possess absolute, "once-for-all" finality and validity. How utterly foreign this Platonic-Kantian-Hegelian idealism is to that Biblical "incarnation-alism" which Luther grasped so thoroughly! The modern "Biblical Theology," reared on such philosophical foundations, is anything but Biblical. The opposition to propositional revelation, to inerrancy, and to the normal "concept" of truth comes

from philosophy, not from the Bible. Biblical language, not allowed to function authoritatively, is forced to serve as a fig-leaf!

"Logicide", Genesis, and Evolution

More pathetic than the outright denial of inerrancy is the dishonest practice of keeping the term, but only as a kind of hollow ruin in which to store alleged errors--the way the Communists use ancient and beautiful churches as granaries and museums of atheism!

Consider the fantastic claim that "an 'error of fact' can't affect the inerrancy of the Bible, according to a Canadian Lutheran Council report."⁶⁹ The headline puts the nonsense even more tersely: "Factual Error Can't Affect Inerrancy, Canadians Agree." One asks in amazement: What meaning, if any, did the editor who penned this headline attach to the words he used? Or did he simply string words together mechanically? Worse yet, how can responsible churchmen produce such "agreements"?

An "inerrancy" which allows for errors is a contradiction in terms. It is as nonsensical as a non-alcoholic beverage that contains alcohol! As gin by definition "affects" the non-alcoholic nature of the punch, so "factual errors" necessarily "affect" inerrancy! To deny this is to commit "logicide," the assassination of meaningful discourse! In evidence I offer the final paragraphs of the item in question, which constitute, logically, a badly mutilated corpse:

Among some Lutherans such a difference is termed a "discrepancy," and among some others it is called an "error of fact." The Canadians agreed that the terms, when properly understood,

do not cast doubt on the inerrancy of the Bible.

The report emphasised that the term "error of fact" does not refer to an apparent "mistake" or incorrect statement in the Bible. Instead the term, according to the report, allows for human inaccuracies, such as those that frequently occur today when eye witnesses to an accident disagree about some aspects of the event.

Now, how can something be an "error of fact" without being at the same time a "mistake" and an "incorrect statement"? The definitions and distinctions are simply senseless. "Errors of fact" are compatible with inerrancy not "when properly understood," but only when properly misunderstood!

In view of the logical enormities involved, one can only assume that the invention of "inerrant errancy" was a church-political convenience. Had the term "inerrant" not been enshrined in constitutions and hallowed documents, it would have been simply discarded by those who attack its meaning. Outside the Alice-in-Wonderland realm of a certain kind of church-politics, however, it should be perfectly plain that inerrancy either means absence of errors or else it means nothing at all.

But, formal considerations aside, does Scripture itself allow for "factual errors" within the canon of the inspired text? Nowhere in Scripture is such a fatal dispensation from divine authority and inerrancy granted. On the contrary, the Lord Himself insists most pointedly:

If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? (Jn. 3:12)

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much (Luke 16: 10).

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed. . . (Mark 8:38).

It is the concrete, individual statements (note the plural, logous, words, in Mark 8:38!) of Christ which are beyond criticism and dispute. "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35) is a universal proposition which admits of no exceptions. St. Paul similarly confesses belief in "all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24: 14).

To attack the inerrancy and authority of Christ and His Scripture at any point is to repudiate His Lordship in principle. After all, the forbidden fruit in Paradise also seemed a trifling thing in itself!

John Huxtable tries to avoid this logic by saying:

If, for instance, an absent-minded professor tells me that the train for Penzance leaves Waterloo at noon and I find that in fact it leaves Paddington half an hour before, I do not conclude that my informant is a liar, nor that he is ill-disposed towards me, nor that his reputation as a scholar rests on a fraud. I take him for what he is, and do not suppose that being a great authority on Homer makes him a reliable substitute for a time-table. Although this is a very imperfect analogy indeed, it has at least this force: Jesus Christ came into the world to be its Saviour, not an authority on biblical criticism. I do not feel my

salvation insecure because I believe that Jesus was "mistaken" in ascribing the authorship of the second /tolle, lege, it is the 110th! K.M./ Psalm to David, or because he seemed more certain than I am able to be that the commandments were given by "Moses."⁷⁰

The analogy is not only "imperfect" but totally illicit and impossible, because there is a vast qualitative gulf between being "a great authority on Homer" and being Lord of heaven and earth, Wisdom Incarnate--unless of course one gets one's ideas of "Lordship" from the impotence of the House of Lords in Socialistic Britain rather than from the New Testament! The only way to get rid of factual inerrancy is to assume a kenotic Christology. But this is thoroughly heretical and anti-Christian, as Olav Valen-Sendstad, for instance, has made clear.⁷¹

Shifting the discussion onto a slightly different level, we may well ask: where did the idea come from that Scripture and theology are or can be indifferent to the correctness of factual (*viz.*, historical, geographical, etc.) details? Certainly not from the Bible! Many examples could be cited. It pleased God for instance not to lead the Magi directly to the Christ Child by means of the star, but first to make them dependent on the factual, *viz.*, geographical inerrancy of Holy Scripture (Mat. 2)! But what is the need of many examples? Is it not crystal clear that the religion of the Incarnation glories in historical and geographical details? What sort of a miserable, imaginary Incarnation would we have without historical and geographical specifics, without Caesar Augustus, Cyrenius, Bethlehem, Herod, Jordan, Cana, Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, and all the rest? However awkward this may be for Kantian-idealist superstitions and all other false spiritualising and enthusiasm, the Faith of the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the

Resurrection is inseparably tied to, indeed anchored in concrete historical and geographical details, and cannot possibly despise the realm of factual correctness as some despicable, lower order of reality which may safely be sacrificed without any loss of "theological truth." Christ Himself has most explicitly tied the "theological truth" of His Gospel to even seemingly unimportant historical facts (Mark 14:9). Lessing's contempt for "contingent truths of history," applied to theology, is that very "spirit of antichrist" (and of ancient Gnosticism!) which denies that "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (I John 4:2)!

An important and highly technical complex of issues arising in the historical area is the isagogical one, i.e. the matter of the dating and authorship of the various Biblical books. Undoubtedly there is much room here for the application of devout Christian scholarship and for the charitable accommodation of a healthy variety of opinions and conclusions. To assume, however, that all such matters are automatically open questions is shallow and frivolous. What Scripture itself does not clearly settle is of course free. But if Scripture does clearly decide an issue of this sort, then the Christian exegete is in advance committed to this decision, to the exclusion of all contrary views, because what Scripture says God says. For the Christian that ends the matter. This does not mean that there can or must always be agreement on whether in a given case Scripture does in fact speak clearly. Differences of opinion will have to be tolerated here. What cannot be tolerated is any rejection of the principle that if Scripture does in fact pronounce clearly on a point, this decision is final, no matter what the current scholarly opinion may be. For when Scripture has spoken, it is no longer a question of this or that little point of interpretation, but of obedience or dis-

obedience to the authority of God Himself. Permit me to quote our Queensland Declaration and Plea again:

Christ and His Apostles never claimed that they were reading things into the Old Testament which were not there. (Who would have paid any attention to such nonsense?) Rather, they claimed to be giving the true, natural, and original meaning of the Old Testament prophecies. When Christ says that Moses wrote of Him, John 5:46, or when John says that Isaiah "saw His glory and spoke of Him," John 12:41, or when Peter says that David, in Ps. 16, "seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ," Acts 2:31, then no contrary opinion can be entertained where the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church is seriously confessed.

To understand and interpret the Old Testament in any other way than did Christ and the Apostles, is to deny the risen Saviour, Who "beginning at Moses and all the prophets . . . expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself," thereby opening "their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27,45). And it is contrary to both faith and reason to think that we today can have a purer understanding of Scripture or Christianity than did Christ and His Apostles, upon whom the Church is founded, Eph. 2:20.⁷²

And at the 1959 Conclave of orthodox theologians in Oakland, Calif., Dr. M. Franzmann asked in a well-reasoned essay:

If modern Old Testament exegesis has rarefied the nexus between the Testaments to the point where it bears only a shadowy resemblance to

that massive and living connection posited by the apostles; if it has made dubious and problematic what is for the apostles certain and axiomatic, the methodological question inevitably arises: If modern methodology in Old Testament exegesis has brought men to the point where they can no longer "imitate" the apostles, may it not be that we are in the last stages of a grandiose aberration, comparable to the age-long domination of the four-fold sense in patristic and medieval exegesis?⁷³

All this is acutely relevant to the current battle about the interpretation of Genesis 1-3. Tremendous pressures are at work in some conservative Lutheran Churches, to have this vexing question treated as non-doctrinal and as not divisive of Church Fellowship. It is urged that it is not the business of theology to pronounce on the merits of scientific theories (evolution), that the whole thing is merely a question of interpretation, and that the substance of Christian doctrine is in no way endangered, since, after all, the creation from nothing would still be maintained.

But this is a terrifyingly innocent appraisal of the realities involved. History shows that churches which have opened the doors to a figurative interpretation of Genesis, have lost their doctrinal substance. I know of not a single exception. Even authoritarian Rome has tasted the hermeneutical-dogmatic destruction that follows leaving "the doctrine of Evolution an open question," as Pius XII put it in Humani generis of Oct. 12, 1950. This may baffle the historian, or strike him as purely coincidental, but the theologian must see the necessary connections between the Genesis issue and the rest of Christian theology.

It is totally inadequate and beside the point to

concentrate all attention on the question of "literary forms" in Gen. 1-3, as if this were the sole or even the main issue. Genesis cannot be treated as an isolated case. It must be seen in broader perspective. This perspective is to be supplied not by pagan parallels from Middle-eastern literature, but from Scripture itself--Scripture is its own interpreter--particularly from the normative pronouncements of Christ and His Apostles. Yet this crucial issue is invariably avoided by the advocates of the figurative view. The reason is not difficult to see: if the New Testament's interpretation of Genesis is at all taken seriously, all figurative schemes vanish as mist before the sunshine!

Christ Himself in Matt. 19:3-9 clearly takes the Genesis Creation account at face value as straightforward historical narrative. A mythological, poetical, "symphonic" (!), or any other type of symbolical understanding of Genesis could not possibly support the argument of Our Lord in this passage. And when He says: "but from the beginning it was not so" (v. 8), he obviously means to speak of historical reality as it really was, not of some nebulous "depth-dimension"!

Similarly, St. Paul's arguments in I Cor. 11:7-9 and I Tim. 2:13,14 necessarily presuppose and absolutely depend on the nonfigurative, historical understanding of the Genesis accounts of the Creation and Fall. This is even more obvious in Rom. 5:12-21. The great parallel developed here between Adam and Christ is impossible without the historicity of Adam.

At this point it becomes clear what all is involved: not only the formal teaching authority of Christ and His Apostles (this at once involves Christology, as we have seen), but the doctrines of man and of sin,

which form the immediate foundation of the doctrine of the Redemption itself! When the origin and unity of the human race and the origin of original sin are shrouded in mythological fog, the clear contours of the Cross and the Resurrection soon disappear too. What possible meaning can the Atonement have if man, instead of having fallen from a state of original perfection, has actually been evolving toward such a state from animal origins? Christ the Redeemer then becomes Christ the Example (as in de Chardin's "Omega Point"), and the Gospel becomes Law! Those who mumble piously about seeing "Law and Gospel" in Genesis, ought to bear this in mind!

Nor will it do to say that Adam and Eve were real, historical people, but that their creation is reported figuratively and need not exclude evolution; and that the Fall really did take place in history, but not necessarily in the exact way reported in Gen. 3. As one cannot gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, so one cannot gather real fruit of symbolical trees! A real Adam made from symbolic earth, and a real Eve made from a symbolic rib, living in a figurative garden, and falling into real sin by eating of a symbolic fruit, comprise a phantasmagoric frivolity unworthy of a Christian theologian!

The New Testament references adduced do not allow the scheme of a real Adam and Eve in a figurative historical and geographical environment. The texts presuppose not that the Creation and Fall are historical facts which happened somehow though not necessarily in the way described, but that the narratives are correct descriptions of what happened and of how it happened. Any suggestion, in whatever form, of any sort of animal ancestry for man's physical nature is therefore fundamentally heretical. (Note also that man only "became" a living being as man, Gen. 2:7!)

Dr. W. Oesch, in his definitive essay, "The Doctrine of Inspiration and its Application to Proto-History"⁷⁴ comes to the only possible conclusion:

The statements especially about creation, the original state, and the fall, are indissolubly connected with the saving message of the New Testament, yes, it is just here that the Old and New Testaments present a united front in such a way that they can only be rejected together.

The original basis for the rejection of the historicity and facticity of Genesis undoubtedly was the "insight into the incompatibility of Biblical proto-history with the newly won scientific and historical knowledge of the initial state of the world and of mankind,"⁷⁵ to quote the Hartlich-Sachs study of the exegesis of the last two centuries. Today's notion that the factual-historical element isn't the main thing anyway, is but a "sour grapes" rationalisation. This generosity-from-contempt with the factual aspect, the kind of mentality that pooh-poohs "the credibility of Moses and the edibility of Jonah: as pseudo-issues, is not Biblical faith and spirituality, but philosophical idealism. Biblical theology, on the contrary, cannot surrender the facticity of Genesis without thereby committing suicide. The scheme of theological-truth-through-factual-error is entirely foreign to the Bible. If such clearly attested facts as those of Genesis 1-3 can be surrendered, then anything at all can be surrendered, and we end in the hopeless self-confessed bankruptcy of "Neo-Orthodoxy":

For us, then, the Bible is a book of the acts Hebrews believed God might have done and the words he might have said had he done and said them--but of course we recognise he did not. The difference between this view of the Bible

as a parable illustrative of Hebrew religious faith and the view of the Bible as a direct narrative of God's actual deeds and words is so vast that it scarcely needs comment.⁷⁶

Then to keep talking about "inspiration" and even "inerrancy" is to add insult to injury, for a "parable illustrative of Hebrew religious faith" cannot possibly be the source and norm of any serious discipline, not to mention theology, as the Spirit-given ability to apply Law and Gospel for the eternal salvation of men!

Moreover, it is very short-sighted apologetics to buy temporary peace from the Moloch of scientism by the sacrifice of Genesis. It is just in the opening chapters of Genesis, that Scripture, and the whole fabric of Scriptural truth, is firmly attached to reality. If Scripture is pried loose from factual reality at the very start, in Genesis, then henceforth the whole fabric of Biblical teaching floats in an idealistic vacuum of unreality. However flowery the pietistic rhetoric about "Christocentricity," etc., it is but a part of a larger scheme which as such is no longer part of the real world. Even the very Left-wing Christian Century has complained, in an article significantly entitled "The Irrelevance of Theology,"⁷⁷ that despite "so many people of first-rate ability" involved in it, contemporary theology (the fashionable kind is meant) has hardly made any impact at all "on scholarship outside the seminaries." Following Richard R. Niebuhr's thesis in Resurrection and Historical Reason, the writer of the article blames the philosophy of Kant for the impotence and irrelevance of the theology based on it:

Professor Niebuhr denies that the so-called neo-orthodoxy of recent decades marks a fundamental break with the theological method of the 19th

century. Schleiermacher and Feuerbach, Barth, Brunner and Bultmann are variations of one Kantian theme.

From the apologetic point of view it is interesting to note, as Prof. Montgomery has shown,⁷⁸ that the Platonic-Kantian idealism, on which "modern" theology is built, is rather passé since the rise of modern analytical philosophy. Ironically, young Lutheran theologians, anxious to be "modern" and "relevant", are throwing away their birthright for a mess of stale German philosophical pottage, which dooms theology to perpetual irrelevance, while, even more ironically, "medical and science students take so readily to what is called Fundamentalism,"⁷⁹ as Herbert complains! Indeed, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4)!

All the issues raised by modern theology converge so massively on the Genesis question, that this matter, far from being a minor exegetical point, has in fact become the decisive battle ground of modern Lutheranism. It is a crisis pregnant with dogmatic, hermeneutical, ecclesiastical, and historical consequences of great magnitude. Such a decision cannot be made lightly. It will determine whether the Church of the Reformation can survive in our century, or whether it will repeat the other historic churches' tragic history of doctrinal dissolution.⁸⁰ Compromise and accommodation are impossible. Either Christ must win, or Darwin, either the theology of creation or the mythology of evolution, either Biblical authority or scientific "naturalism," either Christianity or atheism! Kyrie eleison!

A Final Fig-Leaf Removed

Satan is far too intelligent to do the orthodox

Church the favour of offering her clear-cut alternatives such as faithfulness or apostasy, theology or mythology, confession or denial, Christ or Belial. Subtle substitutions, devious "reinterpretations," blurred boundary lines, loaded, mined, and undermined terms, in short, intellectual guerrilla warfare is far more effective. It would be foolish, for instance, to scare naive Lutherans with such open atheism as that of Bauer's hermeneutical canon: "Wherever God has appeared on earth, there one must think not of true history but of a myth".⁸¹ Instead, Satan uses many pious disguises.

One fairly old disguise, known already to Dr. C. F. W. Walther, goes like this: As Christ is God and Man, so Scripture also has a divine and a human side. Now, in the past, theology has concentrated too exclusively on the divine side. Today we must do more justice to the human side, without of course in the least denying the divine side. We must avoid monophysitism and docetism in our doctrine of Scripture. But if the human side of Scripture is taken seriously, we must allow for minor mistakes--to err is human--on the part of the holy writers. Otherwise inspiration is a mechanical dictation.

Let Dr. Walther reply, adapting the words of Luther, and of the Formula of Concord, VIII, 40:

Beware, beware, I say, of this "divine-human Scripture"! It is a devil's mask; for at last it manufactures such a Bible after which I certainly would not care to be a Bible Christian, namely, that the Bible should henceforth be no more than any other good book, a book which I would have to read with constant sharp discrimination in order not to be led into error- For if I believe this, that the Bible contains also 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 by this "divine-human Scripture."⁸²

Does this mean that the analogy between the Incarnation and Inspiration is invalid? On the contrary! Properly applied it supports precisely the orthodox, Biblical position: the human side of Scripture implies error as little as the human nature of Christ implies sin! The analogy is violated precisely by those who smuggle in errors under the guise of Scripture's humanity! And it is just the adherents of the strict, orthodox doctrine of the Bible who see Inspiration as of a piece with the Incarnation; for they oppose the idealistic flight to some "spiritual meaning" or "depth dimension" above, beyond or behind the concrete particularity of the Biblical text!

Analogy, however, implies similarity, not identity. Like parables, analogies may therefore not be pressed unto blood. Thus not everything that can and must be said about the Incarnation, can be applied also to Inspiration. It is very misleading, for instance, to speak of a "Chalcedonian relationship" between the human and the divine aspects of Scripture. Not all of the four adverbs applied by the Council of Chalcedon to the Personal Union of the Natures of Christ, can be transferred to inspiration, or, for that matter, to other analogous relationships, such as the Sacramental Union of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist. To make my meaning clearer, I have constructed a kind of (only a kind of!) "truth-table," relating the four Chalcedonian adverbs to three relationships: that between the two Natures of Christ in the Personal Union, that between the heavenly and the earthly elements in the Sacramental Union, and that between the human and the divine elements in Inspiration. T stands for true, and means that the term is applicable, F for false, i.e. inapplicable.

	Personal Union	Sacramental Union	Inspira- tion
(without confusion	T	T	F
(without change)	T	T	F
(without division)	T	F	T
(without separation)	T	F	T

Obviously all four terms apply to the Personal Union. But the body and blood of Christ are not indivisibly and inseparably united to the bread and wine, which after the Communion are subject to normal natural processes which no longer involve Christ's body and blood. When it comes to Inspiration, we must agree that Scripture is God's Word without any possibility of division or separation between human and divine. But we can hardly say that the human word of Scripture is God's Word "without confusion" and "without change," as if human and divine words were and continued to be distinct entities existing simultaneously in some sort of reciprocal relationship. This suggests that the Word of God is after all something which floats above and beyond the external words of the Scriptural text. But this is again utterly unbiblical Platonic idealism! Scripture itself is God's Word, logia tou theou, Rom. 3:2, and not merely something connected with that Word, however closely. No flight from the text to a Word behind it is permissible. There is no danger of "confusing" the human word of Scripture with God's Word, because God has "changed" or translated His message into our language, so that there are no longer two parallel, distinguishable elements when it comes to the meaning of the message. Our old theologians expressed this by speaking of the human element of Scripture

as the "materia" (language, vocabulary) and of the divine as the "forma" (the intended sense or meaning of the human words used by God in Scripture).

An analogy will clarify the point: If a Martian arrived on earth, and through computers and electronics contrived and broadcast the English statement: "Tomorrow your world will be destroyed," then it would be foolish to argue that the real word of the Martian must not be confused ("without confusion") with the human words which he used. No, those human words as such are the direct word and message of the Martian. There are not here two entities, existing side by side, which ought not to be confused. There is only one entity: The word and message of the Martian stated in English.

Similarly God's Word dare not be thought of as something still one step beyond the external words of Scripture (Rom. 10:6-8!), something not completely identical with the external text, "for you must so deal with Scripture that you think God Himself is speaking" (Luther).⁸³ Anything short of this is sub-biblical and sub-Christian.

Summary Conclusion

We conclude where we began: Christianity is either true as a whole, or false as a whole, but not anything in the middle. If Christ is God, then His Word is true down to the last particular. But if His teaching is questioned at any point, be it protology or eschatology, sin or grace, Moses or Isaih, earthly or heavenly, His Lordship is in principle subverted, and a rejection of His Divinity, and thus of the truth of Christianity must follow. These broad, over-arching and inexorable relationships must be forced, in bold outline, upon the attention of our generation of theologians, whose

energies are all too often dissipated in the pursuit of the irrelevant pedantries of a petty learnedness.

Christ and His Scripture--or atheism: that is the real, honest choice. The seamless robe of Biblical Christianity will be either treasured whole or gambled away whole. But it cannot permanently be divided!

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II. THE CHURCH OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AS THE TRUE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Was the Reformation Ecumenical?

The Ecumenical Movement of our time is a mighty stream whose elemental force is felt in the remotest provinces of Christendom. Ignoring it, sticking our heads in the sand, will not make it go away. The surviving Confessional Lutheran churches of the world need to face the issues raised by the Ecumenical Movement, and when these issues will have been faced, fully and in the light of God's Word, then--this is my firm hope--we shall have a new Confession, entailing new alignments and new divisions.

At the very outset we must note that the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" of the "one body" in Eph. 4:4-5 is meant as a present reality, not as an ideal still to be achieved, much less one to be achieved by human church politics! Scripture speaks not of any "Ecumenical Movement" but of the ecumenical status of the Church! The Church is already one. This oneness is given in the one Lord and the one faith, and is not an imaginary abstraction, of a piece with "some Platonic republic".¹

This means of course that there is no conflict or "tension" whatever between truth and unity. The "One Lord, One faith, One baptism" create and determine true unity, so that any "unity" based on compromise is simply a bogus unity, a fraud. The "one faith" is truly ecumenical, no matter how few may consistently confess it, while every departure from the "one faith" is anti-ecumenical, no matter how numerous and illustrious the dignitaries who propound it!

But did the Reformation really represent the "one faith" of the "one Lord" and of His "one baptism"?

The challenge most immediately relevant to our Reformation Jubilee observance is probably the idea that the Reformation was a one-sided reaction, which mistook a part of the truth for the whole truth, and therefore ended in division and sectarianism. Or, as Archbishop Temple put it in his inaugural sermon at the 1937 Faith and Order Conference in Edinburgh: "it may well be that in the heat of conflict, such as tormented the sixteenth century, men so zealously upheld what seemed to them neglected truths that they became blind to supplementary truths which were dear to their opponents."² The remedy of course is to correct the Reformation's one-sidedness by means of a more balanced, ecumenical approach, which would give due weight to the "supplementary truths".

The vulgar, journalistic version of this approach is the conviction that each "denomination" has its distinctive "insight", and that if only all these various aspects could be combined, we would have the one Truth and Gospel of God in all its full-orbed splendour and integrity! This superstitious belief in the attainment of ever fuller truth through the progressive reconciliation of opposites comes of course not from Scripture but from the German philosopher Hegel. St. Paul never suggests that the

"whole counsel of God" which he had "not shunned to declare" (Acts 20:27) in any way depended on the "supplementary truths" of his opponents; quite the contrary (Gal. 1:8,9)! Just as an algebraic expression or sum may add up to nought, no matter how complex the terms that make it up, so contradictory theological doctrines yield not a "greater" truth but none at all. How can the denial of salvation by grace alone, or of the Real Presence, possibly "supplement" these doctrines? Let Chesterton deliver the coup de grace:

I mean those who get over all these abysses and reconcile all these wars by talking about "aspects of truth" . . . I will only say here that this seems to me an evasion which has not even had the sense to disguise itself ingeniously in words. If we talk of a certain thing being an aspect of truth, it is evident that we claim to know what is truth; just as, if we talk of the hind leg of a dog, we claim to know what is a dog. Unfortunately, the philosopher who talks about aspects of truth generally also asks, "What is truth?" Frequently even he denies the existence of truth or says it is inconceivable by the human intelligence. How then can he recognise its aspects? I should not like to be an artist who brought an architectural sketch to a builder, saying, "This is the south aspect of Sea-View Cottage. Sea-View Cottage, of course, does not exist." . . . Nor should I like any better to be the bungling and absurd metaphysician who professed to be able to see everywhere the aspects of a truth that is not there.³

But does not the very slogan "grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone" prove the Reformation's imbalance? Insistence on the threefold "alone" seems "extremist," and "extremism" offends our modern "appalling frenzy of the indifferent" (which for

Chesterton constituted the very definition of bigotry)!⁴ This supposed "extremism" embarrasses even so-called Lutherans today: both the Department of Theology and the Commission on Theology of the "Lutheran" World Federation mutter apologetically about justification being after all only one of many Biblical "pictures"!⁵

From a soberly Scriptural point of view there is nothing particularly "extreme" about the threefold "alone." Quite on the contrary. "By grace alone" and "through faith alone" add up to nothing more or less than "Christ alone," as the ground and means of our salvation. And "Scripture alone," as source and norm of theology, again means "Christ alone" as the one authentic Teacher of His Church. But if the threefold "alone" merely spells out and underscores "Christ alone," then who will dare to call this "extreme"? Or with what is "Christ alone" to be counterbalanced? With Antichrist? Or with Belial? No! What Father Congar calls Luther's "unilateral and exacerbated Galatianism" (!)⁶ is not anything unbalanced or peripheral, but the heart and core of the Gospel, the very centre of that one faith in the one Lord into which and into Whom all Christians have been baptised. In other words, the Reformation with its threefold "alone" was truly ecumenical, catholic, universal, because it was truly evangelical and biblical!

At the time this was freely admitted even by some within the papal camp. Bishop Stadion of Augsburg, for instance, exclaimed after he had heard the Augsburg Confession; "What has been read to us is the truth, the pure truth, and we cannot deny it."⁷ And Duke William of Bavaria, Luther's bitter foe, too, was deeply impressed and asked Dr. John Eck whether he could refute the Confession. When Eck replied that he could do so from the Church Fathers, but not from Scripture itself, Duke William made the

famous statement: "So I hear that the Lutherans sit beside!"⁸

What was really anti-ecumenical was the small and unrepresentative, largely Italian, sectarian assemblage which gave itself the imposing title of the "Sacrosanct Oecumenical and General Synod of Trent, and harshly condemned the Reformation. Such respect for this Council as can survive a study of Chemnitz's celebrated Examen, must, it seems to me, perish in the reading of the learned monk Paul Sarpi's detailed history of the Council of Trent. Sarpi shows clearly that this Council was at every stage effectively controlled by the incredible ambitions and intrigues of the Popes, who saw to it that "the Holy Ghost arrived daily in the mail-bag from Rome". The Jesuit Pallavicini tried, on behalf of the enraged Roman curia, to dispel the fatal impression made by Sarpi's book, but succeeded only in confirming it. Pallavicini was unable to convict Sarpi of a single major error. His triumphant list of 360 mistakes concerns such minor details as names and dates. These having been corrected, Sarpi's classic became all the more valuable!⁹

Like Chemnitz¹⁰ Sarpi calls attention to the deliberate ambiguity of the Tridentine formulations--dramatically illustrated by the completely contradictory interpretations of the decrees on sin and grace, published in 1548 by Soto, the main Dominican representative at Trent, and Vega, the leading Franciscan.¹¹

Although modern Roman Catholics are of course technically bound by the decisions of Trent, recent years have seen some amazing developments in the Roman Church. Consider for instance some of the startling things said by some prelates at the recent Vatican Council. Joseph Tawil, Patriarchal Vicar

in Egypt, said:

The People of God has unity when, in quest of salvation by faith, it receives the promise; on the contrary, it is divided when, trusting in the flesh, it loses the promise. . . Afterwards the Church--the new People of God--ran after the temptation to "Judaize", to "Hellenize" (fifth century), to "Latinize" (eleventh century), and finally to "Romanize" (sixteenth century). Then she found she had the righteousness of the flesh and no longer that of faith. /Phil. 3:7-9/¹²

Luther himself could hardly have put it better!

Eugene D'Souza, Archbishop of Bhopal (India), said:

Just as Christ took to himself everything human, sin alone excepted, so Catholicism which is true to its name should take to itself everything which is Christian, leaving out negations. In actual fact, for the principal first fruits of renewal we are heavily indebted to others--for the biblical movement to the Protestants, and for the liturgical movement to the Orthodox. Relying on their help, let us abandon those traditions which belong only to a particular school of theology or national character or religious order and which we have repeatedly confused with Tradition with a capital T.¹³

Perhaps the noblest statement in this connection was made by Leon-Arthur Elchinger, Coadjutor Bishop of Strasbourg (France):

It is a certain historical truth that at the beginning of our divisions, those who took the initiative had no desire to act primarily and unconditionally against unity, but began by seeing that certain truths were fundamental in divine

revelation; for instance, the apostolic rights of the Churches, in the schisms of the eleventh century, or again, in the sixteenth-century Reformation, the dogma of justification by faith in the Lord Jesus our Savior, which had been defined at the First Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem. On the other side of the ledger, what scholar well versed in the history of those two periods would dare to doubt or deny that some Christians, perhaps many of them, and even Pastors of our Catholic Church, made light of these truths at that time (though they are certain truths) and sinned in various ways against those who bore witness to these truths?¹⁴

When I read such statements, I cannot but admire their honesty and integrity. And I ask myself: Why are such honourably self-critical accents not heard more often from Lutheran dignitaries at great Lutheran synods? Why, so often, the unseemly rush to whitewash every shady status-quo, and to blacken every inconvenient critic? For all our vaunted "Protestantism" we can be a smug and self-congratulatory lot! Our large, comfortable ecclesiastical establishments sorely need the Apology's warning against the spirit of the later scholastics, who "like petty public officials . . . quietly approved the errors of their superiors, without understanding them."¹⁵ And Dr. Sasse reveals a large part of the secret behind the tragedy of the German territorial churches, when he says:

But such are the theologians: for every kick administered to them by any officer's boot, they at once have a theological basis. . . Always the Church receives the elimination of her freedom with gratitude and enthusiasm.

One of the editors of the collection of Vatican Council speeches I have been quoting was Father Hans

Kueng. This Biblical scholar from Switzerland, though he participated in the recent Council in the capacity of theological expert, is so controversial, that his books have been forbidden to be sold in Rome! This is not surprising in view of his book about justification. Here Kueng, whom Karl Barth in a prefatory letter calls "an Israelite without guile", reaches virtually the same conclusions as Luther precisely at those decisive points at which Rome has always condemned Luther. Kueng maintains, for example, that justification is a juridical (forensic) act, that saving grace is the favour of God, rather than anything infused, and that the works which St. Paul excluded from justification were not only those of the Ceremonial Law, but also those of the Moral Law!¹⁷

Now, it would be very wrong not to acknowledge and thank God for voices like Father Kueng's. It would be equally wrong however to allow such voices to rob us of all historical and theological perspective. Yet it is not only excited students but seasoned "Protestant" churchmen, even "Lutherans", who speak and write as if the Second Vatican Council had ushered in, if not the millenium, then at least, belatedly, the Reformation, and that the sooner we can all re-unite under the Pope, the better!

What must be seen clearly is that the biblical-evangelical strain which so impresses Lutherans, is only one element in Rome's theological revolution. The real direction of Vatican II was not towards this, but as the phrase "apertura a sinistra" implies, towards the latitudinarian type of "Theology" represented by the World Council of Churches. And this is not really a theology, but a whole museum of theologies. Now, if you want a museum, you will have to take one or two "Lutheran" displays into the bargain. But they are as harmless as museum tigers!

That this was the real direction of the Vatican Council is clear not only from the subsequent chaos, but from expressions at the Council itself. Thus a Mexican bishop described Freemasonry as "an organization whose origins, as we know from history, are completely Christian, which still remains partially Christian, and is now renewing its Christian character," and then suggested "a reappraisal of the penalties decreed by the Church".¹⁸

Rome's dogmatic confusion is particularly acute in Europe. In Holland, for example, leading Roman theologians have not only attacked Transubstantiation, but, as the new Dutch Catechism shows, have begun a "reinterpretation" of fundamentals like the Virgin Birth. The shift of emphasis from the facts of the Gospels to their "meanings" is ominous. Indeed, it has been quipped that "in Holland everything changes--except bread and wine"!

Where it will all end, no one can foresee. It behooves us to celebrate neither Rome's imagined acceptance of the Reformation, nor her present doctrinal chaos, which can only mean a frightful acceleration of Christendom's general plunge into dissolution. It behooves us rather, mindful of I Cor. 10:12, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall," to ponder the sobering words of Britain's former leading Roman Catholic theologian, Father Charles Davis, who recently left the Roman Church because "it is not concerned with truth or people."¹⁹ It would be a great and perhaps costly mistake to assume that this is true only of the Vatican-dominated power structure. Dr. Sasse has written:

If the Missouri Synod were to join the World Federation. . . nothing would change in the World Federation, but everything would change in Missouri. This great Church would cease

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to be a Confessional Church. Who would be served thereby? The great global church politicians perhaps, but no one else, neither the congregations, nor the pastors. Whether a Church might perhaps break up, many thousands of consciences be injured, hearts be broken and souls lost, about that the Oecumene does not ask.²⁰

Trent was not the only anti-ecumenical force in the sixteenth century. Zwingli's and Calvin's denial of the Real Presence of the One Lord's true body and blood in the Sacrament, was equally unbiblical and therefore unecumenical. Therefore Dr. F. Pieper used to admonish his students: "Do not get into the habit of saying 'Reformers'. There are not Reformers, but only one Reformer, that is Martin Luther."²¹

The authentic line of true, doctrinal apostolic succession in the sixteenth century runs through the Augsburg Confession. And if that Confession was biblical, evangelical, and ecumenical four-hundred years ago, then it is still biblical, evangelical, and ecumenical today. On the other hand, if opposition to that Confession was unbiblical, unevangelical, and unecumenical then, such opposition under whatever flag, must still be unbiblical, unevangelical and unecumenical today!

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The Teaching of Article VII
of the Augsburg Confession

The genuine ecumenicity of the Augsburg Confession is evident particularly in its teaching about the nature of Christian unity:

For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in

conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.²²

Here with one stroke are swept aside all the false crutches which men have used to prop up their various caricatures of Christian unity!

Probably the earliest such crutch was the idea that the bishop is the centre of unity and guarantees it.²³ So long as the bishop is orthodox, the rule works well enough. But the scheme collapses when bishops themselves become heretics and must be excommunicated. Modern Anglican insistence on the "Historic Episcopate" as one of the four cornerstones of its ecumenical programme (the so-called Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral²⁴) is in fact very unecumenical. Insistence on this human tradition (according to Scripture there is no difference between "presbyters" and "bishops", despite the King James translators' tendentious avoidance of "bishops" in Acts 20:28!) is not only theologically wrong, but also practically absurd. What does the "Historic Episcopate" mean, if members of it, like Pike and Robinson can with impunity reject the Trinity, and even the very existence of a personal God, not to speak of the rest of the Christian Faith? Why should personal bishops be necessary when a personal God is not? It is one thing to swallow camels and strain out gnats, but quite another to recommend this hypocrisy as the very model of ecumenicity!

Yet this fallacy permeates the whole institutionalized "Ecumenical Movement," which is wont to speak of "Faith and Order," as if it were self-evident that human, traditional "order" is on the

same level as the divinely revealed faith. This whole conception is essentially legalistic and therefore unecumenical.

The Western Church had noticed the inadequacy of the "Historic Episcopate" as such long before there were any Lambeth Conferences. The medieval solution of the problem was the Papacy as the visible centre of unity. Despite the warning of St. Ambrose that "they have not the patrimony of Peter who have not the faith of Peter,"²⁵ the Papacy became a law unto itself, and filled subsequent Christian history with tragedy. Today, after the Second Vatican Council has revealed Rome's internal disunity, even many intelligent Roman Catholics are beginning to suspect that the "rock" of the Papacy was in fact papier maché all along!

Nevertheless all "realistic" "Ecumenical" work today is carried on on the premise that the future union of churches will have to take the Papacy into the bargain somehow, though this necessity is of course regarded with various degrees of enthusiasm.

Not unrelated to the notion of the "Historic Episcopate" is another Anglican speciality, the belief in the efficacy of liturgical uniformity. Consider these fantastic statements by Canon Smyth of Westminster, issued together with a lecture by the Lord Bishop of Derby (The Rt. Rev. A. E. J. Rawlinson) and a foreword by the late Lord Archbishop of York (The Most Rev. Cyril Garbett), under the title The Genius of the Church of England:

The great contribution of Archbishop Laud to the Anglican tradition was the dual principle of maintaining a decent uniformity in the external worship of God according to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, as the basis and condition of a wide liberty of theological

speculation. You can afford variety in the pulpit so long as you have uniformity at the altar. So long as your clergy are united by "using the Form in the said Book prescribed, and none other," their divisions of opinion are a source of strength and not of weakness in the life of the Church. . . . the Church of Rome encourages an almost luxuriant variety of devotion, but insists on theological uniformity: the Church of England embraces many shades of theological opinion, but desiderates liturgical uniformity. 26

A more blatant formulation of formalism it is difficult to imagine. Christianity is turned topsyturvy: "human traditions or rites and ceremonies instituted by men" (Augsburg Confession VII,3 Latin text) become necessary and essential, while the real truth and doctrine of God Himself is placed on the free list!

Unfortunately Augustana VII, unequivocally seconded by Article X of the Formula of Concord, has not prevented even Lutherans from falling prey to liturgical legalism at times. To speak purely historically of "the Lutheran Liturgy," for instance, is one thing. But to suggest that this particular form of the Western Church's Liturgy, even allowing for minor variations, is the standard and normative Service for the Lutheran Church of all times and places, is quite another. Let us imagine a particular case. Suppose that Russia were liberated from the Communist yoke. Naturally, the Church of the ecumenical Augsburg Confession would want to begin work in these vast fields ripe unto harvest. Now, it would be totally un-Lutheran to impose upon the new Russian Church "the Lutheran Liturgy" of our Western rite which is entirely foreign to the Russian experience. The biblical, ecumenical, yes, Lutheran thing to do would be to do what Luther did to cleanse the old Slavonic Liturgy from all abuses

and superstitions, but to keep with suitable adaptations to the times whatever is not inconsistent with the Gospel. This purified Byzantine Liturgy, though entirely different in rites, ceremonies, vestments, church architecture, and even in the arrangement of the Church Year, would be just as "Lutheran," under Augustana VII, as Friedrich Lochner's Hauptgottesdienst! Of course all this assumes that the Gospel and the Sacraments are pure. Without the pure doctrine, liturgical schemes are mere mummery anyway.

For better or for worse, however, liturgics is not a major preoccupation of modern Lutherans. More to the point are the activist-organizational patterns of modern society:

Following the dominant patterns of American life, there was an increasing tendency to think of the Church as a kind of business corporation chartered to do the Lord's work. The subordination of questions of truth--though only of those regarded as "unessential"--to efficiency of operation carries a recognisable suggestion of pragmatism.²⁷

This activist business-approach places a premium on rules, regulations, by-laws, and resolutions, which, however necessary they are in their place, can easily degenerate into an oppressive legalism, unless strictly controlled by the evangelical ecumenicity of Augustana VII. Nothing merely human, certainly nothing merely administrative or organizational (Luke 9:49.50), nothing beyond the Gospel and Sacraments of God Himself, may be treated as constitutive or divisive of Church Fellowship!

I have dwelt at such length on the false bases of Christian unity swept aside by Augustana VII in order to distinguish these clearly from the one genuine basis which the Confession emphatically

upholds. Oddly enough this real point of Article VII is today often "interpreted" away. It is done quite simply: The Confession, it is argued, clearly says that agreement on the Gospel and the Sacraments is "sufficient"; then why bother about other, minor doctrinal points? Is it not then contrary to the Augsburg Confession to fuss about such things as inerrancy, Genesis, and evolution, as if they were divisive of church fellowship?

No doubt the proponents of this line of misunderstanding would be displeased to be told that they have in fact adopted the "Fundamentalists'" worst error, that of trying to narrow the binding content of Scripture down to a few "fundamentals", and placing "lesser" doctrines on the free list!

But the Augsburg Confession does not know of any Gospel isolated from Biblical doctrine as a whole. The contrast in Article VII, 2-3 is not between Gospel and "other doctrines," but between the full Gospel, in all its doctrinal detail and integrity, and "human rites and ceremonies, instituted by men." This is crystal clear not only from the wording of the Augustana itself, but also from the longer discussion in the corresponding Article of the Apology. One reference of the latter to the Gospel is particularly suggestive in our modern context:

How many of them/the Popes/ care anything for the Gospel or think it worth reading? Many openly ridicule all religions, or if they accept anything, accept only what agrees with human reason and regard the rest as mythology, like the tragedies of the poets.²⁸

The Formula of Concord goes into considerable doctrinal detail to spell out in relation to the controversies of the times what all is involved in the Gospel, as understood by Augustana VII. It is in

reference to this doctrinal plenitude, which today is scorned as a "theological system," that the Formula demands agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles,"²⁹ asserting that "the opinions of the erring party cannot be tolerated in the church of God, much less be excused and defended," and that "these we do not by any means intend to tolerate in our lands, churches, and schools inasmuch as such teachings are contrary to the expressed Word of God and cannot coexist with it."³⁰ And the Lutheran Church accepts the Formula of Concord not as an expansion of the doctrinal content of the Augsburg Confession, but merely as a specification and safeguard against current misinterpretations of what had been the true and necessary sense and meaning of that Confession all along.³¹

If people reject our Confessions, let them honestly say so. But let them not deceive themselves and others by frivolously twisting the Confessions' obvious intent and meaning.

Neither the Scriptures nor the Confessions know of any "Gospel" which could be separated from the concrete particulars of its dogmatic and organic foundations, to float in the vacuum of Kantian transcendence! The Trinity, Christology, the Creation, fall, and sinfulness of man, and, yes, the absolute authority and inerrancy of Scripture as the organic foundation of the whole structure, all these necessarily belong to the essence and integrity of the Gospel. A "refined" Gospel, free of the "impurities" of concrete doctrinal points is as impossible as "refined" life, apart from some particular organism. Attempts to isolate and abstract "life" on its own from the particularities of, say, a given cat, are bound to lose both the life and the cat! Neither can the Gospel of the Incarnate Saviour be had apart from all the particularities--including the Scriptures!--of His Incarnation.

"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me" (St. Matt. 11:6)!

Those who think that the Genesis matter, for instance, is only a harmless exegetical detail, and does not belong to the integrity of the Gospel confessed in Augustana VII, ought to ponder the part this issue played in the doctrinal dissolution of other Protestant churches, as told by one who regards this dissolution as a healthy "broadening":

Where the theory was consistently universalised, all absolutes--including religious and ethical absolutes--were smashed at a stroke. Of course the most radical implications of evolution were not immediately drawn, nor were they everywhere accepted, but the disquieting and unsettling effects of the new doctrine were soon felt even in the most conservative circles. Evolution's challenge to the creation narrative of Genesis was direct and immediate. The stimulus it gave to naturalistic developmental views of the Bible was soon apparent. Its implications for the traditional doctrines of the fall and sin and redemption were unmistakable. Was the Person of Christ to be excepted from naturalistic processes of development? What should be the foundations for Christian ethics? Most ultimate of all was the threat of evolution to reduce the concepts of reality and truth themselves to sheer relativity. . . . The ultimate stage of metaphysical disintegration was being reached.³² (my underlining)

It is clear that Augustana VII, true to its biblical and ecumenical nature, is not concerned with mere formalities but only with substance. The mere technicality of "confessional subscription" is quite beside the point. The Confession insists not that the pure Gospel somehow serve as a "doctrinal

basis," which can be twisted this way and that, like a waxen nose, but that it be actually taught, and that the Sacraments be actually administered biblically. Note the durative force of the verbs in VII,1 according to the Latin text: "the Gospel is being purely taught," and "the Sacraments are being administered rightly." Orthodoxy is not a matter of occasional pronouncements, much less of correct formalities, but of a solid, faithful day-to-day- continuing in Christ's Word (St. John 8: 31ff). Hence Church Fellowship depends not so much on the quantity of the Confessions accepted, as on the quality of the acceptance! If a man genuinely and unreservedly subscribes to the Augsburg Confessions, he is in fellowship with the orthodox Church. (Of course he cannot then disagree with the Formula of Concord!) On the other hand, the most solemn formula of subscription to all the Confessions including the Formula, is meaningless, if the doctrinal substance of the Confessions is not taken seriously. Men who pay lip-service to the Confessions, but violate their teaching by, say, "reinterpretation" along "Neo-Orthodox" lines, must be denied fellowship by the orthodox Church, and this precisely on the ecumenical grounds of Augustana VII!

But does all this really add up to any sort of ecumenicity worthy of the name? Seen carnally, or as Luther would say, "with cows' eyes," in the false light of the World Council of Churches' eclectic, syncretistic standards, no, definitely not. But seen spiritually, in the true Light of the One Lord, the One faith, and the One baptism, it is the only possible ecumenicity. Genuine biblical ecumenicity stands under the sign of the strait gate and the narrow way (St. Matt. 7:14). Widening the gate and broadening the way are activities of a rebellious, counterfeit "ecumenicity."

"Cows' eyes" and spiritual sight are not complementary, so as to produce between them one harmonious three-dimensional picture. They are as contradictory and incompatible as unbelief and faith. "Cows' eyes" compared Jesus Christ with His illustrious, and above all, official opposition, and concluded that He was but an eccentric Rabbi. The gleaming Temple, the ancient and impressive ritual in it, the unbroken line of priestly succession going all the way back to Aaron, the learning and piety of the conservative Scripture-scholars, all these seem more obviously true and divine than the desert-extremist's earnest young Cousin, with His handful of theological illiterates, and without any "official" trappings whatever! Modern "cows' eyes" are just as blind. They may stare fascinatedly at the moral grandeur and the human pathos forever embodied in the historical figure of the Crucified, yet they see in Him no more than an unusual Step-Son of a Galilean carpenter! And as "cows' eyes" look at Jesus Christ, so they look also at His Body, the Church. The trappings of officiality are always regarded as the marks of truth. The splendour of St. Peter's in Rome, the imposing if rarely attractive historical chain linking Paul VI with Peter and Paul, the "Historic Episcopate" with its aura of legitimacy, the inter-Confessional and international inclusiveness of the World Council of Churches, the negative consensus of the world-wide craft of "theological scholarship" (which when it comes to the positive content of the Faith, is agreed about nothing), the statistical millions, and the deferential treatment by the mass-communications media, all these are far safer bets than the plain men and the small church-bodies which "wrangle divisively" over "obscure theological points", and in general endanger Establishment apple-carts (always containing a fair share of forbidden fruit!) by applying the leverage of Scripture-truth directly without the benefit of intervening safety-springs

and shock-absorbers in the form of the self-serving rulings, interpretations, and pronouncements of vested ecclesiastical interests!

Spiritual sight, guided by the Word of God, judges entirely differently. Judging "righteous judgment," and "not according to the appearance" (St. John 7: 24), faith dismisses as irrelevant, incompetent and immaterial all arguments from numbers, power, prestige, learning, church-political consequences, etc. It is interested only in the question of truth. Though faith treasures the historical continuity of pure doctrine, it is not misled by purely external historical connections. (Fossils of fish are not fish!) Since it knows that Christ was born not in Jerusalem but in little Bethlehem, faith is not shocked to find the Reformation issuing from Wittenberg rather than from Rome. It despises neither the imperial grandeur of the Council of Nicaea, nor the pitiful misery of the Saxon colonists in Perry County, Missouri--impartially regarding both as faithful witnesses to catholic, evangelical truth. Nor does it suppose the voice of the pure Gospel to be forever or ex officio tied to Jerusalem, Rome, Nicaea, Milan, Hippo, Wittenberg, or St. Louis, but is ever ready to follow the Tabernacle through the desert, or, to use Luther's metaphor, the "downpour" of the pure Gospel, wherever it may lead. Faith has seen invidious party-labels attached to ecumenical truth, e.g. "Athanasianism," "Augustinianism," "Lutheranism"; and though it may regret that in the latter case the nickname has "stuck," despite Luther's wishes,³³ apparently through Nicolaus Hunnius' surrender of the term "catholic" to the Romanists and von Seckendorf's acceptance of the term "Lutheranism" from his Jesuit opponent Maimbourg,³⁴ faith is neither confused nor deterred by a mere name. Chesterton wrote about Shaw: "I am much too interested in what he really means to bother myself about everything that he merely

says".³⁵ Faith can do no less. It looks beneath mere form and appearance to substance and reality.

Clinging to the pure Marks of Christ's Church, the pure Gospel and the Sacraments, faith finds there the One Lord's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. That external communion which seriously confesses this pure Gospel in its public teaching and practice, is the legitimate representative on earth of the One Lord, of His One Mystical Body, the invisible Church, and of her One ecumenical Faith! Be they few or many, wise or foolish, rich or poor, known or unknown, official or unofficial, men are ecumenical when they represent Christ's one truth, and unecumenical when they do not!

This true ecumenicity the Church of the Augsburg Confession means to represent. By virtue of the pure Gospel and the Sacraments taught and administered in her, she boldly claims that her cause is not her own, "but the cause of Christ and the Church".³⁶ Her Augsburg Confession is not a sectarian speciality but "a genuinely Christian symbol which all true Christians ought to accept next to the Word of God, just as in ancient times Christian symbols and confessions were formulated in the Church of God . . .".³⁷ Her Confessions never speak of a "Lutheran Church," but only of the "reformed"³⁸ or "Evangelical"³⁹ or "Evangelical Christian"⁴⁰ churches. She is conscious of being not one sect among others, but, by virtue of the pure Marks of Christ's Church, the legitimate outward expression and representative of Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. As such she is the rightful heiress of the whole Christian patrimony, and gratefully treasures as her own even the historic practice of the catholic Church⁴¹ and the memory of men like Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, "Anthony, Bernard, Dominic, Francis, and other holy Fathers."⁴²

Because of this ecumenical status, the Church of the Augsburg Confession must distinguish in other Christian bodies--which differ from her pure, Scriptural faith--two aspects, according to which she sustains to them a twofold relation:

(1) On the one hand she knows herself to be one in faith with all Christian believers everywhere, many of whom "go their way in the simplicity of their hearts, do not understand the issues, and take no pleasure in blasphemies against the Holy Supper as it is celebrated in our churches."⁴³ It is hoped, however, that "when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools."⁴⁴ Since the Holy Spirit works faith only through the truth, it follows that all Christians, to the extent that they are Christians at all, are completely united in faith and doctrine. Errors and superstitions are not part of Spirit-wrought faith. Members of false churches are Christians not through or because of the doctrinal errors involved, but despite them. The orthodox Church is ecumenical, because she officially and publicly teaches that pure faith and doctrine to which the Spirit of God bears witness, through Word and Sacrament, in the hearts of all Christian believers everywhere. This ecumenical solidarity requires of us a breadth of outlook and charity which must constantly counteract any sectarian hardening of narrow, self-centered traditions.

(2) On the other hand, the orthodox Church, just because of her ecumenical, representative character, must refuse all Church Fellowship or fraternal recognition to those who persistently represent, advocate, or defend deviations from apostolic, biblical, ecumenical teaching, and who thereby misrepresent the One Lord, and His One Faith and Church!

One of the most incisive paragraphs on this subject I have ever read occurs in the former Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia's official critique, written by Dr. H. P. Hamann, of the Missouri Synod's "Theology of Fellowship":

Surely one must see that the true counterpart in our day to the false teachers of the New Testament age are the heterodox church-bodies themselves. There are individual false teachers, too, a-plenty, but the truly false teachers today are the heterodox bodies. For in them heterodoxy, false teaching, heresy is given a habitation and a name; it is given respectability; it is given perpetuity--and all this under the protection of the blessed name "Church"! The false teachings given a refuge in heterodox bodies are every whit as bad as the false teachings known in the New Testament. . . . And in all heterodox bodies it is just their characteristic false teaching which makes them what they are, and which is their raison d'etre. The Methodist Church, insofar as it is Methodist, is the support of heresy; its incidental witness to the Gospel is not something which would mean its continued separate existence. And the same is true of all heterodox bodies. In as far as they are what their reason for existence is, they are the modern counterparts of the New Testament false teachers and false prophets. And the New Testament condemnation of false teachers should be applied to them directly and without any softening of the rebuke.⁴⁵

Since, however, we can never deal with entire church-bodies except through representative officials, committees, or assemblies, it follows that any principles applicable to heterodox churches must either apply to their official representatives, as such, or else they cannot be applied at all!

The Biblical principle is stated in Rom. 16:17: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them." This controversial text is particularly relevant because the heterodox bodies as such are the divisions which constitute the notorious offence of divided Christendom! (The most objective and most valuable grammatical study of Rom. 16:17 in our circles seems to me to be that of the classics scholar, Prof. R. G. Hoerber, Ph.D.⁴⁶)

We have already seen that the extensive application of Rom. 16:17 (and parallels) covers at least heterodox church-bodies and their official representatives as such. So long as this important objective minimum of application is firmly maintained, it does no harm if judgments differ on occasion in the shady area of casuistry, involving all sorts of individual, personal relations, unusual circumstances, etc.

But what of the intensive application of Rom. 16:17 and parallels? What sorts of acts and relations are forbidden by the command to "avoid"? Clearly not all forms of contact, "for then must ye needs go out of the world" (I Cor. 5:10). Spiritual fellowship, communication "in sacris" is meant.

The context of Rom. 16:17, "avoid them", speaks of the kiss of peace (v. 16), which was part of fellowship. Nothing could be more artificial than the arbitrary exemption of prayer from the command to "avoid"--except perhaps the claim that prayer is not worship but witness! (And that prayer is not a means of grace is irrelevant: the kiss of peace wasn't either!) Scripture does not contain separate series of texts, dealing with altar and pulpit fellowship and with prayer fellowship respectively. The practice in both cases must be based on the same texts. But if one single series of texts

governs both areas of application, how can the same texts be held to allow the one and forbid the other?

It is rank formalism to think of church fellowship merely as a formal declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship, short of which all sorts of joint spiritual work and worship with falsifiers of the Gospel are possible. Our Australian Document of Union in its amended, final form,⁴⁷ echoing the 1963 Mankato International Theologians' Conference's incisive definition of fellowship as brotherhood, effectively repudiates the formalistic notion of fellowship:

according to the Word of God and our Lutheran Confessions, church fellowship, that is, mutual recognition as brethren, altar and pulpit fellowship and resultant co-operation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments, presupposes unanimity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the right administration of the Sacraments. . . .

We declare that wherever continued co-operation in the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments and worship exists, there we have a witness to the world of unity in the faith and a profession of church fellowship.

Church fellowship is brotherhood--and brotherhood is indivisible. However shady some areas of application may be when it comes to individual cases--the evangelical and missionary maxim "salus populi suprema lex" must rule here--the principle is crystal clear that fellowship is one unitary whole, either practised completely or denied completely. This was taken for granted in the ancient Church, as Elert has shown:

There is either complete Church fellowship or none at all. . . . the schism between Bishop

Meletius of Lykopolis and Peter of Alexandria became complete in this, that "these and those prayed separately and likewise everyone rendered the other sacred services (hierourgias) by himself."^{47a}

Fellowship is the point at which doctrine is either confessed or denied. Here it becomes evident whether men or churches really confess what they know to be divine truth, or whether they are merely toying with "views" and "interpretations", and are therefore ready to treat the opposite teachings as having equal rights. A "confession" which can practise fellowship with the representatives of the contrary doctrine, is play-confession. The great Reformer said to Dr. Major:

He who holds his doctrine, faith, and confession to be true, right, and certain, cannot stand in one stable with others, who teach false doctrine, or are given to it.⁴⁸

As part and parcel of the Church's confession of the Gospel, fellowship dare never be treated as simply another aspect of sanctified living, something in the realm of the Second Table, perhaps of the Eighth Commandment. Where this is done, the objective Gospel is subtly transformed into subjectivity, and doctrine and confession are relativised, on the plea that perfection is impossible in a sinful world. Luther warns against this confusion of doctrine and life, in his comments on Gal. 5:9: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump":

Just as in philosophy a small error at the beginning (in first principles) in the end becomes a very great and excessive error, so also it happens in theology: a small error can destroy and falsify the whole Christian doctrine. Therefore doctrine and life must be rigidly distin-

guished. Doctrine is not ours, but God's, Who has called us only as slaves and servants over against it: hence we may not and cannot surrender or remit the very least tittle or letter of it. . .

Doctrine is heaven, life is the earth: in life there are sin, error, disunity, sheer effort and labour; there love must ignore and overlook, tolerate, there the forgiveness of sins must reign and rule. . . . But with doctrine it is another matter altogether: for it is holy, pure, heavenly, divine. Whoever wants to change or falsify it, toward him neither love nor mercy are to be shown, hence doctrine needs no forgiveness of sins.

Therefore it won't do at all to identify doctrine and life: for one letter, yes one single tittle of Scripture is vastly more important than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot tolerate it, if people want to distort it in the slightest. But what concerns the weaknesses and mistakes of life, there we can well tolerate and overlook. For we too are poor men, who daily stumble and sin. . . . But our doctrine is by God's grace pure.⁴⁹

To use C. S. Lewis' example of the chess-game: one may play well or badly, win or lose, but one could not play at all except for the absolute rigidity of the squares and the moves! And so the Gospel, the doctrine of God, is the immovable framework within which all our "manifold changes of this world" take place. It is constitutive of faith and Church, objective, outside and before us--whether we sin or triumph, believe or disbelieve, obey or disobey, exult or despair, live or die. Whoever thinks he can get on without such an utterly objective and prior Gospel, does not yet know the Law!

To conclude this section, let me cite Luther's famous simile of the two brothers and the bear, which clearly illustrates the two-fold relation of the orthodox Church to the various "Babylonian Captivities" of false doctrine, under whose yoke so much of the spiritual Israel languishes today:

I say that under the pope there exists true Christendom, yea, the very select company of Christendom and many pious and great saints. . . Hear for yourself what St. Paul says, II Thess. 2:4: The Antichrist will sit in the Temple of God. If now the pope is, as I firmly believe, the true Antichrist, then he must "sit" or reign not in the devil's stable, but in the "Temple of God." No, he is not going to sit where there are only devils and unbelievers or where there is no Christ or Christendom; for he is supposed to be an antichrist, and must therefore be among Christians. And because he must sit and reign there, he must have Christians under him. For "the Temple of God" means not a pile of stones, but holy Christendom, I Cor. 3:17, in which he is to reign. . . Therefore we do not rave like the fanatics, who condemn everything which the pope has under him; for thus we would condemn also Christendom, the Temple of God, with everything she has from Christ. . . . they attack the Temple of God and miss the Antichrist who sits in it; like blind people who reach for water and get into fire. Yes they do as one brother did to the other in the Thuringian forest: they are walking through the forest together, when a bear attacks them, and grabs one of them and holds him under. The other one wants to help his brother, stabs at the bear, but misses him, and tragically stabs the brother under the bear. **The fanatics do the same thing:** they should help poor Christendom which the Antichrist has under himself and which he tortures, and so they set

themselves ferociously against the pope, but miss him, and far more tragically murder Christendom under the pope. For if they would leave Baptism and the Sacrament intact, the Christians under the pope could still escape with their souls and be saved, as happened hitherto; but now if the sacraments are taken from them, they must be lost, for Christ himself is taken away thereby. My dear, that's not the way to come bursting upon the pope, because Christ's saints lie under him. It takes a cautious, modest spirit, which would let remain under him that which is the Temple of God, and resist the addition, with which he destroys the Temple of God.⁵⁰

The "Lutheran" World Federation

If the Church of the Augsburg Confession is as ecumenical as she claims to be, is not the global forum provided by the Lutheran World Federation just the instrument she needs to bear effective witness to genuine Biblical ecumenicity?

Reinhold Niebuhr observed about Woodrow Wilson that "as a typical son of the manse, he believed too much in words." In assessing the nature of the L.W.F., it is important not to be misled by mere words, but to pay attention to substance. At least two questions must be asked and answered: (1) What kind of churches make up the L.W.F. membership? (2) Does the L.W.F. act as a church?

In the first place, since the stream cannot rise higher than its source, we must consider the nature of the L.W.F.'s constituent bodies. A decisive feature of the L.W.F. is the fact that most of its 50 odd million members are supplied by various state and territorial churches of Europe. What is the character of these churches? The Church of

Sweden is in full inter-communion with the Church of England and with the (Presbyterian) Church of Scotland, both of which in their official confessions--if indeed one may still call the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles that--reject the Real Presence in the Biblical, Lutheran sense. The Church of Norway, the Church of Denmark, and the Church of Finland also practise inter-communion with the Churches of England and of Scotland. The Churches of Sweden and of Finland also participate in Anglican episcopal consecrations, and vice versa.

Even more curious is the situation of the various German churches in the L.W.F. The relevant portion of our story begins in 1817,⁵¹ with the Prussian King's attempt to unite the Lutheran Church of Prussia (to which ninety per cent of his subjects belonged) with his own Calvinistic Church. This resulted in the so-called United Church of Prussia, in which Lutheran and Calvinistic Confessions, the Real Presence and the Real Absence, had equal rights. The modern, expanded successor of this Union Church is the Evangelical Church of the Union, one member of which, the Church of Pomerania, is actually a full member of the L.W.F.!

The Prussian King, Frederick William III, was sincerely convinced that the "minor" differences between the two churches could be and had to be overcome, also in order to make common cause against the outright Rationalistic unbelief which was still powerful. When conscientious Lutherans refused to surrender their Biblical, Reformation faith, the King regarded this simply as insubordination, and his government took increasingly harsh measures in a vain attempt to force compliance. Some incredible scenes took place.⁵² In the hamlet Hoenigern, 500 soldiers drove the weeping Lutheran women from the church-doors with sabres and bayonets, on Christmas Eve, then forced the church open and escorted the

"United" pastor into it to read his "United" service to the empty pews. Lutheran pastoral acts, such as baptisms, marriages, confirmations, etc., were declared invalid and illegal. People were fined for participating in Lutheran services, for refusing "United" baptism, even for refusing to betray their Lutheran pastors. Midwives were commanded to notify the government of the birth of any Lutheran children. Baptized Lutheran infants were seized by the police and forcibly re-baptized by the "United" pastor. Clergy and laymen, even of the nobility, were imprisoned for the "offence" of holding Lutheran services. No wonder that many hundreds emigrated to America and to Australia, forsaking all things rather than surrender the Faith.

So now there were three Protestant Churches in Germany: Lutheran, Calvinist ("Reformed"), and United.

The next significant step came under Adolf Hitler, who, in the manner of dictators, wanted to unify and centralize everything, including the church, in order to facilitate government control. Accordingly, the German Evangelical Church Federation of 1922 was transformed in 1933 into the German Evangelical Church, with "Reichsbischof" (imperial bishop) Mueller at the head. This combined all Lutheran, Calvinist, and United churches of Germany into one administrative structure. However, the attempts to exploit the church for nationalistic purposes provoked serious opposition from all sections. This opposition became crystallized in the famous "Confessional Synod" of Barmen in 1934. The Barmen Declaration, composed by Karl Barth, and addressed by the Synod to the "congregations associated in the one German Evangelical Church," called upon the latter,

irrespective of their Lutheran, Reformed, or United background and responsibility to recognize anew the majesty of the one Lord of the one

church and, on this account, the essential unity of their faith, their love, and their hope, of their confession and their task, and of their message through sermon and sacrament.⁵³ (my underlining)

After the collapse of the thousand-year reign in 1945, the Lutheran churches of Germany had their last opportunity to assert their Confessional integrity. They missed it. Instead they joined with all the Calvinistic and United churches of Germany to organize the Evangelical Church in Germany. This happened at Treysa and Eisenach in 1945-1947-1948. This church, though constitutionally a federation, calls itself a church, and, theologically, undoubtedly acts as one. The initial draft constitution

distinctly emphasized that while the EKD /Evangelical Church in Germany. K.M./ lives in an inner unity which makes it more than a mere agency or federation which exists simply to get some common tasks done, this unity is not--or not yet--legally conceivable.⁵⁴

All the Lutheran member churches agreed to these formulations at Treysa on June 6, 1947:

We trust that in this federation, by virtue of the common hearing and heeding of the Word, the church in the sense of the New Testament is realized.

There is agreement on this point that Evangelical church members are not to be excluded from participation in the Lord's Supper for this reason that they belong to another confession recognized in the EKD.⁵⁵

And the basic constitution of the Evangelical Church of Germany (July 13, 1948), provides:

Regularly called ministers of the Word are not denied the privilege of preaching the Word also in congregations of another confession. . .⁵⁶

Although some Lutheran member churches have in the past objected to formally declared complete altar-fellowship--informally practised anyway--within the Evangelical Church, this opposition is now subsiding, as a result of the "consensus" achieved in the Arnoldshain Theses of 1957.⁵⁷ While these Theses generally straddle the controverted issues, Thesis 5 (c) and (d) can only be construed as denials of the Real Presence in the Biblical, Confessional Lutheran sense.

Dr. H. Sasse, whose testimony gains weight from the fact that he confessed not only in word but also in deed--choosing "exile" rather than comfortable treason within the EKD--has written:

The German Evangelical Church Federation of 1922 proved to be, as a wise leader of the Union foresaw, "the sleeping-car in which the Lutherans are being carried into the Union." . . . In Eisenach, at the foot of the Wartburg, the Lutheran Church of Germany was buried in 1948. Loehe's dream-vision of the burial of the Lutheran Church through its own pastors had become reality. From the sleeping-car of the Church Federation one could still exit. . . From the grave of the EKD no one shall rise again. This mishmash of Federation and church, a federation which calls itself church and acts as church, a church that wants to be federation--"federal church" they said in 1933--no longer knows any right of secession.⁵⁸

They all /the bishops/ know, without exception, that the EKD is compatible neither with the

doctrine of Luther, nor with the Invariata /the Unaltered Augsburg Confession/, nor with the Formula of Concord. They all know that the EKD is more than a federation. . . And what they don't know, their theologians know. Sommerlath, Schlink, and Merz, to name only these, know that one must choose between the constitution of the EKD and the Formula of Concord.⁵⁹

Widening our perspective to include all of "Lutheran" Europe, let us hear Dr. Sasse's sobering summary--bearing in mind that he is speaking of the churches which comprise the great bulk of the L.W.F. and therefore determine its character:

The Lutheran territorial churches of Germany have been dissolved into the "Evangelical Church in Germany," whose Council has just decided that in every member church all members of the EKID, without regard to their Confession, must be admitted to the Lord's Supper. The Churches of Sweden and Finland are in intercommunion with the Church of England. An Anglican bishop participates in every episcopal consecration. Bishop Stephen Neill, who "equalises" (gleichschaltet) German students and missionaries at the supposedly Lutheran Faculty of Hamburg, keeps book about how many German bishops already possess apostolic succession. On top of this, Sweden has now solemnly introduced intercommunion with the Church of Scotland, which is practised also by Denmark and Norway. How all this works out in the formerly Lutheran mission fields, above all in Africa and India, is well known. The Church of the Palatinate has solemnly accepted intercommunion with the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the related American sects, but demands that all German Lutherans moving into the Palatinate communicate at the Reformed Communion Table of the Church of

the Palatinate. In Holland altar-fellowship between the Lutheran and the Reformed territorial church has been solemnly confirmed. France will follow. And no one takes offence at this. The German professors go from Tuebingen to Zurich, from Zurich to Goettingen, from Bonn to Erlangen, from Erlangen to Mainz. For "the Confessional age is over," as they assure us. That their students must some day swear an Ordination vow, does not interest them.⁶⁰

Clearly, the "Lutheran" character of these churches, and of their World Federation, is a legal fiction: "To assure the security of the organized church, the legal validity of the confession must not be touched; it is respected as a public document, but in theology and in piety every one goes his own way."⁶¹

In matters of faith, legal fictions are sacrilege. Churches which still have real Confessions, and are still able to distinguish between the Real Presence and the Real Absence in the Sacrament, cannot prostitute their Confessions by going along with the masquerade. They cannot but stand with Luther and the Formula of Concord:

I reckon them all as belonging together (that is, as Sacramentarians and enthusiasts), for that is what they are who will not believe that the Lord's bread in the Supper is his true, natural body, which the godless of Judas receive orally as well as St. Peter and all the saints. WHO-EVER, I SAY, WILL NOT BELIEVE THIS, WILL PLEASE LET ME ALONE AND EXPECT NO FELLOWSHIP FROM ME. THIS IS FINAL.⁶² (my caps)

Of course many more fundamental things than the Real Presence are at stake. As Dr. Sasse observes, "the majority of Protestant churches have long ago broken

with the faith of the Reformation and the faith of the whole Church."⁶³ Let three testimonies suffice to indicate the results of two centuries of secularization:

Dr. Hans Asmussen, President of the Chancery of the Evangelical Church in Germany from 1946 to 1948, wrote in the Lutheran World, an official publication of the L.W.F.:

But this is in fact the picture of wide sectors of our Lutheran church today: clergymen read aloud the Christmas story, which they consider a fairytale. They read aloud the Easter story, to which they find access only after several reinterpretations. At the grave they witness to the resurrection of the dead, which they consider a myth.⁶⁴

The Bruedernrundbrief, a Confessional voice within the territorial church of Brunswig denied that the territorial churches are even churches any longer:

A binding doctrine no longer exists in them. He who maintains of the Evangelical Lutheran Confession that it is binding for all members of the territorial church, is regarded as a foreign body, yes, he harvests scorn and hatred. The Confession merely stands peacefully on paper, in constitutions, and even there "screened" by ambiguous formulations. Practically everyone teaches and believes whatever occurs to him. . . . There is no longer any article of faith which might not be denied at will and with impunity. And because this is so, because all allegiance to the Confessions, in constitutions, Ordination vows and other obligations of office, is no longer taken seriously, but is regarded only as empty form, our territorial churches as church-bodies are no longer churches.⁶⁵

And, reporting from Sweden, Pastor Tom G. A. Hardt, contests "the notion that a European national church like the Church of Sweden is in any way a Christian body. There are many Christians within her, both of orthodox and heretical convictions, but the body as such is a social entity, part and parcel of the society."⁶⁶ What is the nature of the aberrations? "I regard it as unnecessary to make a list of heresies within the Swedish episcopacy and clergy. I know of no heresy that is not found there."⁶⁷

Recently, however, a strong reaction to the reign of Bultmannian Liberalism has arisen within some German territorial churches. Movements like "No Other Gospel" have attracted considerable attention. One church-politician who had dismissed the movement as involving but "a fraction of our church population," received the just reply: "Yes, but it happens to be that fraction which still goes to church!"

This is the tragic result of the last centuries' theological dissolution: the churches are empty. When I was in Helsinki in 1963, I was taken by a Finnish friend to see one of the two main down-town churches, in a parish of 20,000. The church seats 3000 people. We asked: "How many attend church here on Sundays?" Our Finnish friend was not supposed to mention this to foreigners, but the answer was: 65! And in the summer even they didn't come and the church had to be closed!

This is typical of the territorial churches. Individual preachers may attract larger audiences, but by and large, attendances are pitiful. National averages of 3 per cent have been mentioned. Bavaria is considered exceptionally good, because 10 per cent go to church.

All this needs to be kept in mind when considering the L.W.F.'s claim to represent some 50 million

Lutherans. These millions exist only on paper. Only a small fraction have any meaningful connection with the organized church. Their leaders are generals without armies. They have plenty of money, because the German state, for instance, hands over to them 10 per cent of all the income taxes collected!

To sum up: Under close scrutiny the "Lutheran millions" of the L.W.F. evaporate into theological and statistical fictions. It transpires that they are neither Lutheran nor millions!

At this point of the argument, when it has to be admitted that the religious situation within the L.W.F. is fairly grim, it is usually said: But the L.W.F. is not a church anyway but only a federation, so that joining it does not imply any spiritual recognition or responsibility. It is a wonderful opportunity to help these dilapidated Lutherans by witnessing to them!

Now, what would you say if I told you: "The U.S.A. are not a nation, because they are a federation of states"? Or: "Australia isn't a nation, because it is a federation"? You would soon conclude that there is something badly amiss in my logic. Why cannot something be both a nation and a federation? The same is true of the Church. The terms "church" and "federation" simply move on two different sets of tracks, and there is no contradiction between them whatever. The one speaks about the inner nature of the thing, the other of its outward organization. It is quite literally nonsense, therefore, to say that something is not a church BECAUSE it is a federation! (The Missouri Synod is supposed to be a federation of autonomous congregations. Is it therefore not a church?)

Certain misinformed or dishonest people have been

spreading the fairy-tale that the last Assembly of the L.W.F. at Helsinki in 1963 has made it quite clear, even through constitutional changes, that the L.W.F. is not a church. The very opposite is the case. It was just at Helsinki that it was made very plain that the L.W.F. is in fact a church!

In the December, 1960, issue of the Lutheran World, Prof. Peter Brunner had published an essay, "The Lutheran World Federation as an Ecclesiological Problem," in which, on the basis of the L.W.F. Commission on Theology's own "thorough study," he argued that L.W.F. was in fact constantly having to act as church, for instance in making decisions involving doctrine (any membership case!). Teaching is "the one absolutely central commission of the Church of Christ. When it teaches, it is undoubtedly acting as a church." And Dr. Brunner concluded that all member churches of the L.W.F. ought to be in full church fellowship.

On the basis of this essay and the resultant discussion, the Commission on Theology presented to the Helsinki Assembly an official report on "The Nature of the Lutheran World Federation." The idea was that this, or some modification of it, should be adopted as an "authoritative commentary" on the Constitution. This Report regards it as self-evident that the L.W.F. has "churchly tasks," and speaks of "the unquestionable fact that the L.W.F. must also be active in the area of doctrine and church policy."⁶⁸ It furthermore speaks of a "tension" between "the federative character of the instrument" and "the churchly character of its purpose and aims" (italics in original). The Report notes that by the very fact of membership all member churches accept the L.W.F.'s "doctrinal basis," and concludes:

Therefore, these churches are spiritually obli-

gated, above and beyond their having come together in the L.W.F., to enter into mutual church fellowship and to declare the consummation of church fellowship through their official organs.

Two prominent experts on church law who were present, Prof. Liermann and Prof. Grundmann, however, advised that constitutional amendment was the only way of clarifying the constitution, but that an "authoritative commentary" on the constitution was a legal impossibility. The Assembly followed this advice. It may be added that the amendments proposed to the Assembly had been discussed previously with representatives of the large delegation of observers from the Missouri Synod, who had apparently fallen into the trap and approved them.

When the new version of the L.W.F.'s constitution, as amended at Helsinki, provides that the L.W.F. "shall not exercise churchly functions on its own authority" (III,1), this does not mean that it shall not exercise churchly functions, but that it shall do so merely as the agent of one or more member churches. But it is everywhere taken for granted--and certainly was at Helsinki--that the L.W.F. must exercise churchly functions.

The Department of Theology, for example, reported officially that "one of the basic principles of the theological work of the L.W.F. is that it is carried out in the fellowship of the Church."⁶⁹

If the churchly nature of the L.W.F. has not always been made clear in the past, the reason is purely church-political. Prof. E. Clifford Nelson, one of the main essayists at Helsinki, said in his lecture, "The One Church and the Lutheran Churches," which was received with tumultuous applause:

No doubt the leaders of the Lutheran World Con-

vention and the Lutheran World Federation felt they were acting wisely in making disclaimers of intentions to being or becoming "a church" in a constitutional sense. But, that organized world Lutheranism was an expression of the ekklesia had already been recognized (Jørgensen: "It is a Church".) Nevertheless, a prudential concern dictated then that haste be made slowly, in order to dissipate anxieties and to avoid shattering by precipitous action what had already been achieved.⁷⁰

Prof. Hans Liermann, in his post-Helsinki article, "The Legal Nature and Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation," which seems to me to be the most thorough, indeed the definitive treatment to date, concludes that "the Lutheran World Federation is a church in every sense of the word. It possesses a confession and fulfills churchly tasks. It is entrusted with direct proclamation of the word."⁷¹

At this point I could conclude with a hearty Q.E.D. However, Prof. Liermann adds some observations which are so important, that we should not overlook them here. He says that the L.W.F. "represents a type of church answering to the demands of the modern world, and with a quite new character, but rich in promise for the future." This is so because the tendency today is away from a centralized "empire"-type of church structure, toward a federated "commonwealth"-type. And the L.W.F. fits nicely into this picture. Indeed, Prof. Liermann notes that even Rome, the classic example of an ecclesiastical empire, had discerned the signs of the times, and has begun a "cautious loosening and decentralising" showing that "possibilities of transition to the new form of world church are being prepared."

Whether the Vatican can absorb the World Council of Churches and transform itself in the process from

"the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon the grave thereof" (Hobbes) to a more modern ghost of a commonwealth of churches with the Pope as its figurehead, remains to be seen. But all signs seem to point in that direction. While naive and not so naive Lutherans look about them and cry incredulously, "Where, where is this dreadful Super-Church?" they are at that very moment building it, and being built into it, through all those innocent-looking federations now so popular! Whether it is L.W.F. or L.C.U.S.A., N.C.C., or W.C.C., the illicit and un-ecumenical premise is everywhere the same: that Christian unity can come by way of "ORGANISATIONAL RECOGNITION OF FRACTIONAL OBEDIENCE TO THE ONE LORD" (Franzmann)!⁷²

And when the Behemoth Church shall at last stand before us complete, as a theologically ever looser but organizationally ever more centralized federal structure in which everyone may believe and teach as he pleases--except for the heresy of "separatism"--will that be the one, united Church of Christ? No, it will be the great Counter-Church, or Babylon, of Rev. 17!

Lutherans should be the last to be deceived by this fraud. For it was Luther who saw the issue so clearly:

The holy Church of Christ speaks thus: I BELIEVE one holy Christian Church; the mad church of the Pope speaks thus: I SEE one holy Christian Church.⁷³

In these last days of sore distress, when the Word of God is crowded out of the Holy Place more and more by secular abmoninations of desolation, the Church of the Augsburg Confession has a unique opportunity to teach men to walk by faith and not by sight, to seek Christ's Church by her pure Marks,

and not to be misled by masks. When men find the Shepherd--by His pure Voice (St. John 10)--they have also found the Sheepfold. But if they look merely for sheep, they may follow a wolf unawares into the valley of the shadow of death. To proclaim Christ's Life-giving Voice, to be a humble but incorruptible stewardess of His mysteries, this is the massively ecumenical task of the Church of the Augsburg Confession. In fulfilling it faithfully she is in fact the true Ecumenical Movement of our time. This is her grace and her glory--but also her judgment!

Footnotes

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3. G. K. Chesterton, Heretics (London: Bodley Head, 1960), pp. 295-296.
4. Ibid., p. 298.
5. Theological Commission, L.W.F., Ueber die Rechtfertigung (Helsinki Assembly, 1963, Document No. 3), pp. 6 ff. & 22. Department of Theology, L.W.F., Report, 1957-1963 (Helsinki Assembly, 1963, Document No. 7), pp. 15 ff.
6. Quoted in Richard Stauffer, Luther as Seen By Catholics (London: Lutterworth, 1967), p. 77.
7. F. Bente, Historical Introductions to The Book of Concord (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965), p. 19. But see slightly different version in Christian Friedrich Junius, Compendium Seckendorffianum oder Kurzgefasste Reformations-Geschichte aus

des Herrn Veit Ludwigs von Seckendorf Historia Lutheranismi (Frankfort and Leipzig, 1755), vol. II, p. 305.

8. Ibid.
9. Paul Sarpi, Geschichte des Konziliums von Trident (Mergentheim, 1839), vol. I, pp. V ff.
10. Martin Chemnitz, Examen Concilii Tridentini (Berlin: Schlawitz, 1861), p. 3.
11. Sarpi, op. cit., vol. II, p. 103.
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16. Herman Sasse, In Statu Confessionis (Berlin and Hamburg: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1966), pp. 313-314.
17. See copious quotations in Cornelius Freiherr v. Heyl, "Rom und die Rechtfertigung propter Christum," Lutherischer Rundblick, VI, No. 3 (1958), 102-116.
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21. F. Pieper, Die Lutherische Lehre von der Rechtfertigung in Vortraegen Dargelegt (St. Louis: Seminary Press, 1916), p. 58.
22. Augsburg Confession, VII, 2.3, Tappert, op. cit., p. 32.

23. See the trend of the patristic quotes cited by Dr. Walther in an orthodox sense, as testimonies to the doctrine that the pastoral office is a divine institution, in C. F. W. Walther, Kirche und Amt (Erlangen, 1875), pp. 210-211.
24. Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds., A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948 (London: S.P.C.K., 1967), p. 265.
25. Quoted in C.F.W. Walther, op. cit., p. 62.
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27. Lefferts A. Loetscher, The Broadening Church (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), p. 59.
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29. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, X, 31, Tappert, op. cit., p. 616.
30. Ibid., Rule and Norm, 9, p. 503, and Preface to the Book of Concord, ibid., p. 11.
31. Preface to the Book of Concord, ibid., pp. 3-14.
32. Loetscher, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
33. Martin Luther, Saemmtliche Schriften, St. Louis ed., X, col. 370.
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37. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Rule and Norm, 4, Tappert, op. cit., p. 502.
38. Ibid., p. 504.

39. Ibid., p. 502.
40. Ibid., pp. 501-502.
41. Especially Arts. XXIV of the Augsburg Confession and of its Apology.
42. Apology, IV, 211, Tappert, op. cit., p. 136.
43. Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert, op. cit., 11-12.
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47. Official Report, First General Synod, Lutheran Church of Australia, (Oct. 29-Nov. 2, 1966), p. 229. Theses of Agreement (Adelaide, 1966), V, Church Fellowship and Co-operation, 26, 28, p. 12.
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 54. Ibid., p. 101.
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 56. Ibid., p. 118.
 57. Ibid., pp. 122-124.
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 59. Ibid., p. 306.
 60. H. Sasse, "Gedanken am Vorabend des Reformationsjubilaeums von 1967" (Letter No. 60), Lutherische Blaetter, XIX, No. 89 (December 1966), p. 84.
 61. Vajta, op. cit., p. 82.
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 64. Hans Asmussen, "The Dogma of the Holy Scriptures," Lutheran World, XIII, No. 2 (1966), p. 186.
 65. Quoted in Lutherischer Rundblick, XV, No. 1 (1967), pp. 59-60.
 66. Tom G. A. Hardt, "The Church of Sweden," Lutheran News, Nov. 16, 1964, p. 5.
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EDITORIAL NOTE:

The Winter and Spring issues of this periodical contain the four Luther lectures which were delivered at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato, Minnesota, on October 30 and 31, 1967. This presentation was a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's observance of the 450th anniversary of the Reformation. The lecturer was Pastor Kurt Marquart of Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. These lectures were designed for and delivered to pastors and lay people.

Pastor Marquart speaks of himself as "a European-born American living in Australia." He was born in Estonia in 1934 and lived in Austria during World War II. On several occasions his family found it necessary to take flight, to escape

Communism. He came to the United States in 1949.

The essayist spent two years at Concordia Collegiate Institute in Bronxville, New York, and received his theological training at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He was graduated from that institution in 1959. His B.D. thesis compared the "Prolegomena" (fundamental theological principles and assumptions) of F. Pieper with those of G. Aulen.

The first two lectures, entitled THE WORD AS TRUTH, are presented in this number of the Quarterly. In them Pastor Marquart examines the matter of Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Hermeneutics. The next issue of this journal will contain the two presentations on THE WORD AS LIFE, in which the essayist considers the Word as the Source and Center of practical Church life. (Extra copies of the full set of lectures may be had for \$2.00)