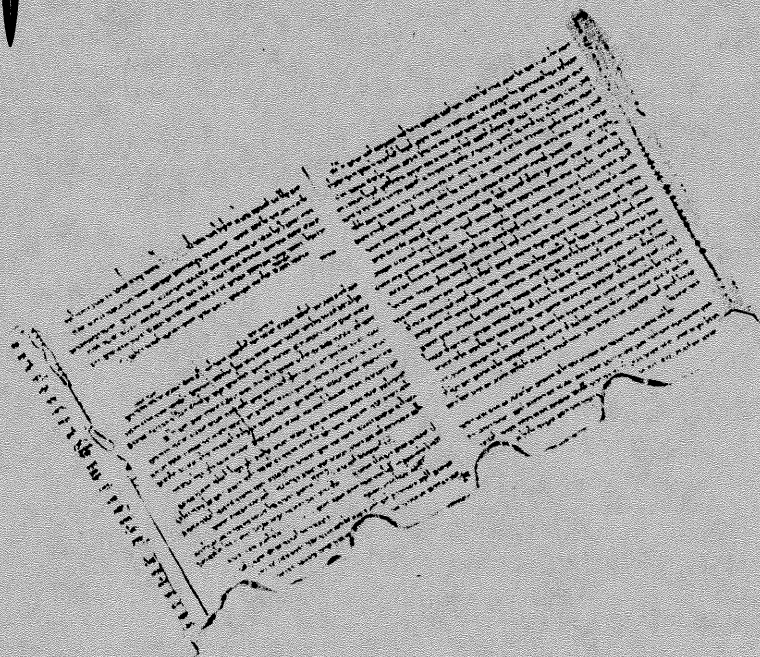


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FOREWORD

This issue of the Quarterly includes a reprint of a synodical essay delivered by the Rev. Arnold Kuster of Madison, Wisconsin, to the 1964 convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, entitled Luther and the Word of God. This essay is especially timely in our day when most of Lutheranism has given up the doctrine of Scriptural inerrancy. The author clearly shows that Luther equated Holy Scriptures with the Word of God and that when faced with difficulties and seeming contradictions in the Bible his attitude was that if we cannot find a solution "it is certain that Scripture does not lie."

We are also pleased to share a sermon delivered by Rev. Harry Bartels to the 1987 seminary graduates on Synod Sunday, June 14. Using II Corinthians 4:7 as his text, he developed his message around the theme "Preparing Earthen Vessels for Dispensing Heavenly Treasure." Rev. Bartels is pastor of Beautiful Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana. His son Mark was one of the graduates. Also included are remarks to the graduates by the seminary president in which he calls attention to what Dr. C. F. W. Walther says about the importance of allowing the Gospel to predominate in our preaching.

Our readers will appreciate the review of the U. S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Justification by Faith, by Professor Juul Madson. He points out that the situation today is similar to the time of the Reformation when representatives of both camps (including Eck and Melanchthon) met at Regensburg in 1541 and claimed to have reached agreement on justification, a claim which Luther rejected. The essayist concludes by saying that until the anathematization of Luther's doctrine of justification by the Council of Trent has been removed there is no hope of reconciliation with Rome. Professor Madson teaches New Testament at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

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LUTHER AND THE WORD OF GOD

by

Rev. A. V. Kuster

"Luther." The name fills us with awe! Luther, giant among Christians of the ages, an exemplary man of indomitable faith, of prayer and energy! Intellectually, he is a man of few peers. And few can be claimed to have thrown more light also upon things cultural, political, and educational, to this day.

"And the Word of God," continues the assigned title. "The Word of God." That is what made Luther. Leaping into our minds come the words of his Small Catechism: "Without the Word of God there is no Baptism." In keeping with Luther's thought we might easily extend this. Without the Word of God there would be no Gospel, no Christianity, no Sacraments, nothing -- and certainly no Luther to take note of.

Of course, Dr. Martin Luther was human, and he made mistakes. We need not agree with every judgment that Luther ever made. We know of no one who does. Luther did not expect that, either. Besides, the data of the linguistic, historical and scientific research of the 418 years since Luther's death were, of course, not available to him, and on this ground some of his observations sound strange to us nowadays. But the mainstream of Luther's thought is biblical, and, like the Bible itself, brings light and joy to the hearts of the children of God.

Luther always pointed to the Word of God, and because he did so, we have the Luther whom the

world knows and whom we love. As no other man after the apostles of the Lord, this miner's son dug deeply and extensively into God's Word and excavated, exhibited and offered to the world the treasure or priceless worth, the whole truth of God, the assurance that we are Christ's disciples indeed, and that His truth under God sets us free. No wonder that we also join in the prayerful exultation of generations:

*God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure
Shall to eternity endure.*

What Has Happened to Luther Since Luther?

Luther wrote very much. Besides, some of his sayings were taken down in notes, and these have been added to his collected writings. Many, many editions and collections of Luther's works have been printed. The most extensive edition is the Weimar Ausgabe, now extended to about 60 volumes, which seeks to include everything that has been discovered to have been written or uttered by Luther, in the original languages which Luther used, either German or Latin. Mention might be made also of the St. Louis Edition, a collection of Luther's works, in modern German, in 23 large volumes, produced 1890 to 1910; Luther's Works, American Edition, currently being produced in English in 55 volumes; and What Luther Says, (Concordia) an anthology of excerpts from Luther, in English, in 3 volumes. This latter is to be recommended especially to the laity.

In spite of the availability of Luther in his own words, and perhaps because the vastness of his literary production has made it seem forbidding, comparatively few people read in Luther to any extent.¹ At the same time, there are many who quote Luther and many who misquote him. It has been said that more books have been written

about Luther than about anyone else except the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As might be expected, many have misrepresented Luther and there have been too few to say them nay. Luther's extensive works have been a happy hunting ground for folks of all sorts to find support for their views. Some have thought to show Luther for a fool. Others, of varying and contradictory types, have searched to find passages in Luther to support their claim to Luther's support. They like to have Luther on their side, or claim him as a fore-runner of their favorite fad, no matter how wild their theories may be. Pietists, rationalists, philosophers of many stripes, evolutionists, and "higher critics" of the Bible have rummaged through Luther to come up with some sentence, some excerpt, or some interpretation which they cherish as aid and comfort to their cause. There are even those who disseminate grandiose misrepresentations of Luther without having bothered to check the sources themselves.²

It is, therefore, timely that we check-up on these matters, especially at this time when there seems to be a revival of interest in Luther, and especially with regard to his views on the Word of God.

I. For Luther the Word of God, in Its Fundamental Sense, Was the Holy Scriptures, the Canonical Books of the Old and the New Testaments

In commenting on Ps. 22:7, Luther said: "The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, written and (as I might say) spelled out and set forth in letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God veiled in the human nature."³ In his Preface to the Sermons on Genesis, Luther said: "You are so to deal with the Scriptures that you bear in mind that God Himself is saying this."⁴ In the Preface

of the Old Testament he warned: "I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and the stories that will often meet him here. He should not doubt that however simple they may seem, these are the very words, judgments, and deeds of the high majesty, power, and wisdom of God. For this is Scripture, and it makes fools of all the wise and prudent and is an open book to the small and foolish, as Christ says Matthew 11:25. Therefore dismiss your own thoughts and feelings and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be exhausted, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such foolish and simple guide, in order that He may quench all pride."⁵ What the Christian's attitude should be toward the Scriptures as the Word of God, Luther described in strong language in his Exposition of the First Epistle of St. Peter, as follows: "They (the sophists) say the Scriptures are far too weak that we should silence heretics with them; reason must do it, and it must come forth from the brain; thus one must prove that the faith is the right one. But our faith is above all reason, and it alone is the power of God. Therefore, if the people will not believe, then be silent; for you are not held to compel them to receive Scripture as God's book or Word; it is enough if you give the reason therefor. But if they take exceptions and say: You preach that one should not hold to man's doctrine, and yet St. Peter and Paul, and even Christ, were men -- when you hear people of this stamp, who are so blinded and hardened as to deny that what Christ and the Apostles spoke and wrote is God's Word, or doubt it, then be silent, speak no more with them, and let them go. Only say: I will give you reason enough from Scripture; if you will believe it, it is well; if not, go your way. Will you say: Then God's Word must

suffer defeat? Leave that to God!"⁶

Luther brought Scripture as the Word of God into every little corner of Christian life. In The Large Catechism he wrote: "But if you say: What, then, shall I do if I cannot feel such distress or experience hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?" (the Lord's Supper). He then pointed to Gal. 5:19ff, and continued: "Therefore, if you cannot feel it, at least believe the Scriptures; they will not lie to you, and they know your flesh better than you yourself."⁷ In other words, no matter what your emotional condition might be, take God's Word for it, God's Word in Scripture.

Luther urged preaching the Word of God and hearing the Word of God, as well as the actual reading and studying of Holy Scripture. But this did not mean that there were two or more "words of God." What is to be preached is Scripture; its words are the Word of God which is to be applied to the hearts of men. In the Scholia on Isaiah, Luther said: "God speaks to us through Scripture and through the man who teaches Scripture. He who hears these is not deceived."⁸ For Luther, to preach, properly speaking, is to repeat Scripture. Through the oral word of men people are brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior, yet this does not occur insofar as they speak their own words, but insofar as they speak (Luther uses the word "repeat") the Word of God as found in the Prophets and Apostles, the Holy Scriptures. Listen to Luther's remarks on the words of David. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me," in 2 Sam. 23:2: "Such a boast neither we nor anyone who is not a prophet may utter. What we may do if we are also sanctified and have the Holy Ghost, is this, that we boast of being catechumens and pupils of the Prophets and Apostles, and are also sure that the Prophets have taught it. In the Old Testament

such men are called 'the children of the prophets' who offer nothing of their own and nothing new, as the Prophets do, but teach what they have learned from the Prophets, and they are the 'Israel,' as David calls them, for whom he writes the Psalms."⁹

For Luther, therefore, the preached Word of God or the oral Word is the Word of God because it repeats and applies the words and the contents of Scripture. Thus Luther very often linked together, or used interchangeably, the term "Scripture," "Word," "Gospel," and "promises." The source, ground, foundation, "Fundament," is the Holy Scriptures.

Many of the so-called Luther Scholars let themselves get confused here, and go off in all directions with these various terms, starting out with the assertion that Luther did not "simply equate" the Word of God and the Scriptures.¹⁰ We shall have more details on the modern theologians later, but shall content ourselves here with a repetition of Luther's oft-repeated dictum: "The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God." He "simply equates" them.

The heading of this chapter makes mention of the "canonical Books" for the sake of completeness. Luther applied his view of Scripture as the Word of God only to the canonical, that is, genuine, authentic and original books of the Old and New Testaments, but he applied his principle fully to them. This matter need not disturb us, and it also will be taken up in more detail later.

II. Luther's Teaching Concerning Holy Scripture

- A. *Holy Scripture is the Only Source and Norm of Christian Teaching or Doctrine.*

Neither the power of reason, the Pope, the Church, nor anything else but the Scriptural Word of God is the source of Christian teaching, according to Luther.

In his Lecture on Psalm 45, speaking of what the Scriptures say about the Trinity, he asked: "If I could grasp this with my reason or senses, what need would there be for faith? Of what use is Scripture revealed by God through the Holy Spirit?In theology only one thing is necessary; That we hear and believe and conclude in our heart: God is truthful, however absurd what He says in His Word may seem to our reason."¹¹ Again, he said: "We, however, who want to be called Christians should not ask what human wisdom says and how it agrees with reason, but what the Scripture teaches."¹²

In The Smalcald Articles, which became a Symbolical or Confessional Book of the Lutheran Church, Luther wrote the following: "Our Papists, however, cite such statements of men in order that men should believe in their horrible, blasphemous, and cursed traffic in masses for souls in purgatory, etc. But they will never prove these things from Augustine. Now, when they have abolished the traffic in masses for purgatory, of which Augustine never dreamt, we will then discuss with them whether the expressions of Augustine without Scripture (being without the warrant of the Word) are to be admitted, and whether the dead should be remembered at the Eucharist. For it will not do to frame articles of faith from the works or words of the holy Fathers..... The rule is: The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."¹³ The last sentence has become axiomatic for Lutherans.

The Church as a whole is tied to the Scriptural

Word, and its decisions, agreements, and unity are only in the Word, the Reformer maintains in his exposition of John 14:25-26: "Our papists glory in the splendid name of 'Christian Church.' They say that the Holy Spirit teaches it (the church) and that for this reason one must observe whatever it says; for what it says is true and right. But you must investigate who is or is not the church. You are to see or decide this, says Christ, by the presence of My Word, for the Holy Spirit is to come in My name and teach what I have said. If it is something else or is not in accordance with My Word, it is not the Christian Church. For what could induce the Christian Church to change and subvert the Word of its Lord? If it were the true church, it would say: I cling to the Word of my dear Lord Christ. On this I insist. In accordance with it I will make my decisions. I will not hold to those who would act otherwise. This the Christian Church did in times of yore. Then it condemned all heresy and all false doctrine, not, however, according to its own opinion, as the pope and his rabble do, but according to Scripture and Christ's Word. And so it decided: This my Christ says. This the Holy Spirit has taught me. Therefore I decide and say that Arius and others, who teach contrary to it, are heretics and accursed teachers. This is a proper decision, a decision such as the Christian Church should pass. We should observe and obey it. Other matters, however -- such as pertain to clothing, for instance, to food, and to other external pomp -- are not decided in this way; for they are not Christ's Word but the personal opinion of the pope. Let men ordain in this area whatever they please. It means nothing to the church. For what God's Word teaches and Christendom decides does not pertain to this life but to yonder life above and, therefore, must come, not from our own head but from above, from Christ, and must be in accordance

with His command."¹⁴

B. The Holy Scriptures are Verbally Inspired by God, Specifically the Holy Ghost.

Sprinkled throughout Luther's writings we find definite testimonies to the fact that he believed the entire Scriptures, word for word, to have been inspired or given by God the Holy Ghost, and therefore pure and errorless. In the act of Inspiration, God was the real Author, the Prophets and Apostles His instruments.

Luther speaks of "scripture, which though it also has been written through men, is not of or by men but by God."¹⁵ "I believe that in the Scriptures the God of truth speaks."¹⁶ He says that theologians should study "the lettered words in the Book," that is, Holy Scripture, and goes on to say that these are the words of the Holy Ghost.¹⁷ "The Holy Ghost Himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the true author of this Book" (the Bible).¹⁸ Luther points out that God used David's tongue to utter His own speech. In his comments on 2 Sam. 23:1-2, we read: "What an excellent, bold glorying that is! Whoever can boast that the Spirit of the Lord speaks through him and that his tongue speaks the words of the Holy Ghost, he must be very sure of his case. That cannot be David, the son of Jesse, born in sin, but he who has been raised to be a Prophet by God's promise. Should you not expect delightful Psalms from him who has such a Teacher to teach him and speak through him? He that has ears to hear, let him hear. My speech is not my speech, but whoever hears me hears God... The Holy Scriptures are spoken through the Holy Ghost, according to the statement of David: 'The Spirit of the Lord has spoken by me.'"¹⁹ Again, Luther says: A Prophet is one who gets his understanding immediately from God, into whose mouth

the Holy Ghost puts the right word."²⁰ In Scripture all the words of God are "weighed, counted, and measured."²¹ "Not only the words but also the diction, which the Holy Ghost and Scripture use, is divine."²² "Therefore we sing in the Creed, (the Nicene Creed) concernig the Holy Ghost, 'Who spake by the Prophets.'" So we refer all of Scripture to the Holy Ghost."²³

Is the Bible a book that can be taken as true in some of its parts, but not true in other parts, as is so widely claimed today? Luther maintained that the holy book of the Mohammedans, the Koran, is such a book, and he pointed out that no one could take stock in such a book.²⁴ Luther gave this principle concerning Scripture: "So we must say: Out and out, all and everything is believed or nothing is believed. The Holy Ghost doesn't let Himself be divided or partitioned, so that He lets one part be taught and believed correctly and the other falsely."²⁵

Being the inspired Word of God in all their parts and words, the Scriptures harbor no contradictions or mistakes or errors, according to Luther, who said: "The Scriptures cannot err."²⁶ "The Scriptures have never erred."²⁷ "Scripture agrees with itself everywhere."²⁸ "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself, only that it so appears to the senseless and obstinate hypocrites."²⁹ It is true that Luther noted some of the so-called Bible difficulties and apparent contradictions. But in such cases he would propose at least one possible solution of the particular difficulty, and he would never assume that Scripture was in error. Often he advised that we Christians take off our hats before the Holy Ghost, Who is wiser than we are.

Let us look at a few examples of how the Reformer

handled such difficulties that occurred to him. In his Preface to the Old Testament he wrote: "Why does Moses mix up his laws in such a disorderly way? Why does he not put the temporal laws together in one group and the spiritual in another and the laws of faith and love in still another? Moreover, he sometimes repeats a law so often and uses certain words so many times that it becomes tedious to read it or listen to it. The answer is that Moses writes as the case demands, so that his book is a picture and illustration of government and life. For this is what happens when things are moving--now this work has to be done and now that; and no man can so arrange his life (if he is to act in a godly way) that this day he uses only spiritual laws and that day only temporal, but God disposes the laws as he sees the stars in the heavens and the flowers in the fields, and a man must be ready any hour for anything and do the first thing that comes to hand. The books of Moses are mixed up just this way. That he is so inconsistent and often repeats the same things shows the nature of his office, for one who is to rule a people with laws must always hold on, always insist, and be patient with the people, as (he would) with asses. No work of law is done with pleasure and love; it is all forced and compelled. Since Moses, then, is a lawgiver, he has to show by his insistence that the work of the law is a forced work and has to make the people weary, until through this insistence they recognize their illness and their dislike for God's law and long for grace."³⁰ In the course of a sermon Luther has this comment regarding Matthew 24:3: "The words are somewhat obscure and Matthew and Mark tell us the tribulations preceding the end of the world and, in addition, that Jerusalem will be destroyed and also point to the destruction of the world in such a way that both are combined and mingled with each other,

and it is the method of the Holy Ghost to speak thus in Scripture."³¹ Again, we note satisfaction with the way it is in Scripture. When Luther found difficulty in fixing the year of the birth of Arphaxad in the chronological table, he remarked, on Gen. 11:11: "One offers this solution, the other another. But, in the first place, it will not hurt us at all if we cannot find a perfectly satisfactory solution.... For it is certain that Scripture does not lie."³² Even when it seems that something just can't be harmonized, it cannot be assumed that Scripture has erred.

There are those today who say that the Bible presents truth only in religious matters, but that when it speaks about scientific, historical and purely secular matters, it may be in error. Luther did not hold such a view.

Hear what Luther said regarding the six days of creation spoken of in Genesis, chapter one: "When Moses writes that God in six days created heaven and earth and all that therein is, let it so remain that there were six days, and you dare not find an explanation that six days were one day. Give the Holy Ghost the honor of being wiser than yourself, for you should so deal with Scripture that you believe that God Himself is speaking."³³

Neither did Luther assume that the Scriptures are mistaken in the historical data which they present, even when it was difficult for him to piece everything together. A fine example of this reverent attitude toward Scripture is found in his exposition of Gen. 11:27-28: "The second question is still more difficult, though neither Lyra nor the other teachers have paid attention to it. That in connection with Abraham sixty years are

lost for us. For the reckoning the text brings with itself is easy. Terah was seventy years when he begot Abraham, now Abraham, when he was seventy-five years old, left Haran, where Terah had died. If you will add these together you will have 145 years. But when the account reckons together the years of Terah, it shows clearly that when he died he had lived 205 years. The question is, therefore, as to how we can account for these years. It would be unfitting to follow the example of audacious people who, when they arrive at such difficulties, immediately dare to correct books written by others. For my part I do not know how I should correctly solve the questions though I have carefully reckoned together the years of the world. So with a humble and proper confession of ignorance (for it is the Holy Ghost who alone knows and understands all things) I conclude that God, because of a certain plan of His own, caused sixty years to be lost out of Abraham's life so that no one would venture from the exact computation of the years of the world to presume to predict something certain concerning the end of the world."³⁴ When Luther wrote his Chronikon, which contained his listing or reckoning of years in world history, he stated at the close of the introduction, concerning secular historians: "I preferred the Holy Scriptures to them. I use them so that I am not compelled to contradict Scripture. For I believe that in Scripture the true God speaks but in the histories good people according to their ability show their diligence and fidelity (but as men) or at least that the copyists were capable of erring."³⁵ When Luther noted that the Prophets did not seem to observe order, in that, while speaking of the Jewish kingdom, they suddenly broke off and began to speak of Christ, he pointed out that we must not forget, above all, that the Holy Ghost inspired the Prophetic writings. "The Holy Ghost has been

blamed for not speaking correctly; He speaks like a drunkard or a fool, He so mixes up things, and uses wild, queer words and statements. But it is our fault, who have not understood the language nor known the manner of the Prophets. For it cannot be otherwise; the Holy Ghost is wise and makes the Prophets also wise. A wise man must be able to speak correctly; that holds true without fail."³⁶

Even the less important verses of Scripture, which set forth casual matters and things that seem to be petty trivialities -- even these the great Reformer assigned to God the Holy Ghost as the true Author. Also these verses have some divine purpose. In commenting on the details of Jacob's arrival at Haran, just prior to the meeting with Rachel (Gen. 29:1-3) Luther said: "Are you wondering and asking how it could please the Holy Ghost to describe such common and contemptible things? Listen to what the holy Paul writes in Rom. 15:4: 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.' If we firmly believed, as I believe, albeit weakly, that the Holy Ghost Himself and God, the Creator of all things, is the Author of this Book, and of such mean, despicable things, -- mean and small to our carnal eyes, -- we should, as St. Paul says, derive the greatest comfort therefrom.... That is what the Holy Ghost would teach us when He condescends to write about the saints and their petty affairs: The lowliest works of the saints please God. Behold the glory and worth of a Christian man: there is nothing so small about him but that it pleases God."³⁷

And what about those minor matters in Jacob's family life, including even the family quarrel

between Jacob and Rachel, in Gen. 30? The Roman hierarchy, pledged to celibacy, could not see any value in such trivial matters, though they were recorded in the Bible. Luther disagreed. For the reason that these incidents are in the Bible and are taught by the Holy Ghost, he insisted they should also be taught to the people, even stressed. Listen as we quote Luther, for his insistence that the Holy Ghost speaks also this allegedly trivial part of Scripture, as a basis for acceptance and practical instruction. These mean and trivial things, he said, "should always be dealt with and taught the people; namely, why the Holy Spirit, who certainly has a very clean mouth, speaks with such diligence of such things, of which the Most Holy Father, the Pope, with his chaste monks and nuns, is unwilling even to think, as of things that are utterly filthy and carnal in his sight. For they move about on the high level of their celibacy and single blessedness. The filth, however, that wives became pregnant, children were born, and that the spouses perhaps quarreled with each other, they do not regard as worthy of reading. The Holy Ghost might, they say, in keeping with His holiness, have spoken of celestial and other higher things, and not of such lowly carnal things. He should have become a monk or a nun, but now He tells merely how things stood in the household and how Jacob fared in marrying. That offends us holy and angelic men, who walk above the clouds in the wisdom and spirituality of the angels. But because they despise these ordinary things and look upon them with loathing, the Holy Ghost on His part turns away from these proud and boasting saints and will not acknowledge them as His; He abandons them to their glorying pride, and vanity, and descends to His creatures; for them He provides and them He adorns. For He has made the earth, He has created man and wife and blessed them that they be fruitful; He has

subjected the world unto them, and it is He who still preserves all things; He nourishes and gives the mother milk to nourish and sustain her child.... Hence the Holy Ghost would here teach and assure us in speaking of these lowly, human, and ordinary things that we should know that He is minded to be with us, to provide for us and to prove that He is our Creator and Ruler. This the Papists do not see, but despise it; therefore they must justly bear the punishment of their contempt. ... What better or more profitable thing can be taught in God's congregation than the example of a God-fearing housewife and mother, who prays, sighs, implores, thanks God, rules the house, does what the duty of a pious wife calls for, desires to have children, in great chastity, gratitude, and godliness. What more could be expected of her? But the Pope, cardinals, and bishops are not to see that, for they are not worthy of it. The Holy Ghost lets them roam on in their fanciful, great, and supercelestial things, let them admire nothing but their chastity and highly extol it (which really is only fit for the brothel), but these things they are by no means to see. Meanwhile the Holy Ghost so guides and rules the pious wives that thereby He proves that they are His creatures, whom He would govern not alone according to the Spirit, but also according to the flesh, that they should call on Him, pray, and thank Him for the children and be obedient to their husbands," etc.^{37a}

"Regarding the statement in Gen. 24:22, that Eliezer had given Rebekah an earring and two bracelets, with a specification as to their weight, Luther makes this comment: 'What is here told appears to reason to deal with carnal and worldly matters, and I myself wonder why Moses has so much to say concerning such trifling things and speaks so briefly concerning far more sublime matters. However, there is no doubt that the Holy Ghost

wished that these things should be written for our instruction, for there is nothing small, nothing useless presented to us in Holy Scripture; but all things that were written, were written for our learning, Rom. 15:4. For God wishes to be recognized in all things, both small and great."³⁸

What did Luther do with the portions of Scripture which some would have us believe are too lewd, too filthy, to be worthy of a place in the Bible? The answer is that he treated them with reverence as having their origin from the pure Spirit of God. Also from these portions Luther drew profound lessons, urging repentance and, above all, true faith in the Savior Christ Jesus, of the tribe of Judah according to the flesh. Concerning Gen. 38, where the sin of Judah and Tamar is recorded, Luther said: "Wonderful is the diligence of the Holy Ghost in describing this filthy and obscene happening, relating it even to the last details, so that he did not hesitate to speak of the birth of the twins and the breech made by the second. Why did the most pure mouth of the Holy Ghost descend to the utterance of such low and despicable things which are obscene and filthy and moreover damnable, as if such things could be of profit for the instruction of the Church and Congregation of God? What has the Church to do with such things."³⁹ Again, in a sermon, Luther said of this place in the Bible: "It is true, this is a rather coarse chapter. However, it is found in Holy Scripture, and the Holy Spirit wrote it, whose mouth and pen are as clean as ours.... If He was not ashamed to write it, we should not be ashamed to read and hear it."⁴⁰ Luther followed this up with application of Law and Gospel.

Another point should be mentioned, although we shall not elaborate upon it. Luther would ascribe divine Inspiration and Inerrancy only to the

original texts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament, as we do. In several places, in the transmitted texts which he used, he recognized that errors in copying had occurred at some time during the intervening centuries. This was not a matter of evasion with Luther, but, on the contrary, a credit to his insight. We have more information on the original texts today than Luther had, and think nothing of applying proper textual-critical judgment when necessary. It might be stressed that Luther did not continually harp on these textual-critical matters, and that he operated by and large on the assumption that what was in the transmitted text of Scripture was the Word of God.⁴¹

A final point in connection with Luther's teaching of the Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy of Holy Scripture: Every so often the claim is made that Luther held firmly to this doctrine only during part of his theological career (usually these claimants specify the earlier part), but that he more or less relaxed his position otherwise. Such a claim is false, and, fortunately, seems to be falling out of style at the present time. Detailed rebuttals are available.⁴² Suffice it to say that the quotations from Luther in this paper, and also specifically in this chapter, date from various periods of the Reformer's career. Luther never changed his position.

C. Luther Believed in the Divine Authority of Holy Scripture. Since God speaks in the Holy Scriptures, they are Entitled to the same Faith That is Due God.

In his preface to a series of sermons on Genesis, Luther declared: "You are so to deal with the Scriptures that you realize God Himself is speaking."⁴³

Liberal, modernist theologians have occasioned quite a debate by claiming that the Holy Scriptures are not a revelation. It is claimed that the Scriptures contain God's Word, but are not God's Word. The Scriptures, they say, are not a revelation from God, but only a record or witness of certain acts, deeds, or signs from God, which may or may not be real or factual in themselves; that is, may have really happened or may be purely mythical. To them, consequently, it matters not whether the Bible is inspired by God and inerrant, and most of them say that it isn't.

Such theologians cannot claim Luther on their side. He believed the Holy Scriptures to be God's supreme revelation. In Scripture "God Himself is speaking." "In his lectures on the Psalms Luther regards the expressions, 'God speaks,' and 'the Scriptures speak,' as convertible," observes Dr. Reu.⁴⁴ Luther commented: "The Prophet means that his tongue is the organ of the Holy Ghost,"⁴⁵ and that Scripture is "revealed (revelata in the Latin) divinely through the Holy Spirit,"⁴⁶ and he added: "In theology only one thing is necessary: that we hear and believe and conclude in our heart: God is truthful, however absurd what He says in His Word may seem to our reason."⁴⁷ Scripture is God's revelation.

Consequently Luther's axiom was: "The Word of God" (the Scriptures, as the context shows) shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel."¹³

Luther called those who forsake the sole authority of Scripture "Enthusiasts," (Schwaermer in German) because they buzz about like a swarm of bees. When religion forsakes Scripture, it has no

solid foundation. Concerning the Reformed Enthusiasts (the "Protestant" Enthusiasts), in his Word of Warning to the People of Frankfort on the Main, Luther wrote: "Outside His Word and without His Word we know of no Christ, much less of Christ's teaching. For the 'Christ' who pretends to bring His teaching without His Word is the abominable devil out of hell, who uses Christ's holy name and under it is peddling his infernal venom." And Luther made it plain, also at this place, that by Word of Christ he meant the "words" of Scripture, "as they stand."⁴⁸ And that there is Enthusiasm in the Roman Church too, Luther pointed out in the Smalcald Articles: "For the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with (in) his Church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word." Luther wrote here also: "Enthusiasm.....is the origin.....of the Papacy."⁴⁹

All of Scripture was the authority for Luther. We have touched on this before, but we quote one more place in Luther now: "There is not a single letter (Buchstabe) in Scripture for nothing." And the authority of Scripture should never be set aside, for in connection with any doctrine of Scripture, "When we begin to be so proud and overweening as to judge according to our reason.... then we are made fellows, thinking more of our blind and poor reason than of the statements of Scripture. For Scripture is God's own witness concerning Himself, and our reason cannot know the divine nature; yet it wants to judge concerning that about which it knows nothing."⁵⁰

We do not want Luther to be misunderstood; therefore another matter must be pointed out at

this juncture. As firmly as Luther insisted that conscience must be bound by the Word of God in Scripture, so firmly did he insist that we are not bound by anything outside Scripture; that is, whatever is not covered by Scripture. Anything outside Scripture (that is, purely items of outward forms, political and domestic science, etc., where Scripture leaves the matter open) is "free." Opinions may vary. Luther exulted: "Free, free, free would we and should we be in all things that are outside of Scripture. Defiance to him who would stop us."⁵¹

There is no more fitting way of closing this chapter than to quote the kernel of Luther's answer to the Goat Emser and his Comrad Murner, who were seeking to persuade him to return to the Church of Rome. There he wrote: "You had better put reason to bed and show me....Scripture." "I want Scripture. Scripture, Murner; Murner, Scripture! Or else seek another combatant; I have other things to do than to attend to your scriptureless chatter."⁵²

D. *Luther Believed in the Divine Efficacy of Holy Scripture; That is, It Has the Power to Bring About Repentance, Faith, and Salvation.*

"What pasture is to the beast....the nest for the birds, the stream for fish, the Scriptures are for believing souls," Luther said in "Lectures on the Psalms."⁵³

Scripture, being, as it were, God's letter addressed to us, is a power. "Letters of Lords and princes should be read twice and three times, for they are carefully worded. But, verily, the letters of our Lord God -- for thus St. Gregory calls the Holy Scriptures -- one should read three times, seven times, yea, seventy times seven,

or, to make it still stronger, without end. But we do not do it. I myself do not do it; therefore I hate myself. But when I get at it and read it, I derive strength from it; I feel that it is a power and not a mere story."⁵⁴

Both the Law, detailing God's commandments and expressing His wrath over sin, and the Gospel, proclaiming forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus -- both are in Scripture, and therefore are God's Word, according to Luther. We must leave a detailed study of this to another time, meanwhile recommending C. F. W. Walther's familiar Law and Gospel, which draws heavily upon Luther, for continued study. We take time here for one quotation from Luther, as follows: "Now, when both Law and Gospel meet, and the Law declares me a sinner, accuses and condemns me, the Gospel, however, says (Matt. 9:2): 'Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee,' 'thou shalt be saved,' and both are God's Word, which am I, then, to follow? St. Paul tells you. 'But after faith is come,' he says, 'we are no longer under a schoolmaster,' the Law has come to an end. For as the lesser Word it should and must give way and place to the Gospel. Both are God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, but the two are not equal. One is lower, the other higher; one is weaker, the other stronger; one is lesser, the other greater. When now they wrestle with each other, I follow the Gospel and say, Good-bye, Law."⁵⁵ So Law and Gospel each has its place in bringing to faith and keeping in the faith.

By this time you may have concluded, and rightly, that Luther certainly did not encourage the practice of deliberately exposing people to error and heresy. But he did believe that as much of the scriptural Word of God as might be preached by the errorists was efficacious. So great is the power of God's Word that it is able to sanctify

even when it is preached by those who, regretably, mix error with it. The power to sanctify is in the Word as such. Hear Luther: "We must, after all, confess that, in certain other articles, the enthusiasts hold views which accord with Scripture and God's Word and that, although they are impious heretics and blasphemers of Christ, he who hears and believes them on these points shall be saved. That God proclaims His Word even through the wicked and the godless is not an insignificant blessing. In fact, in some respects it is more dangerous for him to proclaim it through holy than through unholy people, for then those who lack understanding fall into the error of attaching more importance to the holiness of men than to the Word of God. The danger of doing this does not exist if Judas, Caiaphas, and Herod preach. At the same time no one is excused for his evil life, even though God is able to use it for a good purpose."⁵⁶

So, read the Word, and don't get tired of it, for satiety, getting tired of the Word, is about the worst thing that can happen. It's more dangerous than the troublesome heretics. This is the warning of Luther: "I am glad to have warned you against satiety and surfeit; for if any danger threatens our doctrine, it comes from this vice. Although heretics and sects work much harm, they nevertheless force us to search the Holy Scriptures diligently. But this pest, satiety of the Word, is born in us, and its danger is the greater the less we are able to note it. When we begin to snore and to be secure and surfeited, Satan is sure of victory."⁵⁷

E. Luther Believed in the Divine Perfection or Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. Everything that Man needs for Salvation is in the Scriptural Word.

Scripture is the perfect and sufficient revelation from God and nothing else is to be trusted. So Luther teaches in the following excerpts: "Everything that is to be held, all and sufficient, is in Scripture. If it is not there, you should say: When did God ever say this?"⁵⁸ "Be it ever so good, outside of the Book of the Holy Ghost; namely, Holy Scripture, one does not find Christ."⁵⁹ "Scripture is the highest testimony, that takes precedence over all miracles."⁶⁰ "Our doctrine is in the Scripture, therefore we should not look anywhere else, but all Christians should keep this book in daily use."⁶¹

Scripture brings to men the atoning Christ and His salvation. So Luther teaches in the following excerpts: "The whole Scripture from beginning to end has this goal, that one may know Christ."⁶² "When we deal earnestly with Scripture, we shall find our heart's desire and joy, and rightly know Christ, how He bore our sins, how we shall live with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob forevermore."⁶³ "The Book of Holy Scripture writes only about this, that God's Son rendered obedience for us to the Father and fulfilled His will."⁶⁴ "So, then, the entire Scripture is throughout nothing but Christ, God's and Mary's Son; all has to do with this Son, that we might know Him."⁶⁵ "Christ is the center of the circle, and all stories in Holy Scripture, viewed aright, have to do with Christ."⁶⁶ "Here (in Scripture) you will find the swaddling-clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, to which the angels directed the shepherds, Luke 2:11. Mean and poor are the swaddling-clothes, but precious is the treasure, Christ, lying in them."⁵

Luther's position on the perfection of sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures is fairly presented

in the above passages. In them he spoke pointedly. He was not indulging in oversimplification. Nor was he contradicting anything that he uttered elsewhere. These are measured words. This extolling of both Scripture and Christ corresponds to our familiar distinction between the formal and material principles of theology. The formal principle is Scripture, and it treats of what Scripture is; namely, God's Word. The material principle is Christ. It treats of the matter in, and the message of, Scripture, and that centers in Christ the Crucified Savior, through whom we are justified. There is no contradiction when Luther and we with him say: Scripture is everything; Christ is everything. Each truth supports the other. Any attempt to make the one supplant the other is not Lutheran and not Christian either.

Thus, when our modernist theologians and neo-orthodoxists pretend to up-grade Christ (and that not the true Christ Luther wrote about, as you will no doubt have noticed) and in the process down-grade Scripture (as a mere human record, etc.), far from having Luther to support them, as they sometimes claim, they actually fall into the classification of Enthusiasts (Schwaermer) which Luther condemned.

Likewise, moralists and social reformers, even though they be clerics and quote precepts of the law from the Bible, but do not clearly present Christ (the Christ of the Bible: The Virgin-born, Son of God, crucified and risen, the only Saviour from sin), may be judged good or bad, but it is a mistake to give the movements they represent the label "Christian," as is so often done, to the confusion of simple souls.^{66a}

Scripture and Christ; Luther would down-grade neither.

F. *Luther Believed in the Divine Perspicuity or Clearness of Holy Scripture. It presents, in Language that Can Be Understood by All, Whatever Men Must Know to be Saved.*

Luther: "No clearer book has been written on earth than Holy Scripture. Among other books it is like the sun among all lights."⁶⁷

Scripture has been charged with obscurity on the ground that its teaching are not thoroughly comprehensible to human reason. Luther countered that reason has its limits, and that therefore we should not expect to understand the how of everything in Scripture, but we can understand what Scripture says. In answering Erasmus, the Humanist, Luther wrote: "Scripture simply confesses the Trinity of God, the humanity of Christ, and the unpardonable sin. There is here no obsecrity or ambiguity whatever. But how these things are, Scripture does not say, nor is it necessary to be known."⁶⁸

In distinguishing between spiritual or inner understanding and the external clarity of Scripture (both of which have their place), he wrote: "If you speak of the inner clearness, no man sees one iota in the Scriptures but he that hath the Spirit of God. All have a darkened heart, so that, even if they know how to speak of, and set forth, all things in the Scripture, yet they cannot feel them or know them; nor do they believe that they are the creatures of God or anything else, according to Ps. 14:1: 'The fool hath said in his heart, God is nothing.' For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of the Scripture and every part of it. If you speak of the external clearness, nothing whatever is left obscure or ambiguous, but all things that are in the Scriptures are by the Word brought forth into the clearest light and proclaimed to the whole world."⁶⁹

Correlative to this teaching, Luther urged the knowledge of language. He said: "A Turk's speech must needs be obscure to me; a Turkish child of seven would easily understand him, whereas I do not know the language."⁷⁰ Applying this principle to our own case, we must say that the English Bible will be dark and unintelligible to anyone who does not know the English language. This principle was at the bottom of Luther's interest in the education of the masses, and gave rise to his treatise, To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools.⁷¹ And even this is not enough, for it is also necessary, as we shall hear Luther say at the end of this chapter, for the Bible-reader who knows the language to become at home in the language of the Bible itself, through diligent use.

To Luther Scripture was clear. In keeping with this, his principles of exposition (or interpretation) of Scripture were simple and few. Definite, common-sense rules are to be observed.

First of all, Luther would follow the natural meaning of the words of Scripture. He rejected the practice common among medieval scholastic theologians, who attempted to find in each place of Scripture a fourfold meaning; namely, the literal, the allegorical, the analogical, and the tropological, thus producing endless confusion. In his book Against the Heavenly Prophets he precisely set forth the principle of the natural meaning, thus: "Therefore this is our basis: Where Holy Scripture establishes something that must be believed, there we must not evade the natural meaning of the words nor wrest them from the connection in which they stand unless an express and clear article of faith compels us to arrange or interpret the statement otherwise.

If we acted differently, what would become of the Bible?"⁷² Note that the principle of the natural meaning included this, that one must not disassociate a passage of Scripture from its context, or connection. In his Answer to the Superchristian, Superspiritual, and Superlearned Book of Goat Emser, in reference to Paul's words, "letter" and "spirit," 2 Cor. 4, Luther explained why he preferred the term "natural meaning" to the term "literal meaning" in holding to this principle, as follows: "Some, however, because they did not understand this matter, ascribed a four-fold sense to Scripture, the literal, the allegorical, the analogical, and the tropological, for which there is no foundation whatever. It is therefore not well named the literal sense, for by letter Paul means something quite different. They do much better who call it the grammatical, historical sense. It would be better to call it the speaking or language sense..... because it is understood by everybody in the sense of the spoken language."⁷³ Thus, for Luther, a Scripture passage had but one, plain, intended sense.

The second principle of Scripture exposition to which Luther would point us, and of equal importance, is that Scripture must interpret Scripture. "Scripture is its own light. It is a fine thing when Scripture explains itself," he insisted.⁷⁴ He knew well enough that there are places in the Bible which the human mind found difficult to understand, the obscure or dark passages. But he said: "If you cannot understand the obscure, then stay with the clear."⁷⁵ Take refuge in the clear, bare Scripture (*nuda Scriptura*). Thus it is a caricature of the principle, Scripture interprets Scripture, when the attempt is made to explain a clear passage according to some interpretation of a less clear or an obscure passage. This the Reformed

enthusiasts were guilty of, especially in their interpretation of the words, "This is my body," in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper. It was in this connection that Luther wrote to Carlstadt: "The result of this method will be that no passage in Scripture will remain certain and clear, and the comparison of one passage with another will never end.... To demand that clear and certain passages be explained by drawing in other passages amounts to an iniquitous deriding of the truth and the injection of fog into the light. If one set out to explain all passages by first comparing them with other passages, he would be mixing up Scripture into an uncertain and wild chaos. Is this not plain enough? No doubt you will see that this is the case."⁷⁶ Yes, Luther admitted, "One passage must be explained by another." But, he immediately added, "Namely, a doubtful and obscure passage must be explained by means of a clear and certain passage." The obscure passages can teach you nothing else, anyway, "than what is found at other places in the clear passages. Then the heretics come forward and explain the obscure passages according to their own mind and contend with them against the clear passages, the foundation of our faith."⁷⁷

What about the opinions of church fathers and great divines? Are they clearer than Scripture? Said Luther: "When the fathers teach anything, they do not trust their teaching, fearing it to be too obscure and uncertain, but they go to the Scriptures and take a clear passage out of it to shed light on their teaching. How should they have overcome the heretics if they had fought with their own glosses (their own explanations), so that reason was brought into captivity, the evil spirit himself with all his heresies was completely routed."⁷⁸

What of the many books and commentaries written as Bible helps? Luther believed that there was no substitute for the plain, clear Scripture, without any human interpretation. Hear him relate his own experience: "When I was young, I familiarized myself with the Bible, read it often, and became well acquainted with the text; so well acquainted that I knew where every passage that was mentioned was to be found; thus I became a good 'textualist.' Not til then did I read the commentators. But finally I had to disregard them all and put them away because the use of them did not satisfy my conscience, and I had to take my stand again on the Bible; for it is much better to see with your own eyes than with another's."79

Thus one is to proceed. The exposition of the Scriptures is not a machine-like process, by which one may grind out interpretations by the yard, like sausages. One must have principles of procedure, and yet it is not a matter of automation, in which one sets the tabs, pushes a button, thus sending divine truth down the assembly line... Rather this is an art, learned in the school of the Holy Spirit, to be undertaken only with awesome prayer and utmost reverence. Said Luther: "We should not be bold in dealing with the Word of God. You had better think: I do not understand these words; but rather than alter them or take something from God's words or add anything to them, I will let them alone and commit the matter to God. For one should treat Holy Scripture with reverence and great fear."80

We close this chapter with an exhortation of Luther to the effect that the laity as well as the clergy are to become as expert as possible in the knowledge and use of Scripture. In commenting on I Peter 3:15 ("Be ready always to

give an answer to every man"), he said: "St. Peter spoke these words to all Christians, pastors, laymen, men, women, young, old, and of whatever state they may be; hence every Christian should know the foundation and reason of his faith and be able to give his reason, and, when called upon, to answer. Now, so far laymen have been forbidden to read the Bible, and his thought was: If I can induce the laymen not to read the Scriptures, I'll lead the parsons away from the Bible into 'Aristotle,' so that they chatter what they please; then the laymen will have to be content with what they preach. Else, if the laymen read the Scriptures, the preachers would have to study so that they would not be reprov'd and overcome. But take note of how St. Peter here says to all of us that we should give answer and show reason for our faith. When your last hour comes, I won't be with you, neither the Pope; if then you don't know the foundation of your hope and merely say: I believe what the councils, the Pope, and our fathers believed, the devil will answer: Yes, but what if they erred? Then he has won and will drag you into hell. Therefore we must ourselves know what we believe; namely, what God has said and not what the Pope or the councils decree or say. For you dare not trust in men, but must trust in the bare Word of God."⁸¹

G. To Luther the preached Word, based on Scripture, is Also the Word of God.

Luther held that there is a difference in the manner in which the Word of God comes to us in the Scripture and in the preaching of the Word in the New Testament era. The Prophets and Apostles possessed a higher degree of illumination of the Holy Spirit than ordinary Christian preachers, among whom Luther placed himself.

But more than that, and even apart from that, the great Reformer held that there was a specific difference between the above-mentioned illumination which enlightened Christian preachers have in varying measure, and the inspiration of the Scriptures through the holy men of God which made said Scriptures God's own Word. The content of Christian preaching must therefore be always and only a "repeating" of Scripture.¹⁹ "We repeat and preach what we have heard and learned from the Prophets and Apostles."

With this in mind we can rightly understand the statements in Luther concerning the "outward Word," or "external Word." By this he meant Scripture, and because they were all based on Scripture, also the spoken or oral Word and the Sacraments. We shall speak of the Sacraments as Word of God in the next chapter. Here we call to mind Luther's words in the Smalcald Articles: "And in those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may thus be protected against the enthusiasts, i. e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure." Luther went on to show that the Papacy is guilty on the same count, for, "The Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with his church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word." He expressed the conclusion, in this work which became a confessional writing of the Lutheran Church: "Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and Sacraments. It is the devil

himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments."⁸²

The Word rightly preached possesses the full authority as Word of God. In Sermons on Genesis we have this statement: "We have the authority; what we preach is as valid as though God Himself were saying it. When a Christian preaches, baptizes, or absolves, it is the same as though God Himself came down and said and did everything Himself."⁸³ In this day in which the voice of authority has largely been lost in the church, the words of the great Reformer in August Hans Worst are in place, where he exhorted preachers to "declare boldly with St. Paul and all the Apostles and Prophets: 'Thus saith the Lord, God Himself hath said this.'" And again: "In this sermon I have been an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ. Here it is not necessary, not even good, to ask for the forgiveness of sins. For it is God's Word, not mine, and so there can be no reason for His forgiving me; He can only confirm and praise what I have preached, saying: 'Thou hast taught correctly, for I have spoken through thee, and the Word is mine.' Anyone who cannot say this of his own preaching should stop, for he must surely be lying and blaspheming God when he preaches."⁸⁴ And yet again: "A theologian and preacher must not say: 'Lord, forgive me if I have taught what is wrong;' but of everything that he teaches in public and writes he must be sure it is God's Word."⁸⁵ And, according to Luther's example and express word, the applications in sermons, addressed to the needs of the people, are necessary and are to be considered God's Word. The "repeating" of the scriptural Word is not to be a mere recital of the historical facts of Scripture, as Luther explained: "Many proclaim Christ, but in such a way that they never understand or express His

benefit and blessing. This is what the mob of preachers do, who proclaim at best nothing but the histories of Christ. But it is not Christian proclamation if you proclaim Christ historically; that is not proclaiming the glory of God. You must teach that the history of Christ is intended to grant us believers the blessings of righteousness and salvation, that He did everything according to the will of the Father, not for His own benefit but for ours. Thus we may know that everything that is in Christ belongs to us."⁸⁶ In view of all this what must be said of the countless sermons which, when searched for the comfort of the atoning work of Christ, draw a blank?

And, in view of all this, what must be said of those church people whose attendance upon the preaching of the Word of God is lackadaisical? We shall let Luther answer this one: "There are many people nowadays who say: 'Oh, I have read and learned it all, and I know it very well. I do not need (to listen).' They may even come out and say: 'What do we need with any more clergy or preachers? I can read it just as well at home.' Then they go their way and don't read it at home either. Or, even if they do read it, it is not as fruitful or powerful as it is through a public preacher whom God has ordained to say and preach this."⁸⁷

One who reads Luther on this subject carefully will not misunderstand him. He by no means says or intimates that the oral or preached Word is better than Scripture itself. It is a matter of methodology. The oral method is generally the best one by which to bring people face to face with God's truth and hold their attention. We must agree that this is eminently true, and we can therefore see the importance of such things

as these: The layman's study of the Bible, aided by such means as the Bible class, so that he might become better able to give a reason for his faith to him that asketh; the good training of effective preachers, and more of them; apportionment of the cleric's time so that social interests, hobbies, and even studies that are not directly helpful, do not interfere with the effective presentation of the Word, in private and in public; and the unloading of janitorial and office-boy chores from the backs of those called to preach the Gospel, so that their energies may be applied to the Word. We need to share Luther's passion for getting the word out to people.

H. *To Luther, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Because Their Nature and Power are Derived from Scripture, are the Visible Word of God.*

Said Luther: "Thus the entire Holy Scriptures are given to the Holy Ghost, together with the outward Word and Sacrament, which touch and move our ears and senses."⁸⁵ The Sacraments touch the physical senses. They are the Word of God visible. Luther in his Large Catechism accepts the dictum of St. Augustine. "If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament."⁸⁹

We are all familiar with Luther's treatment of the Sacraments in the Small Catechism, where he teaches that the water of Baptism is connected with God's Word, and that forgiveness of sins and salvation are declared, in Baptism, in God's Words and promises. The respective words of Scripture pointed to by Luther are Matt. 28, Mark 16, and Titus 3.⁹⁰ Luther preached: "We say, therefore, that children are brought to Baptism by the faith and work of others; but when they get there and the pastor or baptizer deals with them in Christ's stead, He blesses them and grants to them the

faith and the kingdom of heaven, for the word and work of the pastor are the word and work of Christ Himself."⁹¹

Likewise, the power of the Lord's Supper rests upon the words of Christ in Scripture, the Words of institution, specifically the words, "Given, and shed for you for the remission of sins," "which words, beside the bodily eating and drinking, are as the chief thing in the Sacrament, and he that believes these words has what they expressly say, namely, the forgiveness of sins." These, too, are familiar lines from Luther's Small Catechism.⁹² He wrote: "Therefore this Luther has correctly taught that he who has an evil conscience because of sin should receive the Sacrament and get consolation, not from the bread and wine, not from the body and blood of Christ, but from the Word which in the Sacrament offers, presents, and gives to me Christ's body and blood as given and shed for me."⁹³

Luther often pointed out that God has been superabundant in providing the means of grace. He has provided not only the written and spoken Word, but also the visible Word, the Sacraments, as means of grace. And in the Sacraments God addresses the individual; this feature should make them very dear to us. Speaking of the Lord's Supper in comparison to the preached Word, Luther declared: "When I proclaim His death, that is a public proclamation in the congregation, which I am not giving to anyone individually. Anyone who accepts it, accepts it. But when I administer the Sacrament, I personalize it individually for the one who receives it.... This is something more than the public proclamation. For although that which is present in the Sacrament is present in the proclamation also and vice versa, the advantage is that here (in the Sacrament) it is directed

to a specific person."⁹⁴

That the Word of God is the very soul of the Sacraments Luther expressed in this way: "You should know that the Word of God is the chief thing in the Sacrament. Man is composed of two parts, but the more important part is the soul. The other part is the body; but without the soul the body is nothing else than a rotten malodorous cadaver. So the Lord's Supper is nothing if the divine Word is not present; just so Baptism. For through the Word the water in Baptism has the power to wash away sins."⁹⁵

This completes the summary of Luther's teaching concerning the Word of God. You will have noted that the summary follows the familiar categories used by leading Lutheran teachers, called the Lutheran dogmaticians, since Luther. Luther taught with consistency the Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture, the divine Authority, Efficacy, Sufficiency and Clarity of Scripture, and the basis of the oral Word of God and the Sacraments in Scripture. Luther never got around to writing a complete and exhaustive systematized summary of his teachings, such as in theology is commonly called a book of Dogmatics, and for this reason some have accused him of being an inconsistent theologian, whose basic ideas were half-developed. But our summary, though it is not exhaustive, should serve to show at least that Luther had thought through the whole doctrine of the Word of God, and in every place and point was consistent with himself and, above all, with the Word itself. Others have accused the Lutheran dogmaticians of these intervening centuries of having gone far beyond the teaching of Luther himself, especially in their insistence upon Verbal inspiration, but our summary of Luther should serve to show that no one could have

insisted on these specific teachings more sharply and definitely than Luther himself. That the later dogmaticians simply echo Luther is a fact that careful comparisons will bear out, but this subject must be left for another time and place.⁹⁶

III. Perversion of Luther's Teaching Concerning the Word of God

There are two kinds of Luther scholars, one that deserves the name, and another that casts about to find support for preconceived notions.

Poor Luther! He is being treated like the Bible is being treated by its opponents. And, behold, they are the same opponents!

These latter are the ones to whom we now give our attention. We confessional Lutherans can detect in their writings a strange breath, and what it conveys goes a bit like this: "You just read Luther and take his word for it that he means what he says in the plain words. But you in your simplicity do not understand Luther. He was a very complex man. You must ask us, the new Luther experts, what Luther really means. We have cross-examined, psycho-analyzed and dissected him. We have become his confidants. Now you may know the new Luther, the real Luther."

What are these deep mysteries that Doctor Martin has confided to these experts? Alas, we are to learn that Luther was really pretty shaky on a lot of things we thought he was solid on, starting with his stand on the Word of God, and all that it entails.

Lists of misconceptions and criticisms of

Luther's position are at hand. We cannot treat them all at this time, nor are they all worthy of note, for some of them shout the naive and ridiculous. We shall, then, treat only a few of these items, either because they have been widely spread and have gained some acceptance, or because they are somewhat involved and require some untangling.

A. *The "Hay, Straw and Stubble" Episode.*

The most widely known misconstruction of Luther, without a doubt, has been this one concerning the "hay, straw and stubble." It has been stated in this way: "On the other hand (Luther) knows and tells of hay, straw and stubble that in the case of the Prophets slipped in with their own good thoughts." And again: "Luther says concerning the Prophets that they studied Moses and their predecessors and built thereon not always gold and silver, but also hay, straw, and wood."⁹⁸ The conclusion is then drawn that Luther, after all, at least at times, regarded the writers of Scripture as "free organs" of God who mixed their own thoughts into Scripture when they wrote it, and hence were subject to error when writing Scripture. These sentiments have been repeated in encyclopedias and textbooks of religion, and this has given them an aura of authority.

But Luther is not really in trouble. The contention of the Luther-critics is, if we may overwork the word, a "straw" man. The way to find out the truth is to look up the place referred to and check it. There we read how Luther is developing, at some length, the Bible study he brings in the example of the Prophets, who thoroughly studied the books of the Bible that had been written before their time, especially the books of Moses. In the course of this study they took down notes. Here

is some of the context of the passage under consideration: "In this manner without doubt the Prophets studied Moses, and the later Prophets studied the first Prophets and wrote their good thoughts, inspired by the Holy Ghost, into a book.... But though some hay, straw and stubble slipped in at times (into the writing) of these good faithful teachers and searchers of the Scriptures and they did not build purely silver, gold, and precious stones, still the foundation remains; the rest the fire consumes."⁹⁹ In this passage Luther does not speak at all of the writing of Scripture or of the inspiration of Scripture. He is referring to times when the Prophets studied Scripture just as Luther himself, or other pious teachers, studied Scripture. Luther realized very well that the Prophets were not at all times in the state of inspiration. Only at times, temporarily, were they inspired by the Holy Ghost to infallibly speak and write God's Word. Luther said: "The theologians have a common proverb: 'The Holy Ghost did not always touch the hearts of the Prophets.' The inspiration of the Prophets does not continue forever, on and on, without stopping. Isaiah did not continuously and forever receive revelations of high and great things, but only at special times. We have also the example of the Prophet Elisha, who says to the Shunammite (2 Kings 4:27): 'Let her alone, for her soul is vexed within her.' There he confesses that the Lord does not at all times move the hearts of the Prophets."¹⁰⁰ Luther never said that hay, straw, and stubble were written into the Scriptures.

B. The "Epistle of Straw" Episode.

While we are speaking of straw, we might as well take up the much-misused phrase taken from Luther's Preface to the New Testament: "St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw."

There you have it, say the critics, Luther, after all, did not take such a serious view of the Bible as God's Word; otherwise he would not so have spoken of a whole book of the Bible.

It is interesting to see what Luther means here. Luther considered the Holy Scripture to be God's inspired word throughout, and therefore important throughout. But it is well known that he considered some books of the Bible to be more important than others. He valued the Gospel of John as the "one tender, truly chief Gospel," because it brings more of the doctrine of Jesus, while the other three Gospels deal more with deeds and works from the life of Christ. And among the Epistles of the New Testament, Luther recommended especially: "St. Paul's epistles.... and St. Peter's First Epistle," "the true kernel and marrow of all books. They ought rightly to be the first books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most, and, by daily reading, to make them as familiar as his daily bread."¹⁰¹ In this light, we are able to see that when Luther referred to the Epistle of James as an epistle of straw, he was making a comparison, to bring out merely that it was not as important as some of the other Epistles of the New Testament. Here is the text of the whole paragraph in which the misused phrase occurs: "In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it. But more of this in other prefaces."¹⁰²

Something has at times been made of the fact that the paragraph just quoted appeared in the Prefaces to the books and portions of the Bible in the year 1522, but was omitted thereafter in all the editions that followed. This may mean that Luther did not wish any longer to press the point in his Prefaces. The Prefaces were later included in the editions of the German Bible. But this does not mean that Luther ever changed his judgment regarding the importance of James' Epistle. Luther never did hold this letter to be on any higher level of importance, as Reu points out quite convincingly.¹⁰³ Why!

This brings up the historical fact that, from ancient times, there was some doubt concerning the genuineness as truly apostolic writings of the last four books of the New Testament,^{103a} including the Epistle of James. That is, it was considered by some to be doubtful that they belonged in the list of books of the Bible, which list was called the "Canon."¹⁰⁴ We hardly talk about this any more, but in Luther's day, and for centuries before, this was a matter more frequently discussed. The question was not whether the Bible was God's inspired Word; it was whether these particular books belonged in the Bible. Christians were not condemned for holding to variant opinions on this latter question. In his Preface to St. James' Epistle,¹⁰⁵ Luther commended it for reading and said that he himself found much good in it. However, he personally could not accept it as a genuine book of the Bible, at least not on the same level with the epistles of Paul, because, first, "it was rejected by the ancients,"¹⁰⁶ and furthermore because, in his judgment, the Epistle of James betrayed by some of its own statements that it was not written by James the Apostle.

To sum up this whole matter: Luther's doubts about the Epistle of James concerned the canonicity of the letter, that is, whether or not it had a place in the Bible at all. It had nothing whatever to do with his teaching of the inspiration and inerrancy of the rest of the books of the Bible. This is so easy to see that even those modern searchers of Luther¹⁰⁷ who do not accept his doctrine of Inspiration have abandoned the attempt to twist his words. Therefore this misrepresentation of Luther is not as common in books as it used to be.¹⁰⁸

C. Other Claims that Luther was Inconsistent.

Characteristic of the many claims that Luther did not consistently proclaim the Bible to be the Word of God, inerrant, and the sole foundation of faith, are the following: At the beginning of his career, Luther took a rather free attitude toward Scripture, but later, due to his controversies with the Reformed and his insistence on the Real Presence of the body and Blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper, he became more and more tied to the letter of Scripture, and thus was forced, somewhat unwittingly and unwillingly, to pull in two different directions at the same time.¹⁰⁹ Another sample: "It is well known how Harnack loved to differentiate between high points and unfortunate regressions in the position of Luther. When he was at the high points he was free from every bondage of the letter, but when he regressed he again bowed to the sovereignty of the Scriptures and did so to such an extent that there was no longer any elbowroom for the human ratio" (Reason).¹¹⁰ That such charges are simply not factual is readily evident. It will not be necessary here to repeat the facts already set forth in this essay. One can sense the wishful thinking

of the Neo-Lutherans who make such charges. They would so much like to have Luther espouse their hypotheses.

Then there are those who love to bring up the "Christ against Scripture" passages. -- One of them occurs in the Five Disputations of Rom. 3:28, a series of short, pithy sentences or aphorisms, of which No. 49 reads: "If our adversaries urge Scripture against Christ, we urge Christ against Scripture." The problem here is easily solved. The context shows that Luther, here as elsewhere, has nothing against Scripture as it stands. What he means by "Scripture" here is not the real Scripture, but the misinterpreted "Scripture" adduced by the Romanists, by which they hoped to show that justification is by the works of the law, and not by faith in Christ alone. The Romanists misused Scripture passages from the Law in order to down-grade Christ as the only Savior. So Luther would urge Christ, the real Christ of the Scriptures, as the Savior from the curse of the Law. Those who cannot understand this passage from Luther betray that they are unable to appreciate the brilliant and effective irony which Luther was so well able to employ. They are missing out on some of the pleasure that attends the reading of Luther's works. Two sentences later Luther declared: "Should one or the other be lost, Christ or the Law, then the Law must fall, not Christ."¹¹¹ By this time there should be no trouble in rightly understanding the other so-called "Christ against Scripture" passage. It is located in the Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude, where it reads: "Whatever does not teach Christ, that is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul taught it; again, Annas, Pilate, and Herod did it."¹¹² Luther's thinking here is the same as in the case of the previous disputed passage.

Do not fail to note that Luther, in this passage, presents a supposed harmony with the great Reformer's position on the Perfection of Sufficiency of Holy Scripture, as set forth above in Section II, E, of the essay.

D. Putting False Emphases into Luther's Works.

"Neo-orthodoxy" is the name given to the newest version of what is called "Modernism in the Church. Modernism took over as the theology of the larger portion of the Protestant Church, which then became spiritually bankrupt because of its denial, first, of the Bible as God's Word, and then, eventually, of every tenet of the Creeds. Neo-orthodoxy has been described as an attempt to bring the Church half-way back to the Scriptures. In Neo-orthodoxy the Scriptures are still not the Word of God; they are merely a witness or record put down by some erring human beings. However, it is claimed that in this record of Scripture there are some events or acts of God, by which He somehow touches men or in which He encounters them. In the contemplation of these acts or events (and perhaps other acts or events outside of Scripture) it is said that God makes His self-communication to man. To get the meaning of God it is said to be a mistake to quote Scripture passages as authoritative; instead the Holy Scriptures are subjected to what is called the "scientific method" of investigation, by which said acts or events are sifted for their hidden meaning. This is the pattern, although there are many variations among the devotees of the Neo-orthodox fad. They have no passion for doctrinal unity.

It will not come as a surprise that these people, too, would welcome some support from Dr. Martin Luther. Indeed, some of them, searching

about for a name worthy enough to be honored as the pioneer of this latter-day enlightenment for which the Church has been waiting so long, acclaim Luther as their man! He was the first to see the light which now shines so brightly in the modern seminaries and beyond! It would be too tedious and lengthy a procedure for us assembled here to take the roll call--Barth and Brunner and the rest of the company--to see how Luther is praised for allegedly having discovered this or that feature of their system of thinking.¹¹³

Instead we turn our attention to just one book which represents Luther as friendly to the new theology. Its first title page reads:

"LUTHER'S WORKS
COMPANION VOLUME
LUTHER THE EXPOSITOR
Introduction to the Reformer's
Exegetical Writings

By

JAROSLAV PELIKAN
CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE--SAINT LOUIS"

We believe it eminently fitting and fair to give attention to this book, the briefer title of which is Luther the Expositor. It deals largely with our subject, Luther and the Word of God. It is an exhaustive exposition of the author's views on the subject. Also, it is recent (1959). Our purposes are best served by proceeding in the manner of a book review.

There is little doubt that the author knows a great deal about Luther. Some of the observations are penetrating; interesting questions are raised; and there are some thought-provoking quotations from Luther. Moreover, the general tone of the

book is sober and reverent. But it must certainly be read with discrimination. In the hands of the uninitiated it can be a dangerous book. And its potential danger is heightened by the fact that it is distributed with the new set of Luther in English, Luther's Works, American Edition. As a companion volume of the set, its binding matches that of the volumes containing Luther's writings, even down to the gold-leaf facsimile signature of Martin Luther on the front cover, all of which tends to give the volume an aura of authority.

Here is a summary of the main thoughts in Luther the Expositor, especially as they pertain to our subject:

The Word spoken by God at Creation is not the Scripture; the pre-existent Christ, called the Word (Logos) is not the Scripture; the divine acts or deeds, which were the primary sense of the term "Word of God" to Luther, for instance, the Creation, the Exodus, Christ crucified and risen, and the creation of faith, are not the Scripture; the Church's recital of the Word, its communication of Redemption, the proclaimed or oral Word, is not the Scripture. Luther conceived of the Word of God in all these senses, relating them to each other and yet distinguishing them quite sharply. Therefore it is not correct to say that Luther equated Scripture and the Word of God. In fact, Luther regarded the Bible or Scripture as the Word of God only in a derivative sense; namely, because it supported "the deed of God in Christ," which Luther regarded as "Word of God" in the primary sense. Luther considered the Bible to be God's Word chiefly in time of controversy; then he quoted Scripture as God's Word. So far the summary.

In Luther the Expositor the "Word" tends to

become only the Gospel, or the means of grace. The presentation is not always lucid. The implication lurks, at many a point in the book, that the means of grace are reliable, but Scripture is not necessarily so. The attempt to categorize Luther's thinking in accommodation to Neo-orthodoxy is veiled thinly. If at all. Whether or not Luther considered Scripture to be of primary importance, and errorless, and whether we are to follow him in this conviction, is left seriously in doubt, to put it mildly. It is evident that these are matters of relatively little importance to the author. Thus one is supposed to view Luther as an expositor of Holy Scripture!

The tenor of the book can be grasped perhaps nowhere better than in one sentence to be found on page 65. There one finds this Pelikanesque quip: "The ministry of the 'Word of God' did not consist in distributing Bibles but in telling about the deeds of God." Amazing, from a student of Luther! Who ever did more to distribute the Bible than Luther did? He made the first successful translation of the Bible into a modern language. He spent years on this work. He urged Bible reading time and again, the right kind of reading of the Bible, in which it is viewed as God's Word. No one has done more to put the Bible into the hands of the Christians than Luther did. He was a one-man Bible society.

This essay has let Luther speak for himself. The primary importance of Scripture as the Word of God in his teaching is evident. In addition, when we think of such facts as this, that Luther repeatedly attributed the words of Scripture to God the Holy Ghost, also in the commentaries, when the matter under discussion was not a matter of controversy, we realize more and more that the

false emphasis which the moderns attribute to Luther issues from their own bias. When they extract, from settings in Luther which do not deal with his doctrine of Scripture, passages such as "The Church is not a pen house, but a mouth house," and "Christ Himself has not written anything, nor has He ordered anything to be written," and twist these words to make it appear that Luther held the oral preaching of the Word to be more authoritative than the written Scriptures, it becomes quite apparent that we are being treated to the big bluff. How can you tell? Read the whole context. Forget the expositors of Luther and read Luther himself! You will hear him say that Scripture is not a dead letter, but "a living book full of living words."¹¹⁵ You will hear him reject the "scientific method" of the Neo-orthodox theology, four hundred years in advance, in words such as these: "For in this book, which is called the Holy Scriptures, there is no place for the clever master or wrangler. God has given other arts: the languages, dialectic, rhetoric, philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine; there be clever, wrangle, investigate, and question as to what might be right or wrong. But here in the Holy Scripture and God's Word let wrangling and questioning stop, and say: God has said this, therefore I believe it. Here disputing and questioning, why or what, is out of place, but it says: Be baptized, and believe in the woman's Seed, Jesus Christ, true God and man, that through His death and resurrection you may have forgiveness of sins and everlasting life."

We close this convention essay with the Reformation Collect which memorializes Dr. Martin Luther. Let us all rise and pray:

Almighty God, merciful Father, who madest the

light to shine out of darkness, we thank Thee that Thou has shown mercy unto us and our fathers and by means of Thy servant Luther hast restored the pure light of Thy Gospel; we beseech Thee, keep us in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Thy saving Word and finally, by its holy comfort, depart in peace and joy, through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end, Amen.

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NOTES ON "LUTHER AND THE WORD OF GOD"

- 1) Also among the clergy. The present writer recalls that he was vociferously "kidded" when he bought his St. Louis Edition of Luther at a St. Louis Seminary book auction, in 1934, for only a few dollars, because there were so few bidders on this item. He also recalls how an old pastor, about to retire, said, in all seriousness: "Now I'll have plenty of time to read Luther." This is said, not in order to deprecate an already overburdened and harrassed clergy, but simply to point up the fact that reading Luther is not a wide-spread pastime.
- 2) See F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, I, p. 297.
- 3) St. Louis Edition. IX, 1770.
- 4) St. L., III, 21.
- 5) St. L., XIV, 3-4.

- 6) St. L., IX, 1238-9.
- 7) Concordia Triglotta, p. 771 (75-76).
- 8) St. L., VI, 79-80, and What Luther Says, Vol. III, p. 1463, item 4727.
- 9) Exposition of the Second Book of Samuel, in St. L., III, 1890.
- 10) Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 35, Intr., xi. Also writings of J. Pelikon, passim.
- 11) Weimar Ausgabe, 40 II, 593 24ff. Comp. M. Reu, Luther and the Scriptures in The Springfielder, Aug. 1960, p. 34 and Luther's Works, American Edition, Vol. 12, p. 288. (St. L., V. 456)
- 12) Comp. Reu, Op. Cit., pp. 34 and 81, n. 106b. The English translations in this essay are sometimes those of the English works referred to, sometimes those found in Pieper, Op. cit., sometimes those in Th. Engelder, Scripture Cannot Be Broken, and sometimes those of the essayist. In some places in the cited translations the essayist has taken the liberty of making revisions which in his judgment are an aid to accuracy and fluency.
- 13) Smalcald Articles II. II, 15 in Trigl. p. 467.
- 14) What Luther Says, III, p. 1476-7, item 4774. St. L., VIII, 464-5.
- 15) Erlanger Edition, 28, 343. Comp. Pieper, Op. cit., I, 296.
- 16) St. L., XIV, 491.
- 17) St. L., XIV, 435.
- 18) St. L., II, 469.
- 19) St. L., III, 1890, 1895.
- 20) St. L., III, 785.

- 21) Reu, Op. Cit., 14 and n. 28, quoting Weimar, 3.
- 22) St. L., IV, 1960, Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 34
and n. 107a.
- 23) St. L., III, 1890. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 37
and n. 113.
- 24) St. L., XX, 2275.
- 25) "Brief Confession on the Holy Sacrament,"
St. L., XX, 1781.
- 26) St L., XIX, 1073. 27) St. L., XV, 1481.
- 28) St. L., III, 18. 29) St. L., IX, 356.
- 30) Works of Martin Luther, Philadelphia Ed., VI,
372ff. St. L., XIV, 8-9.
- 31) Weimar, 27, 566, 29ff. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 44.
- 32) St. L., I, 713-714.
- 33) St. L., III, 21. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 51.
- 34) St. L., I, 721. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 52.
- 35) St. L., XIV, 491. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 56.
- 36) St. L., XIV, 1418. 37) St. L., II, 469, 471.
- 37a) St. L., II, 538 - 540.
- 38) Reu, Op. cit., 54. St. L., I, 1711-2.
- 39) Reu, Op. cit., 54. St. L., II, 1200ff.
- 40) St. L., III, 559.
- 41) Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 57-59 and Pieper,
Op. cit., I, 295.
- 42) E.g., Reu, Op. cit., 9-11, 30-37 and Pieper,
Op. cit., I, 282.
- 43) St. L., III, 21 44) Op. Cit., p. 14.
- 45) Weimar, 3,262, 30f. Comp. Reu, Op. cit.,
14 and 73, n. 29.

- 46) St. L., V, 456f.; Weimar, 40, II, 593, 24ff.
Same context as reference in Note 11.
- 47) Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 34.
- 48) St. L., XVII, 2015.
- 49) Trigl., 495, 4; 497, 9.
- 50) St. L., X, 1018. See also section II, B
of this essay.
- 51) Weimar, 10, II, 253, 25. (From the German
Answer to King Henry) Comp. Reu, Op. cit. 23.
- 52) Works, Philadelphia Ed., III, 395, 394.
- 53) Weimar, 3,640, 31f. Comp. Reu, Op. cit., 13.
- 54) St. L., I, 1055; also XXII, 544, 1069.
- 55) St. L., IX, 808.
- 56) What Luther Says, III, p. 1467, item 4743.
St. L., XVII, 2212.
- 57) What Luther Says, III, p. 1487, item 4807.
St. L., IV, 1751.
- 58) St. L., XII, 169. 59) St. L., IX, 1775.
- 60) St. L., XII, 1604. 61) St. L., XII, 32.
- 62) St. L., III, 18. 63) St. L., XIII, 1911.
- 64) St. L., IX, 1774f. 65) St. L., III, 1959.
- 66) St. L., VII, 1924.
- 66a) Comp. Luther on Muenzer and the Peasants'
Revolt.
- 67) St. L., V, 334. 68) St. L., XVIII, 1682.
- 69) St. L., XVIII, 1683f. 70) St. L., X, 473.
- 71) St. L., X, 473ff. Philadelphia Ed. IV.
103-132.
- 72) Weimar, 18, 145, 2, 147, 23f.

- 73) Philadelphia Ed. 3, 352-3.
- 74) St. L., XI, 2335. 75) St. L., V, 338.
- 76) St. L., XX, 325ff. 77) St. L., V, 335.
- 78) St. L., XVIII, 1293. 79) St. L., XXII, 54f.
- 80) What Luther Says, III, p. 1471, item 4754.
- 81) St. L., IX, 1235f. 82) Trigl., 495, 497.
- 83) Weimar, 24, 282. Quoted in J. Pelikan,
Luther the Expositor, p. 164, n.
- 84) Translations from Sasse, Here We Stand, 161,
in Engelder, Op. cit., 419. See St. L.,
XVII, 1343.
- 85) St. L., XXII, 1507.
- 86) Weimar, V, 543. Quoted in Pelikan, Luther the
Expositor, 225, n.
- 87) St. L., XIII, 2253; Weimar, XXXVI, 220.
Quoted in Pelikan, Op. cit., 64, n.
- 88) St. L., III, 1890. 89) Trigl., 755. 10.
- 90) Trigl., 551. 91) St. L., XI, 492.
- 92) Trigl., 557. 93) St. L., XX, 275.
- 94) St. L., XX, 750. Weimar, 19, 504f. Quoted
in Pelikan, Op. cit., 226n.
- 95) What Luther Says, III, p. 1469, item 4748;
St. L., VII, 2131.
- 96) See Pieper, Op. cit., I, 277f.
- 97) See Reu, Op. cit., p. 79, n. 89a for the list
of Luther aberrations by Kahnis; Ladd's
list in Engelder, Op. cit., p. 290f;
Seeberg's views, Ibid., 263 and 366.
- 98) Quotations from Cremer and Kahnis in Pieper,
Op. cit., I, 287.

- 99) St. L., XIV, 150. 100) St. L., II, 1645.
- 101) St. L., XIV, 90f.
- 102) Philadelphia Ed., VI, 444.
- 103) Op. Cit., 26-29.
- 103a) As arranged in Luther's German translation.
- 104) The books of the Bible whose genuineness has never been questioned are called by the technical term "homologoumena.: The books whose genuineness has been held in some doubt are called "antilegomena."
- 105) St. L., XIV, 128-131; Amer. Ed., 35, 395-398; Philadelphia Ed., VI, 488-479.
- 106) Notably the historian Eusebius and the church father Jerome.
- 107) "Luther-forscher."
- 108) Largely on the basis of studies by Wilhelm Walther of Rostock. The matter is well taken care of by Pieper, Op. cit., I 291f. and Reu, Op. cit., 24-29.
- 109) See Theodor Brieger, Martin Luther and wir, Gotha, (1918) esp. pp. 40ff. Also E. Brunner, Revelation and Reason, 275.
- 110) Reu, Op. cit., 20.
- 111) St. L., XIX, 1441.
- 112) Philadelphia Ed., VI, 478.
- 113) Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, 12n, 125, 127, 130, 133, 145, 150, 275f, 380. Also Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, Harper (1957), 179.
- 114) St. L., III, 206. See also St. L., 1514f, and VII, 829ff.
- 115) St. L., XIII, 1911, 32.

IN NOMINE JESU
Text: II Corinthians 4:7

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Christian Brethren:

As we are assembled for this seminary graduation service, the opportunity is provided for us to direct our thoughts in a reflective and thankful manner to what the work of a true Lutheran seminary is all about. And it is especially fitting that this should be done here on this particular day in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, namely, Synod Sunday, for this seminary is owned and operated by the Synod, is supported by the Synod, and supplies ministers for the Synod. Thus, let us proceed, and in the light of our text, think about the work of a true Lutheran seminary in terms of

PREPARING EARTHEN VESSELS
FOR DISPENSING HEAVENLY TREASURE

First let us focus on	I. The Earthen Vessels
Next on	II. The Heavenly Treasure
Then on	III. The Preparing
And finally on	IV. The Dispensing

I. The Earthen Vessels

When Paul says here in our text, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us," he is using the term "earthen vessels" to describe the ministers of the church, by whom God dispenses the heavenly treasure. Some newer translations translate after this fashion: "We have this treasure in jars of clay, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." "Earthen vessels,"

"jars of clay," for dispensing the heavenly treasure -- that's what the ministers of the church are. You who are graduating are such "earthen vessels" who have been prepared by your seminary training for this most honorable, high and holy work.

Clay jars were a common household entity in the days of Paul. They were used in various rooms of the home for various purposes. One might be used to hold family valuables -- pieces of gold, jewels, and the like. Others were used for holding and dispensing water in various rooms of the house. Some were taller, others shorter; some wider, others more slender; etc., depending on how the potter made them. Some, because of the characteristics the potter gave them, were suited better for one room of the house, others for another room -- one for the kitchen, another for the dining room, etc.

In like manner, the ministers of the church are God's earthen vessels, God's clay jars, through whom He dispenses the heavenly treasure in His household, the church, throughout the world. They are God's earthen vessels, made by God Himself. He is their Potter. He makes each of them, each different from the other, giving them each their various needed characteristics, abilities, gifts, to meet the needs of His church, one being more suited for this type of ministry, another for that; one for this kind of parish, another for that; etc.

Now, since none of them have given themselves their gifts in whole or in part, but each has his gifts entirely from the heavenly Potter, therefore there is no room for self-glorying, but only for humble service in the church of God.

This fact, that the ministers of the church are to go about their work in humility, of course also has other dimensions. Another, which is

brought to mind by our text, is that in this matter of the ministers of the church dispensing the heavenly treasure, the ministers of course are not the chief thing. Of far greater importance is the treasure which they dispense, and Him whose treasure it is. Think of what is accomplished in the hearts of men as the heavenly treasure is dispensed by the earthen vessels. Spiritual life is given to men, saving faith is wrought and kept in men's hearts unto eternal life, men are brought from sin, death, and damnation, to pardon, life, and salvation. Now it is certainly not the ministers of the church, the mere earthen vessels of themselves, who accomplish this by any power of their own, for they have no such personal power. Indeed, they themselves, instead of having such power, are full of weakness and frailty, which the term "earthen vessels" is intended by Paul to bring out, and of themselves could never convert and work saving faith in anyone. It takes the power of God to do that, and that power is in the treasure, the very power of God dispensed, God Himself by His power in the treasure converts and works saving faith in the hearts of men. Clearly, then, from this standpoint, too, the ministers of the church should go about their work of dispensing the heavenly treasure with true humbleness of mind and spirit. Indeed, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us."

II. The Heavenly Treasure

With this let us now focus upon the heavenly treasure. This treasure is, of course, nothing else than the holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God, the saving Gospel of Christ, as God has given it to us in the Holy Things of the church, i.e., in His holy Word and Sacraments. In dispensing the treasure, then, it is the work of the ministers of the church to preach the Word and

to administer the Sacraments.

God's Word the ministers of the church are to proclaim, the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the very truth of God. The Word being constituted of both Law and Gospel, they are to preach both the Law and the Gospel, and the Law always for the sake of the Gospel. They are to preach the Law, in the first place, so that God by the Law might convict consciences, bring men to a sober realization of their inherited depravity since the fall, as well as to a sober realization of their daily sins which issue forth from their old corrupt nature, so that they perceive their need of forgiveness and salvation. And then, above all, the ministers of the church are to preach the Gospel, the message of the cross, the message of Christ and Him crucified, the message that we have been redeemed, not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the message that He is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sins, that He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. This Gospel message, above all, the ministers of the church are to proclaim, so that by it God may comfort troubled consciences, bring men to see Jesus as their dear Savior, engender saving faith in their hearts and keep them in it thereby.

And so preaching the Word, they are also to administer the Sacraments, and, as part and parcel of this, lead their people to a true appreciation of the Sacraments. First, Holy Baptism. They are to teach their people to bring their children to Baptism early, so that through this blessed, heavenly, efficacious washing the Holy Ghost might work

baptismal regeneration in their children, give them the new birth in Christ, give them saving faith in Christ, and thus bring them into possession of forgiveness, life, and salvation through this Sacrament. Further, the ministers of the church are to admonish their people to continually prize and take great comfort in their Baptism, as that by which they have put on Christ and all His saving benefits, to earnestly live and walk in their Baptism all their life, and to constantly depend on their Baptism that they are thus by this Sacrament God's dear children as they continue in contrition and faith in the Savior.

And they are also to administer the Sacrament of the Altar, the Holy Supper of our Lord, and teach their people to make a most devout, faithful, regular use of this blessed, heavenly, efficacious Supper, in which, in with, and under the consecrated bread and wine, our Lord gives us His very body and blood, with which He wrought our atonement upon the cross, and in this Supper now imparts to us the benefits of His atonement as we eat and drink His body and blood with believing hearts -- forgiveness of sins, peace with God, salvation, life, through this Supper. Yea, the ministers of the church are to admonish Christ's dear people to continually prize and take great comfort in this Sacrament too, as that by which our Lord brings us into the most precious sacramental union with Himself, through which He dwells in us by His body and blood given us here, and by which we are nourished and strengthened unto eternal life.

Here, then, we have the life-giving heavenly treasure which the ministers of the church are to dispense -- the Gospel in Word and Sacraments -- by which God by His power works faith in the hearts of men, nurtures their faith, and preserves them unto eternal life. That is the treasure which you

who are graduating will before long be dispensing in the respective congregations to which you have been called. You have been prepared to do that by your seminary training.

III. The Preparation

Now some remarks in regard to the training and preparation given by a true Lutheran seminary. The work of a true Lutheran seminary, such as Bethany, is of the utmost importance for preparing men to be qualified to go out and dispense the heavenly treasure. It is the work of teaching them to rightly preach the Word of God, in its truth and purity, and to rightly administer the Sacraments, in accord with Christ's institution. It is the work of thoroughly grounding those preparing for the holy ministry in the church in the pure and wholesome Word of God, in the Christian Verity laid down for us in Holy Writ, in the Gospel in all its articles, in the whole counsel of God. It is the work of thoroughly grounding them in the Lutheran Confessions, not as being independent of the Word of God, but as standing faithfully and immoveably under the Word, and as being a clear and pure exposition of the Word, clearly delineating not only where our Lutheran forebearers at the time of the Reformation stood, but also where we and our churches today confess to stand on the basis of God's Word, the immutable truth of God, the divine dogma revealed to us in the Word. Thus grounding them in the Scriptures and the Confessions -- that's what all those courses in exegetical theology, dogmatic theology, historical theology, and practical theology are all about. The work of a true Lutheran seminary is that of thus grounding its students in order that they might go out as sound Christian, Lutheran, Biblical, Confessional ministers of the church, true ministers of the pure Gospel, the heavenly treasure, to the great blessing of the church of God. Today we thank God for Bethany Seminary

where such training and preparation of men for the ministry of the church is diligently given. We thank God that you men who are graduating today are graduating from this seminary, prepared to rightly dispense the heavenly treasure in the congregations to which you have been called.

IV. The Dispensing

And now a few further words yet in regard to the dispensing, though thoughts in regard to the dispensing have been woven throughout what we have been talking about. Dispensing the heavenly treasure, with all that involves, or, in other words, doing the work of the ministry in the church, is not at all what you would call easy work, as I am sure you who are graduating also already know from your vicarage. It is hard work, and sometimes under the press of duties and the demands of the ministry, very hard work. And often as we who are ministers of the church go about our arduous labors, we, earthen vessels that we are, keenly feel our weaknesses and frailties. But let us always remember to our great encouragement that we are not alone as we go about this work, but that our God, whose earthen vessels we are, and who has called us into this ministry, and, moreover, for whose cause it is that we labor, is ever with us to help us in this ministry, without whose help we could never fulfill it. And He wants us to call upon Him earnestly for His help. Thus, in our weaknesses and infirmities, let us diligently beseech Him to grant us the strength we need. Indeed, let us daily, continually, cry unto Him, asking Him to be strong in us, to give us of His strength, yea, to pour out upon us always His good Spirit, who has ever been the true strength of the church's ministers. Truly, it is not by our own weak selves apart from Him that our ministry is to be and is performed, but rather it is by His mighty power at work in us, sustaining, enabling, empowering us, that this

ministry is to be and is performed by us. Here we of course find ourselves in the presence of another important facet of the truth expressed in our text, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us." Let us then constantly and fervently pray, as in one of our great hymns to the Holy Ghost, "Lord, by Thy pow'r prepare each heart And to our weakness strength impart," (TLH 224:3), and as in another of our great hymns to Him, "The weakness of our mortal state With deathless might invigorate," (TLH 233:4). And thus praying, as we devoutly apply ourselves to our ministry with the measure of strength and vigor He gives, we can then go about our work with cheerful hearts and a good conscience, and can confidently leave the matter of bringing forth results to Him, in whose power alone it is to bring forth results by His power in the Gospel, as we have noted.

In conclusion: May God by His almighty, sanctifying, life-giving Holy Spirit grant much help and strength to you who are graduating today, and to all the rest of us who are ministers of His church, for our work of dispensing the heavenly treasure as His earthen vessels, and this to His great eternal praise and to the eternal salvation of many among whom He has called us to work. Amen.

-- by Harry K. Bartels, Pastor
Beautiful Savior Evangelical
Lutheran Church
Fort Wayne, Indiana

CHARGE TO THE SEMINARY GRADUATES
June 14, 1987

by

President Wilhelm Petersen

Your graduation from the seminary today is the culmination of your formal theological training. And the bottom line of this education is to PREACH THE GOSPEL. It was your desire to preach the gospel which led you to the seminary and now you stand ready to join the ranks of those who are engaged in the unfinished business of proclaiming a finished salvation to blood-bought souls.

As you go forth on this all-important mission, I would share with you some Scriptural advice from a towering figure in American Lutheranism, Dr. C. F. W. Walther. This year marks the 175th anniversary of his birth and the 100th of his death, and as we reflect on this man's life we are indeed grateful to God for the legacy which this man of God has left us and through which he still speaks. We are especially grateful for his classic treatise which you have studied at the seminary and which I trust you will continue to study throughout your ministry; namely, THE PROPER DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL. There is one thesis in particular to which I would call your attention; namely, the twenty-fifth, which reads as follows:

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT RIGHTLY DIVIDED
WHEN THE PERSON TEACHING IT DOES NOT ALLOW THE GOSPEL
TO HAVE A GENERAL PERFORMANCE.

Yes, Walther reminds us of the importance of preaching the law too. He echoes what St. Paul says in his epistle to the Romans; namely, that the law should be preached in such a way "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." We recall Walther's famous dictum:

"Without the law no one will appreciate the gospel." But you are always to remember that when you preach the law you are discharging an alien function. God have pity on the congregation whose pastor delights in preaching the law! Walther laments that "in some there is a legalistic strain which does great injury to their own and to their hearer's souls. They do not administer their office with genuine cheerfulness and do not make their people cheerful Christians."

No one was more concerned about purity of doctrine than Walther, yet he says, "It is not sufficient for you to be conscious of your orthodoxy and your ability to present the pure doctrine correctly. These are, indeed, important matters; however, no one will be benefited by them if you confound law and gospel."

So while both law and gospel are to be preached, the law in such a way "that it drives the greatest saint to despair" and the gospel in such a way "that it gives the greatest sinner hope," always remember that the gospel is to have a general predominance in your preaching so that when your hearers leave your worship service they will do so with the ringing assurance that they have a Savior from sin, that in Him their warfare is accomplished, their iniquity is pardoned, and that they have received of the Lord's hand double for all their sins. "BE OF GOOD CHEER, THY SINS BE FORGIVEN THEE" is the essence of the gospel. That is the joyful, upbeat message which is to predominate in your preaching. And if the Gospel predominates, then as Walther says, "you will not stand in your pulpits sad-faced, as if you were bidding men to come to a funeral, but like men who go wooing a bride or announcing a wedding." May God bless you as you go forth to preach the saving Gospel of Him "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised for our justification!"

Amen

U. S. LUTHERAN - ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

A Review by J. B. Madson

1. On September 30, 1983 a dialogue group consisting of about two dozen U. S. Lutheran and Catholic representatives released a 24,000 word document on Justification by Faith. This document, put into final form by Lutheran Dr. Joseph A. Burgess, culminated six years of discussion of the topic of justification by this American group. Six earlier rounds of dialogue, begun in 1965, had previously considered such doctrines as Baptism, the Eucharist, Papal Primacy, and Teaching Authority.

2 Co-chairman Dr. H. George Anderson and Bishop T. Austin Murphy both admitted that the doctrine of Justification had come to the surface in these earlier dialogues, but not until the seventh round did that foundational doctrine of the Christian church become the focus of study and discussion. The co-chairmen state that this document does not constitute a compromise on the long-disputed doctrine, but that it is rather "the result of a process of common search." They further state that "where they have been able to discern agreement, they have made a common statement. Where they have discovered differences, they have tried to state them clearly and to assess their effect on relationships between the two communions."¹

3 In the manner of *omnis Gallia* this document, too, in *tres partes divisa est*. The first, and by far the longest, part delves into the History of the Question. The second part is entitled Reflection and Interpretation, and the third presents Perspectives and Reconstruction.

I.

4 The opening historical section of this document looks first at developments prior to the Reformation century, then to the 16th century itself, and finally to post-Reformation developments. In pointing to Augustine as the chief formulator of thought in the Western church, the document avers that he not only emphasized Paul's teaching on justification more than was common in the East, but also "understood this primarily in terms of the transformation of the individual, as suggested by the Latin etymology of the term *justificare*, to make righteous."²

5 In opposing the errors of Pelagius, who denied the natural depravity of man, Augustine lay particular stress on the grace of God as alone accomplishing man's conversion; he did not therefore lay the same stress on *sola fide* as did the later reformers. The dialoguers thus conclude that, while Augustine did stress "the priority of God's initiative and the primacy of grace,"³ his transformational model of justification allowed for mounting speculation about the human role in the process, particularly in the areas of grace, merit and predestination, where more and more distinctions were being created.

6 The scene at the time of the Reformation, therefore, was characterized by a bewildering attempt to combine the Augustinian emphasis on the primacy of grace with an emphasis on "the power and freedom of human nature within the order established by God."⁴ What fueled the Reformation movement in its challenge to transformationist thinking was the understanding and promulgation of justification as being by faith alone (*sola fide*) as well as by grace alone (*sola gratia*.)

7 In its view of the 16th century Reformation, the report sees the Reformer's appeal to Romans 3:28 occasioned by two chief problems: 1) rampant Pelagianism on "works righteousness," and 2) the need to console terrified consciences. With salvation becoming widely viewed as something to be earned by good works, it is understandable that a heavy emphasis had developed on fulfillment of moral law, on development of penitential disciplines and ecclesiastical rules and regulations, and on the traffic in indulgences.

8 Especially by opposing the last-mentioned perversion in the church, the Reformers posed a threat also to powerful special-interest groups which badly needed funds for the perpetuation of an entrenched ecclesiasticism. And in his desire to console anxious consciences, including his own, when they were terrified by their uncertainty of doing enough to earn or merit salvation, Luther was led to see that this could be accomplished solely by trust in the promises of mercy and forgiveness in Christ. It was at this point, the report contends, that Luther out-Augustined Augustine in adding *sola fide* to *sola gratia*. Not on the basis of infused grace and its inherent righteousness, but on the basis of the alien or extrinsic righteousness of Christ is a sinner declared righteous.

9 Luther's manner of breaking with the model of transformational justification is thus described in the document of dialogue:

Justification by faith without the works of the law led Luther to a mode of thinking about Christian life and experience markedly different from traditional Augustinian and medieval transformationist models. Instead of a progressive transformation under the power of grace, the imputation of an alien

righteousness received in faith implies a simultaneity; the justification is complete in the imputing of it so that the believer is "simultaneously a righteous person and a sinner" (*simul iustus et peccator*). All notions of "change" and "growth" in the life of the Christian therefore receive a quite different cast. The very imputation of Christ's righteousness also reveals to the believer the depth and persistence of sin. Sin, however, is then not merely the failure to do "good works" or the despair over such failure, but is, above all, the human propensity to trust in one's own righteousness. The imputed alien righteousness of Christ creates a new situation in which sin is exposed as both presumption and despair and is attacked in its totality. Only when so exposed and confessed can sin no longer reign.

It can be seen from this that justification *sola fide* (as Luther read Romans 3:28) is justification *propter Christum*. Nothing but faith in Christ alone makes sinners pleasing to God; their works are good in his sight only "on account of Christ" (*propter Christum*). Because faith itself is wholly the gracious work of the Spirit, the Reformation teaches that God forgives and justifies by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone.

10 When Luther in his Smalcald Articles calls this doctrine of justification "the first and chief article"⁵ he is only asserting, in likewise familiar wording, that it is *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*.⁶ For the Reformers the doctrine of justification by faith is the criterion for all "church practices, structures and theology."⁷ All aspects of Christian preaching, worship and life are to lead to or flow from justifying faith in the Gospel.

While for the Augsburg Confession and the Smalcald Articles this doctrine becomes the Reformers' primary basis for their attacks on the false doctrines and practical abuses in the papacy, it was not always central, especially for the Roman Catholics, in some controversies that resulted.

11 Luther's 95 Theses against the abuses in indulgences were triggered in no small way by his concern that the people were being led to believe that their own contribution and satisfaction made the difference between God's forgiveness and rejection. Against this idea Luther insisted that justification and forgiveness of sins become man's possession solely through faith in Christ.

12 Cardinal Cajetan insisted to the contrary that forgiveness is obtained only if "faith is animated by charity" - the *fides caritate formata* which has become the shibboleth of Roman Catholic teaching in the doctrine of justification.⁸ Cajetan also sought to make clear that good works so performed with this grace of Christ satisfy only for the temporal punishment due to sin (a distinction which was not carefully observed in the wholesale peddling of indulgences.) Although Cajetan did not want to accuse Luther of heresy, he found unacceptable the 58th of Luther's 95 Theses (that the merits of Christ do not constitute a treasury of indulgences), and Luther's contention that penitents can have the certainty by faith that their sins are actually forgiven.

13 At that point Pope Leo X began loosing his heard of bulls against the young reformer, the first one simply calling for retraction of his errors, the second (*Exsurge Domine*) threatening excommunication, and the third (*Decet Romanum Pontificem*) carrying out this threat of excommunication. When Emperor Charles V followed up these

papal bulls with his own imperial ban, the stage was set for the creation of a church that would not yield its Biblical stand on the doctrine of justification. At the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 the Lutherans set forth in the clarity of brevity their position on this doctrine:

Our churches also teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits or works but are freely justified for Christ's sake through faith when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in his sight (Rom. 3:4).⁹

14 In the Apology of the Augsburg Confessions, which was basically a response to the Roman Confutation of the A. C., Melancthon continued the attack against what he perceived to be a Scholastic doctrine; namely, "that faith is saving because it is animated by love (*fides caritate formata*)."¹⁰ It remained the Reformers' contention that justifying faith is such just because it clings to its object, the promise of God's forgiveness in a crucified and risen Christ. Gladly conceding that justifying faith is never alone but will always be followed by good works, the Reformers denied those attendant good works have anything to do with the justification. "Thus the Reformers maintained that love and good works are the necessary fruits of faith, though not its perfecting form, and are the inevitable consequences of forgiveness rather than the prior condition for it."¹¹

15 The document admits that not all Catholics reacted negatively to Luther and his movement. Because Lutheranism was a conservative reforming

movement it did strike a responsive chord in many who, while they recognized a need for reform, never did leave the confines of the Roman Catholic Church. (Compare the Lutheran merger movement of the present day.) It was made clear in Luther's Smalcald Articles, however, that justification was one doctrine which could not be compromised in any way. Despite Luther's position, attempts at rapprochement continued, notably at the Diet of Regensburg (Ratisbon) in 1541, where it was announced that the participants (Gropper, Plug, Eck and Melancthon, Bucer, Pistorius) had come to agreement even on the crucial doctrine of justification. Luther, however, rejected the formula arrived at because it was an attempt to laminate the Biblical doctrine of justification and the Scholastic doctrine of faith animated by love. The formula spoke both of an inherent righteousness (or infusion of charity) "by which the will is healed, and (of) an 'imputed righteousness' which is given solely because of Christ's merits."¹² The present Lutheran-Catholic document finds comfort in Regensburg because the momentary agreement provided there indicates "that the two ways of explaining justification are not necessarily exclusive."¹³

16 Luther's oft expressed appeal for a free and open general council never materialized, but shortly before his death there was convened the Council of Trent which, among other things, established in clear language Roman Catholic rejection of the Reformers' doctrine that justification is by faith alone. This rejection of *sola fide* by the Roman Catholics does not mean that faith plays no part in man's justification. The document states:

In its description of justification Trent insisted on the primacy of faith. "'Faith is the beginning of human salvation,' the foundation and root of all justification, 'without which it is impossible to please God.'" but faith, although unconditionally

necessary for justification, is not living unless "through the Holy Spirit the charity of God is poured into their hearts.....and inheres in them. Hence in justification itself one receives through Christ, into whom one is engrafted, along with the forgiveness of sins, all these (gifts) infused at the same time: faith, hope, and charity. For faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites one perfectly with Christ, nor makes one a living member of his body." Thanks to this justification, received through the grace of Christ, human beings are renewed, and "as faith cooperates with good works (cf. Jas. 2:22), they grow and are further justified."¹⁴

17 Because Trent is willing to emphasize justification by grace alone, and yet insists that God does not judge people apart from the merits He gives them, the document is bold to say that the Tridentine decree on justification, even though it excludes the *sola fide* phrase, "is not necessarily incompatible with the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fide*."¹⁵ The document likewise makes the point that the Formula of Concord, also in its article on Justification, is not so much a response to Trent as it is an attempt to settle controversies in its own midst. Nevertheless, it recognizes the unmistakable opposition of the F C to Trent in the former's insistence on the distinction between the imputed righteousness of faith and the inchoate righteousness of the new obedience of faith, and in its contention that only the imputed righteousness is involved in our justification.

18 In the 400 years intervening since Trent and the F C, the two sides have continued to affirm their respective doctrines, at least in an official way. When justification as an objective forensic

act (objective justification) and the individual's apprehension of it (subjective justification) were distinguished by the 17th century Lutheran theologians, and when more attention was given to subjective aspects of salvation and to the *ordo salutis*, the 20th century dialoguers concluded that "Lutheran orthodoxy came to think of justification in a framework similar to that of Trent," and that in particular this change signalled a "return to transformationist modes of thought."¹⁶ They also concluded, however, that this development also "tended to sharpen the remaining differences over the specifically forensic character of justification as an act distinct from sanctification."¹⁷

19 Meanwhile Catholic theologians were not inactive either but debated such questions as how grace which is infallibly efficacious could leave the freedom of the recipient intact. Rome was tolerant toward much of this debate, but some conclusions it would not tolerate, such as two statements of the 101 propositions of a certain Quesnel which were condemned: "Without the grace of the Liberator, the sinner is not free except to do evil" and "Under the curse of the law, good is never done, for one sins either by doing evil or by avoiding it simply out of fear (Gal. 5:18)."¹⁸

20 It is understandable also that the Lutheran Pietists emphasized the experiential effect of justification on the individual over against forensic justification. They therefore often readily identified justification with regeneration -- the new age movement, found little need for either regeneration or justification.

21 The document of dialogue then notes that in the 19th and 20th centuries there has been a renewal of interest in the Reformation doctrine of justification. Both Protestants and Catholics have contributed to the thought on this subject.

A renaissance in Luther study has also revealed that at the heart of the Lutheran Reformation was the doctrine of justification by faith. Admittedly Vatican Council II gave little direct attention to the doctrine of justification, but only indirectly in connection with such matters as grace, faith, salvation, and ministry. Of significance is the fact that the council "left open the possibility that faith might include the entire response of the faithful to justifying grace."¹⁹

22 Since WW II a changing climate in Catholic theology has provided new possibilities of profiting from the Reformation theology of justification, but, as the document nevertheless asserts, "without making any radical break with earlier Catholic tradition and the doctrine of Trent" (my emphasis).²⁰ Among the liberation theologians -- most recently on the scene -- Juan Luis Segundo is reported as warning "that a paralyzing concern for one's personal justification could detract one from the communal task of building the kingdom."²¹

23 Somewhat counterpart to Vatican II was the 1963 LWF Assembly in Helsinki, which spent a lot of time discussing the doctrine of justification without coming up with anything definitive. An address by Gerhard Gloege asserted that "the old alternative whether the sinner is considered justified. . . . 'forensically' -- or . . . 'effectively' -- is begging the question," for God's action brings about rebirth."²² The report suggests that the main importance of Helsinki is that it alerted Lutherans to a need for further consideration of the theme of justification. And it regards the present dialogue as a part of that continuing consideration. Furthermore, it does not share the widespread dismay at what happened in Helsinki; for example, in response to the often-raised point that a summary statement prepared during the sessions was only "received" and not

approved, it points out that the statement was published by the commission the following year with only minor revisions.

24 In concluding its historical study of the question of justification, the commission of dialogue seeks to turn some light on the hermeneutical insights which triggered Luther's proposal of justification by faith alone as a critical principle in judging all thought and practice. Luther recognized the Gospel message as performative, "God's Word accomplishes what it says in the very act of being proclaimed."²³ "Even the faith which receives the promise is not a condition for justification. . . . Justification is unconditional in the sense that the justifying word effects its own reception Since we obtain justification through a free promise . . . it follows that we cannot justify ourselves."²⁴ That Luther says little directly about the doctrine of justification in his sermons and catechisms does not rule out its constant presence as a hermeneutical guide in all other teachings. The commission finds this understanding important for they conclude that it "converges in part with certain recent trends in Catholic sacramental and kerygmatic theology," as testimony to which they cite the allegedly strong position on the Scriptures taken by Vatican II -- representing "a conscious rapprochement with certain stands in Lutheran theology."²⁵

II

25 In an attempt to reflect on and interpret contemporary relations in the light of the historical evidence, the commission attributes many of the difficulties to different thought patterns of the two traditions. Whereas Lutherans focus on safeguarding the absolute priority of God's redeeming word in Jesus Christ, Catholics are, generally speaking, more concerned about the efficacy of God's

saving work in the renewal and sanctification of the created order.

26 These different concerns result in different thought patterns - transformational or forensic, e.g. - and in different ways of speaking about various points. Whereas Lutherans describe justification as the imputation of a foreign righteousness, namely that of Christ himself, and affirm sanctification as a fruit of justification, Catholics hesitate to attribute everything to justification considered only as a forensic act. Whereas Catholics fear that emphasis on forensic justification could encourage a disregard of the benefits actually imparted, Lutherans fear that emphasis on the non-forensic aspects could easily throw believers on their own resources.

27 Lutherans, in granting that justification effects sanctification, see that renewal as a life-long struggle against the sin in their members; though in Christ they are *justi* by faith, they are *simul peccatores*. Catholics on the other hand, "hold that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit removes the guilt of sin (*reatus culpae*) and renders the justified pleasing in God's sight. The concupiscence which remains is not 'truly and properly sin in those born again.' As a result it is possible, Catholics maintain, for the justified to avoid mortal sins, which involve the loss of the Holy Spirit."²⁷

28 Roman Catholics sometimes appeal to the concept of divinization, i.e., investing an individual with a divine character, to explain their transformational idea of justification - a *gratia increata* instead of a *gratia creata*. It is claimed that Luther at times came close to this language, e.g., in speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Third Article.

29 In the matter of the sufficiency of faith for justification, where the Catholics will not give up their *fides caritate formata*, the document argues that "the common approach to exegesis and the shift from Scholastic to modern categories of thought (personal and existential rather than physical or metaphysical) have greatly narrowed the differences." Nevertheless it has to conclude that differences in this area "have not been fully transcended."²⁸

30 Tension likewise remains in the discussion of merit. While both sides agree that the justified perform good works, the disagreement comes in considering the place of those works in the process of justification. By stating that the two sides have difficulty in finding a common language, and that the differences in language reflect a difference in concerns, the document in vain seeks to minimize the impasse.

31 Apparently the whole realm of satisfaction for sins was not thoroughly discussed by the joint committee even though it would have considerable ramification for other doctrine.

32 Over against the Lutheran contention that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiae*, the committee document summarizes the Catholic response thus:

Catholics. . . . are wary of using any one doctrine as the absolute principle by which to purify from outside, so to speak, the Catholic heritage. They recognize, to be sure, the danger of absolutizing merely human ecclesiastical structures. While conceding that the church stands under the gospel and is to be judged by it, Catholics insist that the gospel cannot be rightly interpreted

without drawing on the full resources available within the church. To speak of "Christ alone" or "faith alone," they contend, could lead, contrary to the intentions of Lutherans themselves, to the position that the grace of Christ is given apart from the external word of Scripture, Christian preaching, the sacraments and the ordained ministry.²⁹

III

33 What are the perspectives for reconstruction?

The committee report states that considerable attention has been given to the study of Biblical passages that have a bearing on the doctrine of justification, Old Testament passages as well as new. It also claims that examination of this evidence has revealed convergences in the work of Catholic and non-Catholic exegetes - in some instances even outright agreement. The report also notes that this can be attributed in part to "the encouragement given by church authorities to Catholic interpreters in the last 50 years to make use of historical-critical methods, thus sharing in a mode of interpretation employed by Protestants for a longer time" (my emphasis).³⁰

34 The document then cites seven areas of new emphases and insights brought out in the Biblical study. The first of these recognizes the Old Testament as providing a proper setting for discussion of righteousness/justification. The second lies in the possibility of discovering the earliest Christian use of righteousness/justification terminology. The third consists in seeing the Pauline data sharpen the meaning of the righteousness/justification terms. The fourth area concerns modern scholarly attention to those Pauline epistles "widely conceded to be the product of Paul's pupils and the Pauline school" (my emphasis).³¹ The fifth

area of insights results from a survey of most remaining N.T. writings on these matters. The sixth area of insights comes from an exegetical understanding of the letter of James. The seventh area is the topic of merit, a term that has no single terminological equivalent in the original texts of the Bible.

35 The growing convergence that is claimed is attributed also to the widespread disappearance of non-theological sources of division, such as many of the abuses of the 16th century. There is a willingness on both sides to admit their shortcomings and a need for continual reformation. Despite the fact that the joint committee recognizes many unresolved issues and points in need of further dialogue, it claims convergence and agreements of the following formulations:

(1) Christ and his gospel are the source, center and norm of Christian life, individual and corporate, in church and world. Christians have no other basis for eternal life and hope of final salvation than God's free gift in Jesus Christ, extended to them in the Holy Spirit.

(2) The prerequisite of final salvation is righteousness. To be saved one must be judged righteous and be righteous.

(3) As a consequence of original sin all human beings stand in need of justification even before they commit personal sins. Those in whom sin reigns can do nothing to merit justification, which is the free gift of God's grace. Even the beginnings of justification, for example, repentance, prayer for grace, and desire for forgiveness, must be God's work in us.

(4) We remain God's creatures even when ruled

by sin. We retain the human freedom to make choices among created goods, but we lack the capacity to turn to God without divine help.

(5) Justification, as a transition from disfavor and unrighteousness in God's sight, is totally God's work. By justification we are both declared and made righteous. Justification, therefore, is not a legal fiction. God, in justifying, effects what he promises; he forgives sin and makes us truly righteous.

(6) Scripture, the proclamation of the word, and the sacraments are means whereby the gospel, as the power of God for salvation, comes concretely in individuals to awaken and strengthen justifying faith.

(7) In justification we receive by faith the effects of Christ's action on our behalf. Justifying faith is not merely historical knowledge or intellectual conviction, but a trustful, self-involving response to the gospel.

(8) Justifying faith cannot exist without hope and love; it necessarily issues in good works. Yet the justified cannot rely on their own good works or boast of their own merits as though they were not still in need of mercy.

(9) Sin no longer reigns in the justified, yet they remain subject to sinful inclinations and the assaults of sin so that, when left to their own powers they fall repeatedly. Of themselves they remain capable of losing justification, but, because of the great mercy of God in Christ, they may firmly trust and hope that God will bring them to final salvation.

(10) The eternal reward promised to the righteous is a gift, for it depends wholly on God's grace in Christ, the one mediator between God and fallen humanity.

(11) The good works of the justified, performed in grace, will be recompensed by God, the righteous judge, who, true to his promises, "will render to everyone according to his works" (Rom. 2:6) (cf. No. 108).

(12) The priority of God's redeeming will over every human action in bringing about ultimate salvation is recognized in both our traditions by the classic doctrine of predestination.³²

36 In conclusion, the members of the joint committee declare their belief that they have reached a necessary fundamental consensus on the Gospel.

37 While the press has almost unanimously climbed aboard the bandwagon and delivered its encomiums for an allegedly profound achievement, we would offer a question raised by a writer in another Dialog (the theological magazine by that name): "What sense does it make to say that Lutherans and Catholics enjoy consensus on the gospel but hold irreconcilable differences on justification, particularly in light of the insistence that the right preaching of the Gospel, normed by the article of justification by faith alone, determines whether the church shall stand or fall?"³³

38 The writer of the joint document himself has apparently struggled over terminology with which to report the results of the dialogue. Instead of claiming agreement, the document speaks of consensus (surely not the *magnus consensus* of the AC) and convergence. Admitting continued tension in many areas, it yet proposes that many positions of the two sides may be complementary rather than contradictory. Even to expect consensus in the dialogue is quite millennialistic when Helsinki revealed that Lutherans themselves no longer have consensus on this important doctrine.

39 Perhaps the greatest problem for Lutherans in dialogue as well as for Lutherans and Catholics in dialogue is the failure to keep what Chemnitz termed the *krinomenon* constantly in mind:

For this is the chief question, this is the issue, the point of controversy, the *krinomenon*; namely, what that is on account of which God receives sinful man into grace; what must and can be set over against the judgment of God, that we may not be condemned according to the strict sentence of the Law; what faith must apprehend and bring forward, on what it must rely when it wants to deal with God, that it may receive the remission of sins; what intervenes, on account of which God is rendered appeased and propitious to the sinner who has merited wrath and eternal damnation; what the conscience should set up as the thing on account of which the adoption may be bestowed on us, on what confidence can be safely reposed that we shall be accepted to life eternal, etc.; whether it is the satisfaction, obedience, and merit of the Son of God, the Mediator, or, indeed, the renewal which has been begun in us, the love, and other virtues in us. Here is the point at issue in the controversy, which is so studiously and deceitfully concealed in the Tridentine decrees. This I wanted for once to explain simply yet more fully that the reader may see that what has been placed into controversy in this topic is not a strife about words but a very serious matter and uniquely necessary for consciences. And when all disputations about this topic are brought under this scope, then all things are plainer.³⁴

40 If the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on Justification has not, despite the optimistic language

of the report, settled an age-old controversy, it may yet have served the purpose of returning people to the "cutting edge," Chemnitz' *krinomenon*. John F. Hotchkin, one of the Roman Catholic representatives on the joint dialogue committee writes: "When we started to dialogue twenty years ago, neither the Lutherans nor the Catholics ranked justification by faith as a subject needing priority attention. Six volumes of reports and published papers later, we reassessed the situation. By then, we spotted that in our discussions of every other issue, this teaching was always lurking just beneath the surface. . . So at last, it seemed right to bring the subject up to the surface and be explicit about our present agreement on it."³⁵

Surely no substantial agreement can be expected until both Lutherans and Catholics recognize that the anathemas of Canons XI and XII of the Council of Trent are totally opposed to the Scripture-based doctrine on which the church stands or falls.³⁶ That dialogue may at times help to clarify positions and remove unwarranted caricatures we readily grant, but these canons of Trent are not our caricatures; they remain for us an insurmountable obstacle to true union. We continue to pray for their removal.

Endnotes

- 1 Preface to document in Origins, the NC Documentary Service, henceforth referred to as Origins.
- 2 Origins, par. 7.
- 3 Origins, par. 8.
- 4 Origins, par. 18.
- 5 Tappert, The Book of Concord, p. 292, Part II, Article I, 1.
- 6 Alistair McGrath in Harvard Theological Review, 75:2, p. 219, contends that a survey of 12th century dogmatics works suggests that *aut* as a more accurate expression than *et*.
- 7 Origins, par. 28.
- 8 A footnote (57) in the Dialogue document states: The formula *fides caritate formata* was meant to interpret the Vulgate version of Galatians 5:6, "*fides quae per caritatem operatur*," transposing it into Aristotelian thought categories: "Faith formed (in the Aristotelian sense of formal causality) by charity, i.e., a faith animated by love. [The Greek is πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη and is usually translated "faith working by love."]
- 9 Augsburg Confession, IV, Tappert edition (from the Latin).
- 10 Origins, par. 40.
- 11 Origins, *ibid.*
- 12 Origins, par. 47.
- 13 Origins, par. 48.
- 14 Origins, par. 54.
- 15 Origins, par. 56.
- 16 Origins, par. 65.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Origins, par. 67.
- 19 Origins, par. 73.
- 20 Origins, par. 78.

- 21 Origins, par. 81. 22 Origins, par. 84.
- 23 Origins, par. 88. 24 Origins, par. 89.
- 25 Origins, par. 90. 26 Origins, par. 95.
- 27 Origins, par. 102. 28 Origins, par. 107.
- 29 Origins, par. 118. 30 Origins, par. 122.
- 31 Origins, par. 137. 32 Origins, par. 156.
- 33 C. B. Braaten, "No Breakthrough Whatever,"
Dialog, Vol. 23, p. 245.
- 34 Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of
Trent, Part I, Transl. by Fred Kramer, CPH 1971.
- 35 Reflections on Dialogue and Justification,
Ecumenical Trends, April 1984, p. 63.
- 36 Canon XI: If anyone says that a man is justified either solely by the imputation of Christ's righteousness or solely by the remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured out into their hearts by the Holy Spirit and stays with them or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God; let him be anathema.

Canon XII: If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema.

(Martin Chemnitz, Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I, Transl. by Fred Kramer, CPH 1971, p. 460.)

CORRECTIONS:

QUARTERLY, June 1987

Page 33. Line five (5) from the bottom of page:

Christ, God and Man, is present in the action

Page 38. End of line 19 should read:

Therefore, whoever takes the bread into his hand after the song or spoken blessing, is taking . . .

Page 47. Line 9 from top of page - last word is gathered, not fathered.

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