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(SHORT TITLE)

RECENT TEACHING ON HOLY SCRIPTURE

by
James H. ...

October 1964

Approved by: *E. J. ...*

[Signature]

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A SURVEY OF RECENT TEACHING ON
HOLY SCRIPTURE IN SELECTED
AMERICAN LUTHERAN THEOLOGIANS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Systematic Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

Leander Martin Waechter

October 1964

35775

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis the writer intends to investigate the doctrine of Holy Scripture as this doctrine is set forth and expounded among leading American Lutheran theologians. As the title indicates, the primary objective of this study is a survey, involving: (a) investigation and research; (b) analysis; (c) presentation and summary.¹

The title of this thesis delimits the scope of the investigation and research to "Recent Teaching on Holy Scripture in Selected American Lutheran Theologians."

In general, this writer has limited himself to books and articles which have appeared since 1950. There were, however, several exceptions to this general rule, which

¹Ragnar Bring, professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Lund, indicates the importance of the problem in the current theological milieu in his monograph, How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 15. He compares the present discussions to the great Christological controversies of the fourth century: "In the ancient church the theologically oriented questions of the most urgent sort were related to Christology, while today the most urgent problems have to do with our relation to the Bible."

should be noted. These were Joseph Sittler's² monograph entitled, The Doctrine of the Word, and Taito A. Kantonen's³ Resurgence of the Gospel, both published in 1948. A few quotations were also selected from Martin J. Heinecken's⁴ Basic Christian Teachings, dated 1949. One article by Warren A. Quanbeck⁵ in The Lutheran Quarterly, I (1949), was also considered. These exceptions were made for the sake of more complete coverage of the theologians named.

This survey does not include theologians of the writer's own church body, The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, since his concern in the present study was to broaden the base of his understanding and knowledge of the problem as it is being discussed in other communions within the Lutheran tradition. As the title indicates, this study is intended to be a "survey" of a prescribed

²Professor of Systematic Theology at Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Maywood, Illinois, 1943-1957. Since 1957 he is professor at the Divinity School of Chicago University.

³Professor of Systematic Theology, Hamma Divinity School (ULCA), Springfield, Ohio.

⁴Professor of Systematic Theology, Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Philadelphia, Pa.

⁵Professor of Systematic Theology, Luther Theological Seminary (ELC), St. Paul, Minn.

area of theological literature. The writer, therefore, had no particular thesis to prove as he pursued his investigation. He simply followed his sources where they led. The essayist, of course, had some intuition of what he might find, and his research has largely borne out this expectation, though there were some exceptions. After the material had been gathered, it was simply sorted under various headings. Hence the outline of this thesis, as shown in the TABLE OF CONTENTS is more inductive and analytical, than deductive and synthetic.

While engaged in this process of organization the writer became increasingly aware that much of the material could be subsumed under antithetical headings. The majority of our sources reject the antithesis and affirm the thesis. The antithetical chapter headings, therefore, are simply an attempt to indicate the substance of the material; they are not the conclusions of this writer. As a matter of fact, the writer is of the opinion that the antitheses do not necessarily express irreconcilable contradictories.

Three theological quarterlies, The Lutheran Quarterly, the Lutheran World, and The Ecumenical Review were the author's primary sources, so far as religious journalism is concerned. Of the many American Lutheran theologians

that the writer became acquainted with in the course of his research three claimed his particular attention for the purpose of this thesis. They are Joseph Sittler, Jr., Martin J. Heineken, and Taito A. Kantonen.

(The identification of positions and church bodies referred to contemplate in each case the time at which the respective individual produced the document cited.)

The cosmology of the Bible was shattered by the work of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Its chronology was brought under severe question by a critical science of history and the pursuit of critical palaeontology. The newly self-conscious science of literary criticism turned its attention toward the biblical record and revealed there the human and historical conditioning of the biblical text.¹

The Genesis account of creation seems to be one of the polemic issues of discussion. Martin J. Heineken maintains that "the account is quite unscientific and requires a lot of reinterpretation if it is to be squared with modern views."² Indeed,

¹ Joseph Sittler, Jr., *The Doctrine of the Word* (Philadelphia: the Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1949), p. 52.

² Martin J. Heineken, *Beginning and End of the World* (Philadelphia: G. E. Pub. Co., 1967), p. 391.

CHAPTER II

CRITICAL INVOLVEMENT: THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Alleged Conflict with Modern Science

Several of the Lutheran theologians either state explicitly or seem to imply that the modern scientific world-view necessitates a restatement of the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

The cosmology of the Bible was shattered by the work of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Its chronology was brought under severe question by a critical science of history and the pursuit of critical paleontology. The newly self-conscious science of literary criticism turned its attention toward the biblical record and revealed there the human and historical conditioning of the biblical text.¹

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¹Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 52.

²Martin J. Heinecken, Beginning and End of the World (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), p. 39f.

we should not expect the Bible, as the witness to God's self-revelation, to give us a description of the process through which our earth and our planetary system developed to its present stage. The first chapters of Genesis reflect, quite naturally, a primitive cosmology (that is, picture of the cosmos or universe) and a nonscientific cosmogony (that is, theory of the origin and development of the universe). . . . The Bible is not a textbook in science, but the witness to God's great acts.³

In view of these considerations Heinecken seems to favor a theistic form of evolution. He writes:

All this may have taken millions of years, through successive ages, until finally some form of life appeared--first in the water, then on the land--in successive stages; until man appeared as the crown of this creative process. At each level of development, particularly at the transition from man to animal, something qualitatively new appeared due to God's creative Word.⁴

Indeed, the theory of evolution, we are told, should arouse no further argument among thinking people.

No great insight is needed to see that neither the science of Genesis nor the theology of the more confident biologists is inspired--so we now feel. We have gotten past arguing about such things--so we now rejoice. Only, if it is all that simple why are

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 43. On the previous page Heinecken describes the formation of the universe and especially the planetary system in terms of the nebular hypothesis.

so many good people still exercised about it?⁵

Another approach is exemplified in an article by J. Schoneberg Setzer⁶ directed against the cosmology of Rudolph Bultmann. Setzer criticizes the "antiquated cosmology," which he maintains is the cause of "the ignominious surrender" on the part of some modern theologians. Setzer draws attention to a clear, logical distinction, which is made by modern scientific philosophy.

The New Physics, we have been attempting to explain, has realized that science constructs changing and merely operational Weltbilder, and that empirical science is incapable in very principle of producing a Weltanschauung. The rationalistic mistake of mistakes has been to transform the scientific Weltbild into the philosophic Weltanschauung.⁷

Setzer points out ". . . the unbridgeable chasm that exists between Weltbild and Weltanschauung, and asserts that it is the Weltanschauung of mechanism that makes Christianity

⁵Robert W. Jenson, "A Dead Issue Revisited," The Lutheran Quarterly, XIV (1962), 53. Jenson is assistant professor of Philosophy in Luther College (ALC), Decorah, Iowa.

⁶J. Schoneberg Setzer, "The Cosmology of Rudolf Bultmann," The Lutheran Quarterly, XV (1963). At the time of writing the author had left Union Congregation (ULCA) near Salisbury, North Carolina, to pursue further studies in Duke University.

⁷Ibid., pp. 174f.

hard to believe."⁸ The confusion of these two concepts he calls "the colossal blunder of promoting a working hypothesis, which is the handmaid of research, into the affirmation of faith, which is a reigning monarch of philosophic absolutism."⁹

Evidences of the Documentary Hypothesis

The second premise, which is often advanced by modern biblical scholars to show cause for a "new approach" to the Bible and a re-formulation of the doctrine of Holy Scripture, is the documentary or source hypothesis. This hypothesis is a construction of "higher" or "literary criticism," to distinguish it from textual criticism. The Bible is made the subject of the same critical analysis and investigation as any other literature. The unity, authorship, and historical trustworthiness of the various books of the Bible are generally called into question.

Some of the Lutheran theologians, who accept the results of higher criticism, seek a new conception of the Scriptures. Thus Eric H. Wahlstrom, professor of New Testament at the Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois, states

⁸Ibid., p. 175

⁹Ibid.

expressly:

The Bible itself, as a product of human efforts, is subject to similar critical investigation. . . . It is impossible to ignore the vast amount of critical biblical research produced within the past 150 years. If our conception of the Bible is such that it prevents us from asking these questions or accepting the critical results, we have to develop a new conception of the Word of God that is compatible with historical reality. The Bible is a document written by men who recorded events that occurred in human history, and as such it must submit to critical evaluation.¹⁰

The Pentateuch, certainly, is one of the primary sections of Holy Writ which has been analyzed according to the source hypothesis. That some Lutheran theologians follow this theory and regard the first five books of the Bible as a compilation of various "redactors" and not as the work of Moses is seen in the following statement:

Here the results of modern Old Testament criticism come to aid us, for so long as the Pentateuch in its present form was regarded as the work of Moses, it was impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Old Testament faith was also predominantly a matter of cultus, of the sacrificial ritual, and the observance of festivals: On the other hand, we know that a large part of the sacrificial ritual as described in the Priestly code was borrowed after the Conquest, most likely from Canaanite practice, or inherited from pre-Mosaic times. We have the seemingly clear position

¹⁰ Eric H. Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 6. (Italics mine).

of the prophets that sacrifice was not characteristic of the earliest Israelite religion.¹¹

Another Old Testament book which is commonly divided by higher critics is that of the prophet Isaiah. Second and third Isaiahs have been defined, and still others, which are less clearly delineated. Some Lutheran scholars, too, have accepted a Second Isaiah. J. Benjamin Bedenbaugh, instructor in the Biblical Department in the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (ULCA), Columbia, South Carolina, writes concerning "Deutero-Isaiah":

It is probably not going too far to say that it was our prophet who confronted Israel with the first radical monotheism. Functions that had been assigned to other deities, like the fertility of the soil and the productivity of nature (Hos. 2:8), had gradually been seen to be the real function of Yahweh; but Deutero-Isaiah takes the final leap and declares that these beings are not only inactive but non-existent.¹²

It seems hardly necessary to point out that in the above quotation the author seems to indicate his acceptance of the idea of a progressive monotheism in the actual worship

¹¹George E. Mendenhall (ULCA), "Biblical Faith and Cultic Evolution," The Lutheran Quarterly, V (1953), 244f. Mendenhall is a member of the Department of Near Eastern Studies in the University of Michigan.

¹²J. Benjamin Bedenbaugh, "The Doctrine of God in Deutero-Isaiah," The Lutheran Quarterly, XI (1959), 154.

life of the people of Israel. Toward the end of the article he remarks: "We cannot complete this survey of some of his leading ideas without registering a sense of gratitude for this nameless prophet. . . ."13

The addition of segments to the book of Isaiah is set forth in an article entitled, "The Unity of Isaiah 1 - 12." The author, Robert J. Marshall, states the general thesis, "We should expect a prophetic book to resemble an anthology, an anthology with additions by admirers of the poet."14

The author elaborates this theme as follows:

If the authorship of Isa. 1 - 12 represents more than one generation of work, as it probably does, it is very likely that the writers were disciples of the prophet Isaiah. What would appear to be later material has not been introduced into the text in a haphazard fashion. On the contrary, it is related to the themes in the so-called earlier material. Hence the later authors could well have been students or reciters of the prophecy. Moved by what they had learned, they added consistent segments. In this case Isa. 1 - 12 could be said to arise from a certain sociological unity, a group that continued through several gener-

¹³Ibid., p. 158 (italics mine).

¹⁴Robert J. Marshall, "The Unity of Isaiah 1 - 12," The Lutheran Quarterly, XIV (1962), 22. Marshall is professor of the Old Testament in Chicago Lutheran Seminary (ULCA), Maywood, Illinois

ations.¹⁵

Closely allied to this division of the Old Testament books on the part of higher critics is the fact that some scholars place the predictive element in the prophetic sections, particularly in the messianic prophecies, into a new perspective. "Prophecy," says Robert E. Bornemann,

is not a matter of precise prediction. The relation of prophecy and fulfillment is not that of correspondence. One cannot begin with prophecy and come out with the picture of Jesus. The fulfillment is always something other than the prophecy.¹⁶

Professor Wahlstrom declares that the so-called "Second Isaiah" was an eye-witness of the Return from the Babylonian Exile, and his prophecy expresses his hopes for a glorious restoration of the Kingdom of Judah in the immediate future. "It is evident," he writes,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 21. Cf. Harold L. Creager, Review: Prophecy in Ancient Israel by J. Lindblom, The Lutheran Quarterly, XVI (1964), 73: "The prophetic books contain some material written down by the prophets themselves, some directly entrusted to their disciples, some collected, condensed and written by the disciples on their own initiative. Also there was some oral transmission which led to changes and also to doublets." Creager is professor of Old Testament, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (ULCA), Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁶Robert E. Bornemann, "On Prophecy and Fulfillment," The Lutheran Quarterly, VII (1955), 337. Bornemann is assistant professor of the Old Testament in The Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

that chapters 40-66 of Isaiah represent the vision of the prophet as he ponders the meaning of this return to Jerusalem which is now assured through the generosity of Cyrus.¹⁷

A little later Wahlstrom asserts that there is truth in the interpretation that the Suffering Servant is Jesus.¹⁸

Apparently, he feels that in the providence of God the prophet's message had a double frame of reference. "It must not be forgotten," says Wahlstrom,

that the prophets saw in the event of their time a great redemptive act of God, through which a new age would dawn for God's people and for the world. The prophets were not speaking of the distant future but of the immediate future.¹⁹

.....
The unity of the Bible is to be found in God and in his redemptive activity which is the same from beginning to end.²⁰

The manner in which some prophecies, often alleged to refer to the distant future, are made contemporary is illustrated by the following comment on the familiar

¹⁷Wahlstrom, p. 30f. (Italics original). Cf. p. 62: "Where in all the Old Testament, with the exception of second Isaiah--which had never been interpreted messianically--had it been said that the Messiah was to suffer and die and on the third day rise again?"

¹⁸Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁹Ibid. (Italics original).

²⁰Ibid., p. 33.

passage, Isaiah 9,6:

To remove one final argument that Isa. 9 must refer to deity rather than an Israelite king, we note that the English translation of Isa. 9:6 may exaggerate the titles of the king. "Mighty God" could just as well be "mighty hero." There is a parallel in Ezek. 32:17. The Hebrew is 'el, not 'elohim, as for the term "everlasting father." We have seen that it was not unusual to refer to the king as everlasting; and "father" does not refer to a father deity but to the king as father of the nation, a natural derivative from the patriarchal rule in tribal society. Isa. 9 speaks of the king in exalted terms, but not so exalted as to offend Hebrew monotheism. Thus our familiar Christmas lesson was first sung within the milieu created by Davidic monarchy.²¹

We shall conclude with a lament on the part of a New Testament scholar that graduates of some theological seminaries have not been intellectually consistent in carrying the results of their critical training out into the parish ministry.

Too often a seminarian does lip service to the findings of contemporary Bible study for three years but in the parish follows the line of least resistance in preaching and teaching and bows to the entrenched

²¹Marshall, p. 25. Cf. Robert E. Bornemann's comment on the section Is. 7,1 to 9,7: "Can it be said, then, that these are prophecies of Jesus, ho Christos? They are not if we think of them as predictions of New Testament events, or as 'riddles' spoken by Isaiah but whose meanings he did not know," p. 334.

biblicism and dominant "Jesusism" of American Volkstheologie.²²

It is not within the province of this thesis to engage upon a lengthy polemic and rebuttal against the documentary hypothesis. The writer at this point merely wishes to make a few summary observations. It is perhaps worthy of note that the theologians adduced above never defended their views; they were simply stated without apology. The conclusion, therefore, seems justified that these Lutheran professors assumed their theories were more or less taken for granted, or, at least, that there would be no strenuous objection to them among their readers.

The Influence of Neo-Orthodoxy and Demythologizing

Martin J. Heineken, professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, writes of neo-orthodox theologians in general:

What they all have in common, which perhaps justifies the designation neo-orthodoxy, is that they accept the findings of higher criticism of the twentieth

²²John Reumann, "The Dead Sea Scrolls in America: A Survey of Five Years of Popular Literature," "The Lutheran Quarterly, XII (1960), 108. Reumann is professor of New Testament in the Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

century world in general while nevertheless accepting the historic revelation to which the Bible bears witness. . . .²³

Similarly, Professor Taito A. Kantonen, of the Hamma Divinity School, Springfield, Ohio, sympathetically describes the Barthian theology as follows:

Barth's fundamental message. . . couples an enlightened biblical scholarship with a profound insight into the spiritual content and living function of the Bible instead of quibbling about the peripheral matters of letter and form. In its devotion to the Word and to the central truths of orthodox Christianity it seems to have retained the virtues of fundamentalism while rejecting its vices.²⁴

Modern liberal theology, Joseph Sittler maintains, "has no doctrine of the Word of God at all in any classical sense."

On the other hand, he writes concerning Barth as follows:

The very title of one of his earliest works, "Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie" is both diagnostic and ironic. Over against "Theologie" as it had come to be understood in his day he places "Das Wort Gottes" in sharpest possible opposition.²⁵

²³ Martin J. Heineken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (1956-57), 366.

²⁴ Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel, (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 15.

²⁵ Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Education of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 58.

Still another influence upon American Lutheran Theology relative to the doctrine of Holy Scripture is that of Rudolf Bultmann's demythologizing. The writer should state immediately that this influence is not general or wide-spread. As a matter of fact, only two of the Lutheran theologians covered in this survey exhibited this tendency to any marked degree. They are Martin J. Heineken and Eric Wahlstrom.

The Bible, Heineken declares, is not "an exact historical record in the ordinary sense." Rather, it is "the human record of God's self-impartation in which the part which 'myth' (carefully defined) plays is recognized."²⁶ He explains the need for demythologizing the Scriptures on the ground that preachers and theologians must not put the offense of the Gospel at the wrong place by insisting that men of intellectual honesty and scientific respectability must necessarily believe the mythological elements of the Bible to be factually true. "Demythologization," he says, "releases the kerygma, the real mes-

²⁶Martin J. Heineken, "Bultmann's Theology and the Message of the Preacher," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954) 286.

sage of the preacher" and makes it possible "to touch men in their real need."²⁷ Indeed, he warns the preacher:

we must not set up a false stumbling-block. We must not, as Wilhelm Herrmann suggested long ago, make a virtue of believing that runs counter to evidence. This, too, is a form of work-righteousness, this wanting to have credit for believing three impossible things before breakfast, like the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland. This is not the proper sacrificium intellectus.²⁸

The early part of the story of human existence as recorded in the Bible, especially the accounts "of the creation of the first human beings, the Fall, the antediluvian development, and the Flood," says Professor Wahlstrom, "is obviously prehistorical, mythological, and legendary."²⁹ Indeed, "it is not absolutely necessary that the record of the events be complete or even accurate."³⁰

Concerning the story of the Fall he writes:

This story, like the story of Noah, is mythological, poetic, and couched in anthropomorphic language, and appeared in the biblical record at a relatively late date. . . . The significance of these events for us

²⁷Ibid., p. 283 (Italics original).

²⁸Ibid., p. 288.

²⁹Wahlstrom, p. 4.

³⁰Ibid., p. 8f.

is not to be found in their historicity as such, but rather in what they reveal about God's approach to man and about the purpose and destiny of his creation.³¹

In all fairness to these two theologians, Heinecken and Wahlstrom, it should be stated that they do not follow Rudolf Bultmann to the ultimate logical conclusions of his demythologizing process. When they speak of certain narratives recorded in the Scriptures as being mythological or legendary, they are not necessarily passing judgment upon the historicity of these events. "It is not a necessary consequence of the scientific classification of the myths and legends," says Wahlstrom, "to treat them as simply fictitious stories, which lack any basis in fact or relationship to reality."³² Heinecken, too, after having expounded Bultmann's theology quite sympathetically, toward the end of the article asserts:

If everything may be dissolved into anthropology and the real saving events disappear into thin air, . . . then I cannot go along. Then the objective basis for the preacher's message would be gone. By all means the objective events must be proclaimed.³³

³¹Ibid., p. 26.

³²Ibid., p. 1 (Italics mine).

³³Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology. . .," p. 294 (Italics mine).

CHAPTER III

VERBAL INSPIRATION VS. THE BIBLE AS RECORD, WITNESS, AND MEDIUM

In view of the theological presuppositions exhibited in the previous chapter it is not surprising that the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures is rejected by some Lutheran theologians covered in this survey. Here a word of caution may be in order. The writer does not wish to imply in this section that all forms of verbal inspiration are correct. There have been theories of verbal inspiration in the past, and they are still held in some fundamentalist circles today, which would make automatons of the holy writers and deny them any individuality of their own. Moreover, this form of verbal inspiration virtually canonizes the existing documents and for all practical purposes rejects the results of textual criticism (as distinct from "higher" criticism). Whenever the terms "mechanical," "dictation theory," or "fundamentalistic" occur, we may assume that the theologians are referring to this uncritical form of verbal inspiration. In some cases, however, the statements do not seem to differentiate clearly between the types of verbal inspiration. The reader, there-

fore, will occasionally have to rely on his own discretion in evaluating the quotations adduced.

John Reumann apparently is alluding to the dictation theory when he writes: "Most of us reject the later theories of verbal inspiration, binding the Bible so, more Aristotelian often than the doctrine of transubstantiation."¹ In another connection the same writer remarks:

The notion of the Scriptures is often fundamentalistic, colored by some shade of verbal inspiration and a crude bibliolatry that regards the Book with an awe immune to much of modern criticism.²

Referring to the various accounts of Christ's resurrection recorded in the Gospels, Martin J. Heineken concludes:

Unless you hold to a verbally inspired record and then seek to harmonize all the contradictions, honest historical criticism must admit that not everything reported can have happened as reported.³

The following statement by Heineken is one of the doubtful variety, concerning which the reader will have to

¹John Reumann, "Retreat from the Word or Return to It?" The Lutheran Quarterly, XIII (1961), 319.

²John Reumann, "The Dead Sea Scrolls in America: A Survey of Five Years of Popular Literature," The Lutheran Quarterly, XII (1960), 107.

³Martin J. Heineken, Review: Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte by Hans Grass, Lutheran World, VI (1959-60), 107.

use his own judgment. However, the quotation clearly reveals his acceptance of the historical critical method.

The starting point is the acceptance of the verbal and "plenary" inspiration of the Bible, "true in the whole and in the part", containing an "objective revelation," an "objective moral code" in the form of propositions to be held as true and acted upon in faith. It means a repudiation of practically all of higher criticism and regarding every assertion of the Bible in the original manuscripts, no matter whether they concern cosmology or geography or anthropology or ordinary historical fact, as true.⁴

In his little monograph, The Doctrine of the Word, Joseph Sittler states his objections to verbal inspiration. He refers to the fact that the seventeenth century dogmatists, whom he calls the "scholastic theologians," recognized the difficulty inherent in the fact that the Scriptures demonstrate a wide variety of personal styles. "But," he continues, "the doctrine of direct verbal inspiration

⁴Martin J. Heineken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (1956-7), 363. Heineken apparently has some reservations with regard to the expression, "content and fitting word," (Pittsburgh Agreement, Article III). When questioned on this point, he replied in a personal communication addressed to the writer, dated October 15, 1964: "I am of the conviction that the whole approach to biblical revelation which includes a doctrine of inspiration as referring to a text which we are then constrained to say we do not possess is abortive and futile. I think that what is involved can be stated without having to posit an 'inspired' text."

was not deterred thereby."⁵ Apparently Sittler understands the orthodox theologians to have taught a dictation theory of inspiration. Later he warns that the "theory" of inspiration is symptomatic of the desire to remove the offense of the Gospel and the requirement of faith. Witness the following statement:

Now this eternal offense of the Gospel may present itself to us as a desire for an understanding of the Word of God from which all offense is removed. We want a doctrine of the Word of God which shall be related to scripture in such a way that we shall not have to believe. We desire some logically persuasive theory of inspiration in which we may believe--and then go on to believe in God because the scriptures, in which we have a prior belief, tell us about him. This is not really belief in God. This is belief in a theory of inspiration. As such it comes perilously close to being the kind of offense against which Jesus so regularly warned.⁶

In the course of this survey the writer came across several expressions, which, while not mentioning inspiration by name, nevertheless seemed to refer to it in its mechanical form. On two separate occasions Taito A. Kantonen affirms that the Word of God is not "God's thoughts handed down to us in transcript."⁷

⁵Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 42.

⁶Ibid., p. 65 (Italics original).

⁷Cf. Taito A. Kantonen, "Christ--The Hope of Those Who are Outside the Church," Lutheran World, I (1954-5), 114 and Taito A. Kantonen, A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 16f.

He deprecates an attitude of "legalism, the use of the Bible as though it were a book of law containing regulations to be literally observed always and everywhere."⁸ Another theologian speaks of a theology which attempts "to understand Holy Scripture not as something that has dropped bodily from heaven as the Koran or the Book of Mormon."⁹

William Narum, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, notes that for Luther "the message of justification is central, what deals with justification in the Bible is authentic, . . ." He describes the mechanical form of verbal inspiration as a "dictation of the Holy Spirit," and asserts that it stems from Calvinism. He voices his concern that such a view of inspiration is essentially legalism. For Calvin, he maintains,

The authority of the Bible is due to the fact that it was composed under the dictation of the Holy Spirit, which led later in both Calvinist and Lutheran orthodoxy to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, which surpasses anything in Calvin himself. Then, too, since the whole Bible is law, the distinction between the Old and New Testaments disappears, a phenomenon you find still in Calvinism. Now I am not concerned here to talk about the technical problem of inspiration--what I am concerned to point out is the legalism which

⁸Kantonen, Stewardship, p. 10.

⁹Jerald C. Brauer, "Theology at the University and in the Church," Lutheran World, IV (1957-8), 363f. Brauer, a clergyman of the United Lutheran Church in America, is Dean of the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago.

is the result of this view of inspiration.¹⁰

To summarize briefly: The majority of American Lutheran theologians under consideration, if they speak of verbal inspiration at all, speak of it in generally negative terms. The results of the historical critical method and modern science have convinced them that the Bible contains errors, discrepancies, and contradictions. Hence, they agree that verbal inspiration, especially in its mechanical form, must be rejected and discarded.

The Bible as Witness, Record, and Medium

John Reumann, whose strictures regarding verbal inspiration have already been pointed out,¹¹ does not wish to discard the concept of inspiration nor to avoid all discussion of the Spirit's role in Scripture. He calls attention to a distinction between Greek and Hebraic views of inspiration. "The Hellenistic notion," he maintains, "was of an inspired book; words were divinely fixed, and anyone could go to this almost magical book and unlock their meaning."¹² This,

¹⁰William Narum, "Preaching of Justification: a Self-Examination of the Church," Lutheran World, VI (1959-60), 370.

¹¹Supra, p. 21.

¹²Reumann, "Retreat from the Word. . .", p. 319f.

according to him, has in the past been the view of the Lutheran Church in America. With this he contrasts the Judaistic view of inspiration, "which sees the Spirit active at this end, with the interpreter, as well as at the other end, in the writer's day."¹³ Reumann's meaning when he speaks of inspiration at the writer's end soon becomes apparent. He cites

Form Criticism, that discipline which teaches us that most of our stories about Jesus circulated orally for twenty years or so, passed on from devout mouth to mouth, before the evangelists wrote them down. Such a view makes it clear that it will not do, in defining inspiration, to limit it to the four evangelists. We must see the Spirit at work in dozens of nameless witnesses who transmitted words and stories which Luke, for example, later wrote down.¹⁴

Reumann is conscious of the objection raised against Bultmann's form critical analysis that "he thus canonizes the whole Palestinian church!" Reumann affirms simply, "And that, I suggest, was so."¹⁵ However, the Spirit-motivated witness of the first generation Christians as recorded in the Scriptures is not just a report of God's words and deeds,

¹³Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁴Ibid. (Italics mine).

¹⁵Ibid.

but an interpretation of their significance as well. Reumann concludes:

And in this sense, I suggest, scripture is part of the revelation itself--not just a witness to historical events but a normative understanding for the people of God as to their meaning.¹⁶

Martin J. Heinecken, too, gives frequent evidence of the witness idea in relation to Holy Scripture. He remarks that the four gospels are not simple biography of the man Jesus. "They are rather the post-Pentecost witness of believers to what this historical person meant to them. . . ."¹⁷ This concept of a Spirit filled, interpretive witness comes out clearly in the following statement:

The point which has been made so often is that in the Bible we have the witness of believers behind which it is impossible to penetrate. The Bible is witness, not biography or ordinary history. The New Testament writings are all post-Pentecost and give the interpretation faith put upon certain witnessed events.¹⁸

The efficacy of the Scriptures also comes under consideration. Heinecken, too, would say that the Spirit of

¹⁶Ibid., p. 313.

¹⁷Martin J. Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology and the Message of the Preacher," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954), 290.

¹⁸Martin J. Heinecken, The Moment before God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 260, passim.

God is active on both ends of the biblical witness. "There is a sense," he says,

in which one must also speak of the sole and sufficient efficacy of the Bible, but this is because in it we have the selfsame, all-sufficient, efficacious gospel to which the Bible is the final and authoritative witness.¹⁹

According to Heinecken "the Biblical record is not just a compendium of doctrines or truths but the witness to certain events. . . ,"²⁰ Nevertheless, the concept of the Scriptures as witness does not deny the fact that the Bible also contains doctrines. Heinecken continues: ". . . it is as such a witness replete with the doctrines which the transformed believers affirmed and which distinguished them from their pagan neighbors."²¹

The purpose of the biblical record is also explained by Heinecken. It was to record in writing the testimony of the original eye-witnesses, so that it might be pre-

¹⁹Martin J. Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 44.

²⁰Ibid., p. 47f.

²¹Ibid.

served and remain as a constant check upon the oral proclamation.²²

This is how the canon of the New Testament came to be accepted and to have authority. It was the literary deposit of the first in the long chain of witnesses that stretched through the years.²³

Finally, Heinecken also speaks of the medium of revelation, which, he maintains, "is always the 'creature' never to be identified with the 'creator,' yet 'charged with' the presence of the 'creator.'"²⁴ Through the medium of revelation God confronts man in a direct and personal encounter.

The medium does not destroy the immediacy and if anyone hopes to make "closer" contact by evading the medium in some kind of direct intuition or vision, he will substitute an "idol" for the true God.²⁵

Both the oral proclamation and the written Word of the apostles emanated from the same source, the Spirit of the risen Christ, affirms Taito A. Kantonen.²⁶ However,

²²Martin J. Heinecken, Basic Christian Teachings (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 122.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Heinecken, Moment, p. 86.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 107.

he would clearly give pre-eminence to the spoken Word in the apostolic witness, as indicated in the following statement:

The burden of the apostolic witness was not "God wrote a book" but "God sent forth his Son." . . . The disciples went forth, not with rolls of papyrus under their arms but with the Spirit in their hearts and the living Gospel on their lips.²⁷

In order to preserve this apostolic witness for later generations, Kantonen explains, "the same Spirit who inspired all their work" led the apostles and their associates "to draw up brief written accounts" of the Savior's life and teaching.²⁸

Thus the apostolic witness obtained the enduring form of the New Testament. . . . Through the written Word the church retains an unbroken and uncorrupted continuity with the original Christian witness and provides for men in every age an encounter with the Word that became flesh for us.²⁹

"The biblical record," says Eric Wahlstrom, "is a record 'from faith to faith;' i.e., it is an expression

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Taito A. Kantonen, A Theology for Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 14f.

²⁹Ibid.

of faith, and it is given in order to produce faith."³⁰ In another connection, he describes the Bible as "the record of God's redemptive activity and the continuation of that activity. Revelation is the result of this activity of God."³¹ According to Wahlstrom, therefore, revelation does not reside solely in the redemptive acts of God, nor in the biblical record alone, but rather as the redemptive acts are interpreted to the believer in the record of the Scriptures.

We have this revelation of his will and purpose in the redemptive acts recorded in the Bible. These past events we can know and analyze. They tell us the character and purpose of God. This record is the foundation of our faith.³²

Joseph Sittler also speaks of Scripture as a witness to Christ. He quotes Philip Watson approvingly, when the latter says of Luther: ". . . he is invariably thinking of Scripture as a witness to Christ, a vehicle of the

³⁰Eric Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 57.

³¹Eric Wahlstrom, "Historical Criticism, the Bible and the Word of God," The Lutheran Quarterly, II (1950), 303.

³²Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems, p. 54.

Word."³³ Still quoting Watson, he continues a little later: "But, for Luther, all authority of the Scripture is secondary and derivative, pertaining to them only inasmuch as they bear witness to Christ and are a vehicle of the Word."³⁴ The "instrumental character" of the Scriptures as "vehicle of the Word" is once more expressed by Sittler in the following statement. The quotation is interesting from the point of view that all three concepts of witness, record, and medium are exhibited (though the term "medium" is not used):

The biblical writers themselves understood their words in this instrumental character. They pointed beyond themselves to that Word of life and power to which their own recorded words were related as record, confirmation, witness. The word which they write can only be attested to the beholder by that same selfsame Word whose action caused them to write at all.³⁵

Warren A. Quanbeck, professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, holds that the witness of the first disciples as recorded in the

³³Philip Watson, Let God be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), pp. 174ff. Quoted in Joseph Sittler, Jr., Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 34.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Sittler, Doctrine of the Word, p. 63.

Scriptures was more than mere reporting of the events in the life of Jesus. It was a witness accompanied by God's mighty power and working. Note the correlation of the concepts of "witness," "Word of God," "word of power" and God's action.

He writes:

When the first disciples begin to witness to the resurrection of Jesus they discover that the word concerning Jesus the Messiah is also the Word of God. Where Jesus is proclaimed as God's salvatory deed, the word of power sounds forth and men are granted faith and life. And this word too is a word of power, working miracles of healing, and manifesting that God's word is His action.³⁶

Subsequently, in the same "Study Document," Quanbeck also puts the concepts of witness, record, and medium in juxtaposition. He speaks of the Scriptures as the "shrine" of the apostolic witness. The record of God's redeeming actions, moreover, is not simple reporting, but also an interpretation of those actions. Finally, through the Scriptures as medium, God continues to speak His Word. The paragraph is one of the most illustrative of these three concepts that the writer encountered.

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments enshrine the prophetic and apostolic witness to Jesus

³⁶Warren A. Quanbeck, A Study Document on Justification (n.p., November, 1962), Par. 69, p. 30.

the Word. Through the providential preparation of the Scripture God has given His church the record of His redeeming actions, and the prophetic and apostolic interpretation of those actions as the very work of God. This collection of books is the medium or instrument through which God continues to speak His word of judgment and grace.³⁷

In conclusion, the writer should state that the witness-record-medium concept of the Scriptures is not necessarily opposed to the idea of divine inspiration nor to the acknowledgment that the Bible is normative for the faith and life of the Church. The statement which follows is from the constitution for the Lutheran Church in America, a merger of the former United Lutheran Church, the Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Suomi Synod, and the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. The constitution was

³⁷Ibid., p. 31. The concept of the Scriptures as medium is occasionally correlated with the idea of truth. One such statement is by Ragnar Bring, professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Lund. He speaks of the Bible as the medium of truth--truth, however, not in the sense of simple historical factuality, but truth requiring personal involvement. The statement follows: "Thus, the Bible mediates a truth--but it is a truth of a more comprehensive and profound nature than what others call truth when they, for example, establish the relations between certain things in time and space. For this reason theology has talked about a divine revelation which is given through Holy Scripture. Scripture mediates a truth which is involved with the salvation of man, including his relationship with eternity and his whole position before God." How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 2f.

adopted, and the new church body began its official life on January first, 1963. The quotation is from Article II--

Confession of Faith, Section 3:

This church acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as the norm for the faith and life of the Church. The Holy Scriptures are the divinely inspired record of God's redemptive act in Christ, for which the Old Testament prepared the way and which the New Testament proclaims. In the continuation of this proclamation in the Church, God still speaks through the Holy Scriptures and realizes His redemptive purpose generation after generation.³⁸

³⁸Unsigned, "Confession and Constitution," Lutheran World, VIII (1961), 204 (Italics mine). Incidentally, an earlier form of this paragraph did not have the expression, "divinely inspired record." Cf. A. V. Neve, "Correspondence and Comment," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), 359. Neve is superintendent of the Good Shepherd Old People's Home (ULCA) in Blair, Nebraska.

CHAPTER IV

INERRANCY AND SUBJECTIVE TRUTH

Both terms in the title of this chapter need some qualification. The term "inerrant," like verbal inspiration, has occasionally been extended to cover the existing documents of the Scriptures. In this view the expression is not perforce synonymous with "infallible", although some of the theologians virtually equate them. Again, it may be worthy of note that an "infallible Bible" is not quite the same as an "infallible norm"; a theologian might conceivably accept one and reject the other. On the other hand, by the expression "subjective truth" the writer does not intend to attribute to the Lutheran theologians a crass form of subjectivity, which holds that truth is created by the subject and exists only in the subject. In this chapter the term will be used to convey the idea that the divine truth of the Scriptures must be personally apprehended by the subject through the involvement of faith, in order to achieve its salutary purpose. In the light of these precautionary remarks, it will be seen that the concepts of "inerrancy" and "subjective truth" are not necessarily contradictory.

Martin J. Heinecken writes most prolifically on this particular aspect of the doctrine of Scripture. He refers to "the controversies waged over the inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible." He concludes:

It is thus impossible to find an objectively certain basis for the revelation of God in Christ. . . . Fundamentalists, who staked everything on a repudiation of higher criticism, have definitely lost the battle.¹

He holds that a changed attitude toward the Bible is absolutely essential to the right kind of reconciliation between science and the message and mission of the church.²

He describes the concept of the Bible as an inerrant rule as a "flight to security,"³ which is a

frightening revival of the kind of Biblicism which looks to the Bible as an inerrant oracle, every sentence of which is true, and which speaks authoritatively on all matters, whether they concern anthropology, geography, history, chemistry, or physics.⁴

For both Luther and Kierkegaard, Heinecken maintains, "truth is subjectivity. Each individual must enter into

¹Martin J. Heinecken, The Moment before God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, p. 262.

²Martin J. Heinecken, God in the Space Age (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1959), p. 73.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

the God-relationship for himself."⁵ Heinecken is conscious of the objection that the idea of subjective truth seems to run counter to the objective certainty of an infallible Bible.

There is grave shaking of heads and clacking of tongues. "We must not let the objective truth be lost in subjectivity," they say. "If every man is to judge for himself what is good and what is true, we will have chaos. So back to Mother Church, with its rigid system of doctrine, with its hierarchy, with its objectively valid sacraments. Or back to the Bible with its infallible truths!"⁶

Heinecken asserts that "the acceptance of the verbal and 'plenary' inspiration of the Bible, 'true in the whole and in the part'," fails to make any distinction between "a simple historical fact such as Washington crossing the Delaware and a revelatory fact, such as that of God entering into history in the man Jesus."⁷ "Revelation," he affirms, "does not consist in propositions held to be true, but it is God in his self-impartation."⁸ Truth and the knowledge of the

⁵Heinecken, Moment, p. 283 (Italics original).

⁶Ibid.

⁷Martin J. Heinecken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (1956-57), 363.

⁸Ibid., p. 362.

truth to Heinecken is a relational process; it is found in the encounter and not at the end of a syllogism.

To know God is to be known of him, and this is a matter of right relationship, as has so often been pointed out after the analogy of the sexual relation. The God of the Bible does not correspond to any single idea in man's mind. He is not the archetype of an idea. He is the living God who confronts man, stands over against him, addresses him, face to face, eye to eye, even though this is in a medium or mask."⁹

After recounting the great redemptive acts of God in Christ to which faith witnesses in the biblical record, Heinecken states:

Those who thus witness are themselves transformed and those who accept this witness must in turn themselves be transformed. Here "subjectivity is truth." He who means to establish an "objective certainty" only confuses the issue.¹⁰

The emphasis upon the objectivity of the revelation, which Heinecken does not reject, nevertheless "fails to take into account the necessary subjective side. It is the fides quae creditur to the exclusion of the fides qua."¹¹

Hence, one should

⁹Martin J. Heinecken, "The Tension between Love and Truth," The Lutheran Quarterly, XI (1959), pp. 201-202.

¹⁰Heinecken, Moment, p. 265.

¹¹Heinecken, "Currents," p. 363.

not confuse the mere historical fact with the redemptive fact. The historical fact is by no means denied, but it is the medium in which the redemptive fact is hidden. The two together constitute the revelation, but there is no revelation where there is no "faith" (inner transformation). So, once more, the thesis is proven, truth is subjectivity,"12

Indeed, Heinecken never tires of affirming his conclusion that "truth is subjectivity."¹³ Therefore,

Only he who lives in the truth possesses the truth. The affirmations of faith are existential propositions so that they cannot either be affirmed or denied except by actual personal participation.¹⁴

For Luther, says Taito A. Kantonen, "The problem of the fundamentalists of our day, the defense of the errorlessness of the written documents, simply did not exist. . . ."15 Appealing again to Luther's example, he writes:

It is strange reasoning indeed to insist on the absolute inerrancy of the Bible in the smallest details and from cover to cover, and yet to follow and defend a leader who rejected whole books within it as unfit to be considered the Word of God.¹⁶

On at least two occasions Kantonen refers to Luther's distinction between the "theology of glory" and the "theo-

¹²Heinecken, Moment, p. 265.

¹³Supra, pp. 37-39-40.

¹⁴Heinecken, Moment, p. 290.

¹⁵Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 117.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 119.

logy of the Cross."¹⁷ The "theology of glory," says Kantonen, seeks a Bible "which can be rationally demonstrated to be inerrant."¹⁸ On the other hand, "It is more consistent with the 'theology of the Cross' to expect God to speak through a medium in which reason sees human limitations. . . ."19 In the Scriptures, according to Kantonen, God "has so concealed Himself behind an unpretentious exterior that only faith can say: the Scriptures are the Word of God."²⁰

"Christian truth is dynamic," affirms Kantonen, "and its greatest foe is static intellectualism, . . ."21 The Scripture, which bears the divine Word, "ushers men into God's own presence."²² Indeed,

It proves its divine origin by furnishing actual contacts with God. In brief, this dynamic concept of the Word of God describes nothing less than the Holy Spirit in action, addressing each man as an individual "thou" and calling him to confront the judging

¹⁷Ibid., p. 125 and p. 136.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 125.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 125f.

²⁰Ibid., p. 136.

²¹Ibid., p. 33 (Italics mine).

²²Ibid., p. 101.

and redeeming God in terms of responsibility.²³

Joseph Sittler, too, is opposed to the concept of the Scriptures as a compendium of propositional truths. He deplores the "transposition of the organic vitality of biblical speech into the abstract, intellectualized and propositional form of Western theology."²⁴ Indeed, "to assert the inerrancy of the text of scripture is to elevate to a normative position an arbitrary theological construction."²⁵ The doctrine of verbal inspiration, says Sittler, can, indeed, find material for its defense in the Reformers.²⁶ He maintains, however, that such statements, taken in abstraction and cut off from a comprehension of the particular concerns they were meant to protect, "cannot be made consistent with the structural character of Lutheran theology."²⁷ Moreover,

". . . to advance a doctrine about inspiration at the

²³Ibid.

²⁴Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Structure of Christian Ethics (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), p. 39.

²⁵Joseph Sittler, Jr., Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 68.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

very beginning of dogmatics, and to make something other than faith a constitutive principle--is to introduce a split character into the entire dogmatical task.²⁸

Reidar Thomte, professor of philosophy at Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota, is also opposed to the concept of the Scriptures as a catalogue of objective, propositional truths, requiring no more than intellectual assent. "The irrelevance of the objective approach," writes Thomte, "is evident from the very nature of Christianity."²⁹ He quotes Kierkegaard approvingly: "Christianity is spirit, spirit is inwardness, inwardness is subjectivity, and in its maximum an infinite, personal, passionate interest in one's eternal

²⁸Ibid. Uuras Saarnivaara in his article, "Written and Spoken Word," The Lutheran Quarterly, II (1950), 168, remarks: "The question whether the Bible is errorless in every word. . . , or whether there are discrepancies and minor errors in it, was no problem for Luther and his time in general." He maintains that the men of the Reformation period were so busy studying the contents of the Scriptures, that they ". . . did not waste their time and energy in such fruitless quarrels on . . . the origin and form of Scripture, . . ." However, according to Saarnivaara, the fact that the reformers did not enter into discussions concerning the origin and infallibility of the Bible, did not keep them from regarding it as normative for faith and life. "They simply believed that the Scriptures are 'from God,' being therefore the God-given norm of faith and life." (Saarnivaara, a Finnish national, was, at the time this article was written, professor of systematic and exegetic theology at the Suomi Theological Seminary, Hancock, Michigan.)

²⁹Reidar Thomte, "Kierkegaard in American Religious Thought," Lutheran World, II (1955-56), 143.

happiness."³⁰ It is a fallacious assumption, he maintains, "that when the truth is objectively brought to light, the appropriation will follow as a matter of course."³¹ On the contrary, "the more objective a person becomes, the less he is possessed by an infinite passionate interest."³² It was Kierkegaard, says Thomte, who cut Christianity loose from such an objective approach and "made it a matter of passionate appropriation by faith--a faith which is absurd to human reason."³³

Gerhard Gieschen, professor of Systematic Theology in Central Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Fremont, Nebraska, also contends that biblical truth "is decidedly more than information about God."³⁴ He speaks of a divine-human encounter at both ends of revelation. According to his view,

³⁰Ibid. Thomte notes that the quotation is from Concluding Unscientific Postscript, D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie, translators, Princeton, 1941, p. 33.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Gerhard Gieschen, Review: Special Revelation and the Word of God by Bernard Ramm, The Lutheran Quarterly, XV (1963), 269.

the written and spoken words of the prophets and apostles

were the result of a personal encounter with the living God, involving the total personality and producing an over-powering sense of mission, which then found expression in human speech. . . . What was thus put into human language was produced by God in his encounter with men. . . . In this encounter it is not information, as such, that is given; the insights are produced by the person-to-person confrontation.³⁵

On this end, too, according to Gieschen, revelation requires more than mere intellectual assent, in order to be apprehended.

It has the force of direct personal address, which can be answered only by an act of decision. Mere assent as to the factual reliability of the events recorded is not enough. . . . , the acceptance of these reported incidents as historical facts does not, in itself, constitute faith as the Bible understands it.³⁶

Gieschen maintains, however, that his view of truth as encounter does not deny to the biblical witness a "unique authority." Furthermore, "Men who have experienced the compelling force of this confrontation with God are not inclined to call its factuality in question."³⁷

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 269f.

³⁷Ibid.

Some of the other theologians, too, who question the concept of biblical inerrancy (carefully defined), nevertheless assert that the Scriptures have a "unique authority" as norm for the Church. Martin J. Heineken declares that the confessions derive their validity from their "conformity with the same gospel to which the Scriptures witness, by which norm and standard, . . . , all doctrines are to be judged."³⁸ Eric H. Wahlstrom maintains: "Scripture as authority for faith must be considered in the context of two other factors: the church (tradition) and the living Spirit."³⁹

Only in the combination of the Bible, the church, and the living Spirit can we find the true guide and adequate authority for faith. We must add, however, that in this combination the Bible retains the primary authority as the unchanging witness to God's acts in history.⁴⁰

Taito A. Kantonen also asserts: "Both the objective content and the authoritativeness of the proclaimed truth are best safeguarded when it is constantly derived from,

³⁸Martin J. Heineken, Christ Frees and Unites (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 81.

³⁹Eric H. Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 17.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 18.

and judged by, the Bible."⁴¹ Walter J. Kukkonen, so far as the writer could determine, does not question the concept of biblical inerrancy; nevertheless, his statement on the authority of Scripture may be considered relevant in this connection: "We recognize the normative character of the Bible and make it our highest standard of faith and life because we take seriously the historical nature of our faith."⁴² "The ultimate norm, after all and over all, is the Holy Scriptures!" insists Franklin Clark Fry. "The standard according to which every judgment must stand or fall is, Does it rightly interpret the Word of God?"⁴³ Finally, the strongest statement of all concerning the authority of the Scriptures comes from the constitution of The American Lutheran Church (inaugurated January 1, 1961). It should be noted that the expression "inerrant Word of God" is not of logical necessity the same as an

⁴¹Taito A. Kantonen, Theology of Evangelism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), p. 14.

⁴²Walter J. Kukkonen, "The Suomi Synod's Stream of Living Tradition," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), p. 49. Kukkonen is pastor of Bethlehem Congregation (Suomi Synod), De Kalb, Illinois, and Professor of Apologetics in Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, Maywood, Illinois.

⁴³Franklin Clark Fry, "The Unity of the Church," Lutheran World, III (1956-7), 322. Fry was president of the United Lutheran Church in America.

inerrant Bible. The paragraph in question is Article IV--
Confession of Faith, Section I:

The American Lutheran Church accepts all the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as a whole and in all their parts as the divinely inspired, revealed, and inerrant Word of God, and submits to this as the only infallible authority in all matters of faith and life.⁴⁴

To summarize briefly: While some of the Lutheran theologians adduced express reservations with regard to the concept of biblical inerrancy, nearly all of them communicate the conviction that the Scriptures are more than a mere syllabus of propositional truths demanding nothing further than a nod of assent. Though they may differ in their terminology when describing the truth of revelation, they are, nevertheless, generally agreed that the divine truth in the Scriptures must be subjectively received. Moreover, it should be carefully noted that the concept of "truth as subjectivity" does not necessarily militate against the substantial historicity of the biblical record or its authority and normative character for the faith and life of the Church.

⁴⁴Unsigned, "Confession and Constitution," Lutheran World, VIII (1961), 203.

CHAPTER V

REVELATION: THE COGNITIVE VS. THE DYNAMIC VIEW

Revelation as Action, Deed, Event

To forestall any false impression that the title of this chapter may convey, the writer wishes to state at the outset that the cognitive and dynamic views of divine revelation are not of necessity mutually exclusive or contradictory. While some American Lutheran theologians may express their misgivings regarding the cognitive view, they do not generally deny that revelation also imparts certain truths about God, His will for us, and His good and gracious plan for man's salvation in Christ. Rather, the consensus seems to be that the Scriptures are so much more than a textbook of religion for the purpose of increasing our knowledge about God. Revelation, they affirm, is not static, but dynamic. It is God in action, deed, event-- indeed, God in His self-impartment. It is the dynamis Theou.

The God of the Bible, declares Taito A. Kantonen, "does not concern himself with imparting to men a body of facts, and principles for interpreting them, but with es-

establishing personal fellowship with men."¹ The concept of the Word, which he promulgates, "is something much more than a body of correct propositions or flawless words."² The heart of the divine self-revelation, according to Kantonen, "is not 'God formulated a policy' or 'God wrote a book' but 'God sent forth His Son.'"³ Moreover, Christ came into the world "not to win assent to a set of propositions but to seek and to save men. He therefore calls His disciples not to propagate an impersonal message but to be fishers of men."⁴ The Word of God, he maintains, "is not only the revealer of divine wisdom but also and primarily the vehicle of divine power,"⁵ Indeed, when God speaks,

His word is life which conquers death, light which dispels darkness, leaven which ferments, permeates and transforms, seed which is destined to sprout,

¹Taito A. Kantonen, The Theology of Evangelism (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1954), p. 18.

²Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 143.

³Kantonen, Evangelism, p. 19.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 143.

to bud to bear fruit. It is the "power of God unto salvation," the dynamis Theou, God's dynamite.⁶

Joseph Sittler also emphasizes that revelation is God in action. "The Word of God," he declares, "is God's self-disclosure and self-communication whereby he turns to man in salvatory action."⁷ However, revelation is not simply God in motion; it is God in directional movement. He affirms that

revelation as God-activity has direction, purpose, goal. . . . It is activity according to God's eternal purpose of love, and hence is directed toward the restoration of men to fellowship. It is God's aggressive self-disclosure.⁸

Moreover, according to Sittler, revelation as an action of God is not just a thing, nor is it merely a divine monologue. Rather it is

an event involving two parties; it is a personal address. There is no such thing as revelation-in-itself because revelation consists of the fact that something is revealed to me.⁹

⁶Kantonen, Evangelism, p. 9.

⁷Joseph Sittler, Jr., Doctrine of the Word (The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 17.

⁸Ibid., p. 61.

⁹Ibid., p. 33 (Italics original).

Sittler also emphasizes the "livingness of the Word of God."¹⁰ The personal address of divine revelation is contemporaneous and perpetually relevant to the here and now. It strikes every man right where he lives.

The Word of God [writes Sittler] is not a then; it is a now. Its content is not an ancient address of God to a vanished people and a past situation; its burden is God's speech and ready action to each man in every situation.¹¹

Finally, Sittler touches on the efficacy of the divine Word. Revelation, he maintains, "must be understood as dynamic as over against all static historicism and intellectualism," ¹² The divine address is more than speech, to which one might stop his ears; it is charged with power. To illustrate his meaning Sittler quotes John Paterson approvingly: "To the Hebrew the word was not merely a vocable dropped from unthinking lips; it was a unit of energy charged with power. We might think of it as a verbal electron."¹³

¹⁰Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹Ibid. (Italics original).

¹²Ibid., p. 61.

¹³Ibid., p. 23. Sittler notes that the quotation is from John Paterson, "The Book that is Alive," Religion in Life, Vol. XV, No. 4.

Revelation "is not the impartation of supernatural knowledge," declares Warren A. Quanbeck, but "the creation of fellowship with the believer."¹⁴ He labels that theologian a "scholastic," who "regards revelation as the impartation of supernatural knowledge, and faith as assent to this fund of knowledge."¹⁵

To use the Bible as a source book of philosophy or science, or an introduction to ancient literature, is to demonstrate an inadequate appreciation of its contents and purpose. The theologian who uses it as a buttress or even as the foundation for a theological system lacks comprehension of its real function. . . . The apprehension of the Bible in static or mechanical terms is necessarily inadequate.¹⁶

In opposition to such a purely cognitive view of revelation, Quanbeck stresses his conviction that the prophetic word "is also the Word of power by which the world was made and by which it is sustained. God's address is not only verbiage, it is act, event, power."¹⁷ And for this very reason the reader must approach the Bible "as a dyna-

¹⁴Warren A. Quanbeck, "Biblical Interpretation in Luther's Early Studies," The Lutheran Quarterly, I (1949), p. 290.

¹⁵Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Authority and power of the Word of God," in Luther Today (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), p. 99.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁷Warren A. Quanbeck, A Study Document on Justification (n.p., November, 1962), par. 66, p. 30.

mic and personal message in which he is himself existentially involved in order to experience its purpose and power."¹⁸

In order to illustrate and emphasize his dynamic concept of revelation, Quanbeck once more compares the Gospel to the almighty creative fiat in the following statement:

The word which is encountered in the Gospel in the Scriptures is the same word by which the world were made. It is the word of power which jars man from his self-centeredness to take seriously God's claim upon him. It is the word which effectively offers pardon and peace, granting the forgiveness of sins. It is the word which creates fellowship, uniting the forgiven sinner with God's people on earth, the Christian church.¹⁹

¹⁸Quanbeck, "Authority and Power," p. 92.

¹⁹Quanbeck, A Study Document, par. 72, p. 31. Ragnar Bring in How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962) maintains that "Luther discovered an idea of revelation in the Bible that was entirely different from the Scholastics. It was not cognitive, . . . , but active" (p. 25). He declares that "in the Bible the meaning of revelation is not merely a mediation of knowledge" (p. 3). Revelation, he affirms, "does not involve a certain kind of knowledge but rather the Lord's mighty acts. Such deeds convey his message, and through these great works he reveals himself. God comes forth, not to mediate a theoretical knowledge about his own essence, but to show his will to help and his power to act on our behalf" (p. 4). Bring explains that the cognitive view of revelation grew out of a Greek milieu, while the biblical conception of revelation is dynamic. The Greek idea of revelation, according to Bring, stands forth in Thomas' cognitive view, while the biblical view is exemplified by Luther. "In the Greek-cognitive view of revelation natural knowledge is completed by means of a revealed knowledge. . . . As has already been stated, the biblical view of revelation

"When we speak of the Word of God as living and active," Eric Wahlstrom informs us, "we are using 'word' in a different sense from the modern popular usage."²⁰ A "word" in ordinary language is usually thought of as imparting information. Hence, when we use the expression, "Word of God," we may get the impression that God is here furnishing certain information regarding man's destiny. But this would make man's dilemma ignorance rather than sin and his salvation tantamount to acquiring the right knowledge. Wahlstrom, therefore concludes:

In the Bible, "word" is a means of communication and action. God's word is creative of new realities. . . and God speaks through his acts. We should not say, "God speaks and reveals himself," but rather, "God acts and reveals himself."²¹

Other theologians express their agreement with this dynamic view of revelation. "We have all moved into a more

is wholly different. In that view God comes forth in terms of his mighty works" (p..5f).

²⁰Eric H. Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 12.

²¹Ibid. (Italics original).

dynamic conception of the Word than just a flat equation of it with the Bible," says John Reumann.²² The term "Word of God," Reumann explains, is a technical expression which theologians use for "God speaking and acting, and, of course also for the message about his mighty acts, and thirdly, also, for the Bible as the Book of the Acts of God."²³ Revelation, according to Martin J. Heinecken, "is by no means the imparting of certain truths, but it is an act, a mysterious, wonderful, incomparable act."²⁴

"Our age needs a Word," writes C. G. Carfelt,

that has a dynamic, a power to bridge the chasm between God and man and the power to change man. As long as the Word is looked on simply as a depository of proof texts or considered merely as a body of doctrine, static in nature, it can not serve its intended function as a message from God and as the divine dynamic the world so sorely needs.²⁵

²²John Reumann, "Retreat from the Word or Return to It?" The Lutheran Quarterly, XIII (1961), 310.

²³Ibid., p. 312.

²⁴Martin J. Heinecken, The Moment before God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 72.

²⁵C. G. Carfelt, Review: Resurgence of the Gospel by Taito A. Kantonen, The Lutheran Quarterly, I (1949), 100. Carfelt is professor of Systematic Theology in Augustana Theological Seminary, Rock Island, Illinois.

Revelation as Paradox

The idea of paradox in connection with revelation is not general among the American Lutheran theologians. As a matter of fact, the writer found only one who discussed this concept in any detail. The theologian in question is Martin J. Heinecken, and, since he is one of the primary sources for the doctrine of Holy Scripture, a brief recognition of his views on this score may be apropos.

"All paradoxes," writes Heinecken, "involve a seeming contradiction. A paradox is always such a seeming contradiction that contradictory propositions appear to be true."²⁶ He provides the etymology of the term in the following statement:

By derivation, a paradox is that which is contrary to the generally received opinion (para: against; dokein: to be of opinion, to appear, to seem). Thus the truth is quite often contrary to that which people generally believe. . . .²⁷

"The recognition of the paradox," Heinecken explains, "is crucial also for the vexing problem of the Bible as the

²⁶Heinecken, Moment, p. 39 (Italics original).

²⁷Ibid., p. 37

Word of God."²⁸ The problem for Heinecken seems to be the exact relationship between the divine and human elements in the Scriptures. "How can this thoroughly human word be the veritable speaking of God?"²⁹ he asks. The divine revelation, according to Heinecken, is hidden in the mask of the earthly creature. This, then, is the perplexing paradox of revelation:

How shall it be asserted that the presence of God is always "hidden" in an earthly medium, in the "masks" of creation, in the incarnation, in the Bible, in the sacraments, and in the church?³⁰

Moreover, the paradox is essential to Heinecken's thinking on revelation, because it leads to a proper attitude toward Christian truth. The absolute paradox, he maintains,

is the very thing which keeps Christianity from being reduced to a philosophical doctrine or a theological doctrine which man accepts, so to speak, with the top of the head, merely as a spectator, and makes it

²⁸Ibid., p. 23.

²⁹Ibid.,

³⁰Ibid

into an "existential communication," in which a man is transformed in his entire being. The paradox is the absolute barrier which blocks the way to a mere intellectual appropriation of a God-idea and forces man to be confronted with the living God in the "hiddenness" of his revelation. It blocks the way to an understanding of God and forces man's energies into the proper channels of obedience, trust, and love.³¹

Revelation as Confrontation

The concept of confrontation also stems from the conviction that revelation involves more than a mere presentation of propositional truths for intellectual assent. Theologians who use the term are convinced that the "event" of revelation God comes to meet man in a personal encounter of an "I" over against a "thou." Revelation is God's self-impartment and takes place in an existential experience called the "crisis" (from the Greek, krisis, judgment). Once again, it should be noted that the concept of confrontation is not necessarily opposed as an absolute contradictory to the cognitive view of revelation.

Martin J. Heineken notes "that God's revelation is always personal, that is, it is divine-human encounter and never just the retailing of ideas and principles."³²

³¹Ibid., p. 22.

³²Heineken, Moment, p. 18

After remarking that the medium of revelation is always the "creature," Heinecken continues: "The encounter with the creature is, therefore, the God-encounter. This is as immediate and direct an encounter with the living God as man can have."³³ "Revelation," he remarks in another connection, "is personal encounter and not the making known of true propositions."³⁴ That the concept of confrontation involves a real personal relationship is clearly seen in the following statement:

He God confronts man always at a time and place in a real "encounter" and "confrontation" of "I" over against "thou." This encounter can never be reduced to a man's communing inwardly with his own ideas. In the Bible there is always the word of address: "Adam, where art thou?"³⁵

This personal relationship with the living God, which is established in the divine-human encounter, is the only certainty and assurance that man can have, declares Heinecken.³⁶ Indeed, he holds that

³³Ibid.

³⁴Martin J. Heinecken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (1956-7), 366.

³⁵Heinecken, Moment, p. 57f.

³⁶Ibid.

It is idolatry to find a certainty other than that of the personal relation of trust in the living God who confronts one and calls one to decision. When this confrontation ceases one communes in the chambers of one's own mind with a logical essence instead of with that living God who cannot be so reduced.³⁷

Heinecken also uses the concept of confrontation in his exposition of the doctrine of the Church. It is through the encounter with God that man is integrated into the fellowship of believers and achieves personality in the highest sense. "By the encounter with God in Word and Sacrament," he affirms, "man enters into right relationship to God and his fellowmen and becomes his true self."³⁸ Still referring to the Church, he emphasizes this personal relationship with God which finds its inception in the encounter.

Here are those who are drawn and held and personally overpowered not as things are overpowered but as a man is overwhelmed and taken captive by another in personal encounter. . . . Their relation is, therefore, a personal relationship.³⁹

Other theologians, when expounding their view on revelation, also use the terms "confrontation" and "encounter," though with less frequency than Heinecken. Taito A. Kantonen declares that ". . . knowledge of God is not something that has been learned out of a book, nor is it wishful thinking or

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Martin J. Heinecken "Jesus, the Christ, Alone Frees and Unites," Lutheran World, III (Supplement No. 1), 23.

³⁹Ibid.

theorizing of any sort."⁴⁰ Over against such a purely cognitive view of revelation, he stresses the idea of confrontation. "It is to be confronted with God, to respond to Him with one's whole life, and to live out the implications of that encounter."⁴¹

The exegete, too, should ". . . interpret Scripture as a living Word in which God confronts men with the Gospel," declares Warren A. Quanbeck.⁴² Indeed, "Only when the interpretation of Scripture presents the Gospel as the living encounter with Jesus Christ is it effective and true to its purpose."⁴³

In summary: The terms "confrontation" and "encounter" are used by the theologians adduced, in order to convey their conviction that divine revelation, in whatever form it may come to us, is more than speech. It is more than the communication of propositional truths to which one may give intellectual assent, like a spectator on the sidelines. Revelation, in their view, is God in His self-impartation--

⁴⁰Kantonen, Evangelism, p. 8.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Quanbeck, "The Authority and Power. . .," p. 89.

⁴³Ibid.

indeed, one might say, God in his Incarnation. Furthermore, according to these theologians, revelation is the personal address of the divine "I" over against a "thou" and can be appropriated only by the intense personal involvement of faith.

The Response of Faith

If revelation is such a living, active, dynamic communication of the divine essence, as some Lutheran theologians assert that it is, it follows that the response to God's self-disclosure must be something more than intellectual assent. Revelation, being the creative and judging power of God, produces the response of faith as a total commitment. Faith, therefore, must be understood as involving one's entire being, life and personality.

Martin J. Heinecken never tires of affirming: "Revelation and faith are therefore always corollary, and where there is no faith (or offense) there is no revelation."⁴⁴ Again, he writes: "In the Bible, revelation and faith are always corollary, which simply means that God never appears

⁴⁴Martin J. Heinecken, "Faith and Facts," The Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1956), 255.

directly, that he is beheld only with the eyes of faith."⁴⁵

It should be clear at this point that faith, as Heinecken is using it here, is not mere acceptance of statements or assent to doctrines. "The revelatory events I must apprehend with my whole being, with the risk of my life and the transformation of my existence."⁴⁶ This is the involvement which faith entails.

Heinecken's clearest exposition of his views on the response to revelation is, perhaps, the following statement. He is referring to the crucial events in the life of Jesus.

Here there is already a proclamation which calls for a decision of either "faith," or "offense," for what is here proclaimed is no longer in the realm of probability so that it might be doubted or believed as more or less credible things are doubted or believed. What is here proclaimed is an existential proposition. That is to say, it is a proposition which cannot be affirmed except as in one's whole being or existence one participates in what is affirmed, unless, therefore, it makes a real difference in the life of the one who in "faith" affirms it or in "offense" sorrowfully or indignantly turns away. Here the wager of one's whole life is involved. Here revelation and faith are strict corollaries, for nothing is revealed

⁴⁵Martin J. Heinecken, God in the Space Age (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1959), p. 112. The basic statement that "revelation and faith are always corollary" is also in Martin J. Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology and the Message of the Preacher," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954), 286.

⁴⁶Heinecken, Moment, p. 138.

and nothing is apprehended except where there is either "faith" issuing in obedience or "offense" issuing in revolt, and both are equally God-worked."⁴⁷

Other theologians do not, like Heinecken, place the response to revelation into such strict either/or categories. Nevertheless, some of them express the conviction that faith is more than mere acceptance of biblical truths.

In listing the requirements of a doctrine of the Word of God, Joseph Sittler emphasizes that such a doctrine must first of all ". . . make no denial of the essential role of faith, but rather enhance and illustrate the faith-full character of our total theology."⁴⁸ "Faith," he reiterates "is essential to any reception of the Word of God."⁴⁹ By the term faith Sittler also means something more than mere assent to a body of doctrine. For Luther, he declares, ". . . this faith is a bestowal of God . . . and cannot be achieved by a faithless and automatic relation of oneself to the mere words of Scripture."⁵⁰ This faith of which

⁴⁷Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology. . . ," p. 290f. (Italics original).

⁴⁸Sittler, Doctrine of the Word, p. 60.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 25.

Sittler speaks is not the conclusion of a logical syllogism, whose premise is a certain view of Scripture.

For if such an irrefutable logical sequence could be established--then the object of my confidence would be the impregnability of the proof (which is not faith, but sight)--and not God.⁵¹

Warren A. Quanbeck also speaks of the response of faith as something beyond mere cognition. "Faith," he declares, is not only knowledge, nor only a decision of the will, nor only an esthetic or emotional experience. It includes all these aspects, for it involves the whole person. Faith is man's response to the God who speaks to him in Jesus Christ.⁵²

Ragnar Bring asserts that the Bible has been written ". . . to those who will respond in faith to that which is proclaimed. This faith does not signify merely a rational acceptance of all that stands in the Bible."⁵³ Indeed, the proclamation of the Bible is by its very nature ". . . a proclamation about truths which can only be comprehended existentially, in faith and obedience."⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid., p. 33, footnote (Italics mine).

⁵²Quanbeck, A Study Document . . . , " par. 60, p. 28.

⁵³Ragnar Bring, How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 2.

⁵⁴Ibid.

Walter J. Kukkonen also declares: "Faith and revelation are correlative concepts."⁵⁵ And Raymond T. Stamm writes in a similar vein:

One cannot even know that God is love except by taking it on faith and making this kind of creative response to him; and this imposes on faith a burden which is infinitely greater than that which is laid upon it by the shallow notion that faith can be freed from the necessity to trust and adventure by treating the Bible as if it were a collection of oracles tossed from a totally other world into the stream of history . . ."⁵⁶

Since, in the view of these Lutheran theologians, revelation is more than speech on God's part, but a dynamic, creative activity of God, there seems to be a general consensus that the response of faith also is more than the casual assimilation of a body of knowledge. They seem to agree that faith, too, must be understood as a dynamic activity--an intensely personal commitment to the living God in His self-communication.

⁵⁵Walter J. Kukkonen, "The Sumomi Synod's Stream of Living Tradition," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), p. 48.

⁵⁶Raymond T. Stamm, "Keeping the Faith Abreast of the Times," The Lutheran Quarterly, VIII (1956), p. 266. Stamm is Professor of the New Testament in the Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

CHAPTER VI

ORTHODOXY VS. LUTHER

A number of theologians covered in this survey referred quite often to Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy as exemplified by the seventeenth century dogmaticians. The Lutheran theologians, who make mention of Orthodoxy in connection with the doctrine of Holy Scripture, generally do so in negative terms and set it up as the major antithesis to their own position. This writer does not wish to emphasize the negative statements of these scholars, particularly in view of the fact that a number of the quotations are somewhat repetitious. Nevertheless, since these statements are rather frequent, and since the positive affirmations of these Lutheran scholars can be better understood in the light of their antitheses, perhaps an overview of these statements concerning Orthodoxy will be considered apropos.

Martin J. Heinecken states that Luther broke with the scholastic system of Thomism, ". . . which fixates once and for all in Aristotelian categories the process of man's progress" ¹ Nevertheless, he affirms, ". . . a later

¹Martin J. Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 48

orthodoxy returned to it and thus destroyed the existential character of faith."² Also American Lutheran theology, according to Heinecken, ". . . generally adhered to the seventeenth century orthodoxy with remarkable consistency."³ Until very recently, says Heinecken, practically all the textbooks on which Lutheran pastors were trained ". . . follow the same pattern--a repristination of seventeenth century Lutheran orthodoxy as compiled in Schmid's Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church."⁴ Heinecken's view seems to be that Orthodoxy's concern for maintaining doctrinal purity was correct, but that its method of doing so was misguided and ill-founded. He writes:

[Luther] returned to a biblical orientation completely foreign to the scholastic orientation, and yet it was precisely to that orientation that seventeenth-century orthodoxists returned and while they wrestled nobly to do justice to the dynamic of the gospel, they nevertheless straitjacketed and imprisoned it. With ever finer and finer rational distinctions they tried their best to do justice to the mysteries of the faith and to safeguard them against heresy. But because the basic orientation of the philosophy with which they

²Ibid.

³Martin J. Heinecken, "Currents in American Theology," Lutheran World, III (1956-7), 361.

⁴Ibid.

operated was wrong, it resulted in any number of the most fearful distortions.⁵

"The persistency and present recrudescence" of the orthodox view, which "must indeed seem an anachronism to any European theologian," says Heinecken, is symptomatic "of the whole trend to security."⁶ He regards it as a flight to a false objectivity, which, in the final analysis, exhibits a rationalistic tendency.

In the objective sacraments and in a plain, coherent system of doctrine based on an infallible Bible there is a refuge from the anxiety of the human situation. Whether one likes the term or not it is actually the acceptance of a "paper Pope". Certainly the blame for this flight into what I certainly regard as a false "objectivity" must fall in great measure upon those who have failed to clarify sufficiently the alternative view of a theology which is equally based upon an historically given revelation, but dispenses with all rationalistic crutches, and recognizes what orthodoxy has in all times recognized, that revelation and faith are always corollary."⁷

Joseph Sittler is even more prolific than Heinecken in statements critical of Orthodox "scholasticism." "Luther," he declares, "was able to shatter the massive pattern of

⁵Heinecken, Christ Frees and Unites, p. 68.

⁶Heinecken, "Currents . . . ," p. 363.

⁷Ibid., p. 363f. (Italics original).

medieval theology by the very energy of his faith-
 understanding."⁸ However, according to Sittler, both
 Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy gradually lost this dynamic
 understanding of the Word of God, this insight of faith.⁹
 The reason for the revival of the scholastic method among
 the orthodox dogmaticians, says Sittler, was simply this:
"The momentum of the scholastic theological tradition was
 too powerful for the men who, after Luther, contributed to
 Lutheran confessional theology."¹⁰ Sittler's conclusion is
 that ". . . the roots of the theological structure of the
 late sixteenth and seventeenth century dogmaticians are
 to be found in the inherited scholastic method of the
 schoolmen."¹¹

Sittler's main objection to the orthodox formulation
 of the doctrine of Scripture is that it allegedly equated
 the Word of God with the Bible, which he claims is a

⁸Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Doctrine of the Word
 (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran
 Church in America, 1948), p. 39.

⁹Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 39 (Italics original).

¹¹Ibid.

"caricature" of the Reformer's teaching.¹² Thus "Orthodoxy came to understand revelation in a propositional, documentary, static, and thoroughly intellectualized manner."¹³ Indeed, it ". . . materialized the Word of God into a historical product, . . ."¹⁴ and ". . . stultified the Reformer's doctrine of the Word in definitions aimed at intellectual acceptance. . ."¹⁵

The result [Sittler concludes] was that Lutheran theology tragically divested itself of that proper biblical understanding of the Word, whereby the Word is spoken of always in organic relationship with the present and creative, the all-powerful and originating activity of God. And thus it came about that the Word of God equated with a book, a literary quantum, is left hanging on the limb of a historically conditioned, and hence relative, process.¹⁶

¹²Ibid., p. 48 (cf. pp. 47 and 58f).

¹³Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 51f.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 49f. The footnote on page 49 is also pertinent: "Such understanding, on the other hand, cannot blunt one's sense of tragedy which ensued. Seeking to enclose the living, orthodoxy stifled. Seeking to cherish by logically necessary formulations, it squeezed out of the doctrine the decision of faith. Seeking to tighten theologically, it reduced religiously. Seeking to protect a heritage by enclosing it in a box--it mummified."

Taito A. Kantonen also feels that Orthodoxy's formulations of the doctrine of Scripture cast Luther's dynamic concept of the Word into the static mold of scholasticism. He speaks of ". . . a static uniformity which subscribes to the form of true religion but lacks its life-changing power. Such was the general tendency of Orthodoxy."¹⁷ Indeed, "it was the misfortune of the reformation," affirms Kantonen,

that its great living truths received their systematic formulation in an age when the basic thought-forms were supplied by a decadent Aristotelian Scholasticism. Consequently the new wine of the rediscovered Gospel was poured into the old skins of static intellectualism. With Luther it was not so. Like Pascal and Kierkegaard after him, he was one of the greatest "existential" thinkers of all history. He did not cast his thinking in the Aristotelian mold.¹⁸

This "static rationalism" of traditional Protestant "scholasticism," according to Kantonen, ". . . approaches Scripture itself with a purpose of seeking corroboration and proof for its own doctrines rather than a mind open and receptive to the Spirit"¹⁹ Lacking Luther's dynamic

¹⁷Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Muehlenberg Press, 1948), p. 58 (Italics mine).

¹⁸Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 137.

concept of the Word, orthodoxy fixated the Scriptures into little more than an aggregation of proof-texts, Kantonen maintains.

The Bible thus turns out to be little more than a collection of proof-texts. God has spoken in the past but He no longer speaks. Inspiration has been frozen to a fixed period in past history.²⁰

Like Heineken, Kantonen also affirms that American Lutheran theology ". . . is still largely oriented in the seventeenth century," ²¹ Adhering to the traditional scholastic methods, he declares, it

continues to busy itself with old distinctions and abstractions quite remote from the present theological battlefield. Unlike European Lutheranism it has tended to develop a self-satisfied and anathematizing mentality and to join forces with an utterly un-Lutheran fundamentalism.²²

Warren A. Quanbeck also contrasts Luther's dynamic view of revelation with the static view of the "scholastics," both Roman Catholic and Lutheran. "For the Occamist theologian," says Quanbeck, "Scripture is authoritative because every word in it has been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 37.

²²Ibid.

This is true of Lutheran scholastics also,"23 Luther, on the other hand,

stands apart from both groups. Scripture is his authority because it reveals Jesus Christ, because in it God speaks His Word of judgment and grace. His more inward grasp of the problem has consequences which have not always been discerned."24

The Bible, declares Eric H. Wahlstrom, was regarded as the "handmaiden of dogmatics" in the medieval church and in Lutheran and Reformed Orthodoxy down to the eighteenth century.²⁵ He, too, charges that Orthodoxy codified the Scriptures into a collection of individual proof-texts.

It [the Bible] was regarded primarily as a depository of proof texts for the doctrines of the church. Usually these texts were taken in isolation from the context without regard for what the original significance may have been. If law was the norm in the Jewish interpretation of the Bible, dogma was the norm in the church's interpretation.²⁶

The consensus of the theologians under discussion, therefore, seems to be that Orthodoxy lost Luther's dynamic

²³Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Authority and Power of the Word of God," in Luther Today (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), p. 99.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Eric H. Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 2.

²⁶Ibid., p. 2f.

understanding of divine revelation and materialized and objectified it by equating the Word of God with the Bible. They feel that Orthodoxy "stultified" the Reformer's doctrine of the Word and cast it into the static mold of scholasticism. This whole attitude is allegedly symptomatic of a false trend toward security and an ultimate tendency toward rationalism, which has lost the insight of faith and wants to understand revelation in a purely propositional and intellectualized manner. This "static" view of revelation on the part of Orthodoxy is sometimes contrasted with Luther's dynamic concept of the Word of God.

Luther's View of the Scriptures

Some of the Lutheran theologians, who voice their objections to the orthodox doctrine of the Scriptures, speak approvingly of Luther's attitude toward the Bible. Whether or not they are justified in placing Luther's views and those of the seventeenth century dogmaticians into opposition is not within the province of this survey. Nevertheless, a résumé of these commendatory statements on Luther's views may be relevant here, not for the sake of objective information concerning the Reformer's position, but because these statements would seem to be indicative of the authors' own

views concerning the Scriptures.

"We note how naturally Luther speaks of the Word," remarks Martin J. Heinecken, "not as an 'it' or a book, but as the living Christ, who is actually with us in our battle."²⁷ We rightly speak of the Bible as God's Word, he declares, but "This must be correctly understood, and the Bible must not be made into a 'paper Pope.' It was not that for Luther, and it dare not be that for us."²⁸ Luther, according to Heinecken, came to have a touchstone of where the Word of God was to be found.

Whatever proclaimed Christ was the Word of God. The Bible, a thoroughly human book, written by fallible, sinful men who were yet used by God, was to him the cradle and the manger where Christ was found. Therefore he treasured it and steeped himself in it, and with it defied the world and reformed the church. The Bible dare mean no more and no less to us today.²⁹

Theological personalism is the key to understanding Luther's concept of the word, according to Taito A. Kantonen. Luther, he declares, ". . . stood 'coram Deo,' in the presence of God, never merely speculating or talking about Him but

²⁷Martin J. Heinecken, Basic Christian Teachings (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949), p. 121.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid. p. 123.

responding to Him with his whole being as person to person."³⁰ Instead of "petrifying" God's Word into a system of abstract concepts, Luther regarded the Word as ". . . God himself speaking to him personally and reaching beyond his intellect into the innermost depths of his conscience."³¹ He also emphasizes Luther's "dynamic concept" of the Word ". . . in presenting faith as the subjective correlate of Scripture, and in holding that Scripture, viewed with Christ in its center, is self-interpreting."³²

That which is authoritative for Luther ". . . is not the formal absoluteness of the inspired Word," declares Warren A. Quanbeck, but rather ". . . its content, the Grace of God in Christ. Luther expressed the content of Scripture as was Christum treibet."³³ And Joseph Sittler maintains that for Luther, "The Scriptures are no longer regarded as a holy plateau of equal relevancy free from all mortal and historical conditioning."³⁴ On the contrary,

³⁰Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 36 (Italics original).

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 112f.

³³Warren A. Quanbeck, "Biblical Interpretation in Luther's Early Studies," The Lutheran Quarterly, I (1949), 293.

³⁴Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word, p. 18.

The Word of God for Luther is what God does as well as what he says. It is the Scriptures as a record of the mighty action of God in history, but it is also the Gospel which is the principal theme of this literature.³⁵

We may now turn to some specific aspects of Luther's concept of the Word, which deserve closer scrutiny.

The Deus Loquens

The expression, Deus loquens, with its emphasis on the present participle, is intended to convey the idea of the living, active, contemporaneity of the Word of God. It lays stress upon the fact that God has not only "spoken in times past" but that He is still speaking through His Word, which is eternally relevant to the present situation. Again, it may not be superfluous to point out that the expression in the present tense (Deus loquens) and in the perfect (Deus dixit) are not necessarily mutually exclusive, for Luther himself appears to have used both forms.³⁶ Hence, the American Lutheran theologians who have taken up this insight of

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶ Julius Bodensieck, professor of New Testament at Wartburg Theological Seminary (ALC), Dubuque, Iowa, in his article, "Translated Theology?" Lutheran World, I (1954-5), 11, remarks: ". . . Luther once said, God has a mighty plow with which to work in the field of this earth, and the name of it is Dixit."

Luther's theology, seem to have done so more as a matter of primary emphasis than as an expression of opposition.

Joseph Sittler has amplified this particular insight of Luther's perhaps more than any other American Lutheran theologian. He informs us that ". . . Luther's favorite phrase for God the Revealer was Deus loquens. Every manifestation of himself in creation, mercy, judgment, salvation, is a Word of God."³⁷ Revelation, he declares, is a "primary activity of God."³⁸ Indeed, ". . . this revelatory action of God is God acting as Word; it is Deus Loquens. That God has spoken, and the content of that speech--this was for Luther the Word of God."³⁹ Furthermore, according to Sittler, revelation is a continuing, dynamic activity of God and should not simply be equated with the Bible. He writes:

Here again, Lutheran theology, with its understanding of revelation as the Deus Loquens can never equate the revelation with a book, a palpable historical product. Revelation is, rather, the address of God to man, the incessant self-disclosure of God in his will and mercy, in his judgment and appeal. Revelation is not a thing; it is continuing activity. It is not static but dynamic.⁴⁰

³⁷Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word, p. 62.

³⁸Ibid., p. 17 (Italics mine).

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 11.

Sittler warns against conceiving of revelation solely in the perfect tense--a completed action in the historical past. He will not have revelation imprisoned, as it were, in a time capsule.

there is a constant temptation to make of God the-One-who-once-spoke, and the-One-who-once-did mighty acts. A large part of the irrelevance of strictly biblical preaching is chargeable to this imprisonment of the holy within the limitations of a chronicle. A doctrine of the Word which encourages this practice does actual disservice to the Bible.⁴¹

Taito A. Kantonen charges that the orthodox dogmatists after Luther "identified" the Word of God with the Scriptures. Thus they lost Luther's insight concerning the dynamic contemporaneity of the Word and reduced faith to "little more than intellectual assent to pure doctrine." His statement reads:

So powerful is this living Word in original Lutheranism that not even the subsequent orthodoxists, who identified the Word with the sacred writings and gave rise to the hypothesis that the purest Word of God is to be found in the lost and buried documents of the original biblical manuscripts, could successfully embalm it. Even when in actual practice faith meant little more than intellectual assent to pure doctrine, that doctrine retained at least theoretically the dogma that the Word is the "means of grace" and that one of the properties of the Bible is its "efficacy." In Luther's ministry the Word as means of grace was no empty figure of speech. It represented not "Deus dixit," a God who

⁴¹Ibid., p. 67 (Italics original).

had once spoken, caused His voice to be recorded, and then become silent, but "Deus loquens," the God who continues to speak.⁴²

The Bible, declares Eric Wahlstrom, is not to be ". . . regarded merely as a record of what God has spoken in the past," ⁴³ The idea that ". . . God has spoken a Word that is finished and recorded in a book," he maintains, is a "popular sophistry."⁴⁴ Such a concept of revelation implies that God ". . . cannot speak anything more or new. He becomes the God who spoke instead of the Deus loquens, the God who speaks now directly to man in his present situation."⁴⁵

The Larvae Dei

Another insight of Luther's that has been taken up by at least two American Lutheran theologians is that of the larvae (masks) or involucrum (veil) of God. Whether or not

⁴²Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 120f.

⁴³Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems, p. 22 (Italics original).

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid. (Italics original).

Luther actually used these terms with reference to the Scriptures is beyond the scope of this survey. The reason for including this subject here is the fact that these theologians have adopted Luther's concept for the purpose of elucidating their own positions regarding the relationship of the divine and human elements in the Scriptures.

We shall let Joseph Sittler introduce Luther's concept of the larvae Dei in the following statement:

Now Luther holds to the biblical principle that man cannot see God in his naked transcendence, and live. God, therefore, wears a mask (larva) or veil (involucrum) in all his dealings with men to shield them from his unapproachable brightness. Christ is such a veil, "the incarnate Son of God is that veil in which the divine majesty, with all his gifts presents himself to us . . . and it is the first step of error when men leave the veiled and incarnate God to pursue the naked God . . . God here in this life does not deal with us face to face, but covered and shadowed from us (cf. Now we see, as it were, through a glass, darkly; but then we shall see face to face); therefore we cannot be without veils in this life."⁴⁶

Sittler draws an analogy between the human and divine natures in the person of Christ and the relationship of the human and divine elements in the Scriptures. Moreover, as only the eye of faith can discern the Son of God hidden behind the veil of His humanity, even so faith alone can discern the divine revelation "incarnate" in the Scriptures.

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⁴⁶Sittler, The Doctrine of the Word, p. 65f. (The quotation is from WA. 42:292, 22ff.) Cf. also Sittler, p. 39, footnote.

Hence the word of Scripture is, in itself, the word of man, just as the historical appearance of the Redeemer is, in itself, that of a man. And just as the eye of faith must pierce through the Galilean rabbi, the poor man of Nazareth, to lay hold of the God-man-- just so the spirit-given, discerning eye of faith must pierce through, unmask the incognito of a historical document and hear there the Word of God.⁴⁷

In its doctrine of Holy Scripture, Sittler maintains, American Lutheran theology has tried to remove the veil from divine revelation by "elevating" the human words of the Bible to the absolute status of the divine.

We have tried [writes Sittler] to make of scripture something more than larvae Dei, masks or veil of God; and in our anxiety to elevate scripture to something other than a larva we have actually reduced it. In our admittedly pious effort to give scripture absolute standing we have disengaged it from the veiling⁴⁸

Even in His revelation, declares Martin J. Heinecken, God remains hidden and mysterious. Even in His revelation He is known in a different way than the truths of reason or even historical persons are known. God always wears a mask in His revelation and confronts man in such a way that He is never directly discernible.⁴⁹ Heinecken insists that we take

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 33f.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 66f.

⁴⁹Martin J. Heinecken, The Moment before God, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, (1954), p. 68.

seriously the absolutely paradoxical nature of revelation--
 the fact that the transcendent, unseen, and unseeable God
 ". . . never did and never can appear to man directly so
 that he can be apprehended with the senses."⁵⁰ He reproaches
 the view of revelation,

which supposes that all you have to do is to open your
 eyes to behold God, like the "prodigious green-
 bird sitting on a fence-post cawing in a most unusual
 manner," or like the omnipresent policeman, of whom
 Kierkegaard speaks, who is always turning up when he
 is not wanted,⁵¹

For sinful man, imprisoned in this space-time continuum,
 to see and know the transcendent God directly and immediately
 (without His mask, as it were) ". . . would violate the terms
 of man's existence and would be prematurely turning faith to
 sight."⁵² Indeed, "the existing individual, . . . is not able,
 as Luther said, to behold God 'in his naked transcendence.'"⁵³
 Hence, when God appears, ". . . he is always hidden and is

⁵⁰Martin J. Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology and the
 Message of the Preacher," The Lutheran Quarterly, VI (1954),
 286.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 287.

⁵²Ibid., 286.

⁵³Heinecken, Moment, p. 67.

discerned only in faith."⁵⁴ Heinecken repeats over and over again: God can be known only with the eyes of faith. ". . . God never did, does not now, and never will appear to man directly for all to see It is only to the eyes of faith that the living God is discernible."⁵⁵

The Distinction between the Written and Spoken Word

Another concept of Luther which has been adopted by American Lutheran theologians in recent years is his distinction between the written and spoken Word. For Luther, it is asserted, the written Word of the Scriptures is essentially normative for the church, while the oral proclamation of the Gospel is primarily the means through which God bestows His grace upon men.⁵⁶

Taito A. Kantonen maintains that Luther lays emphasis upon oral proclamation of the Gospel as the distinctive medium

⁵⁴Heinecken, "Bultmann's Theology . . ." p. 286 (Italics original).

⁵⁵Martin J. Heinecken, God in the Space Age (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1959), p. 101.

⁵⁶Uuras Saarnivaara in his article, "Written and Spoken Word," The Lutheran Quarterly, II (1950), has taken up and amplified this particular aspect of Luther's thought more than any other Lutheran. He writes: "Luther gives both to Scripture (and the written word in general) and the oral testimony and preaching of the word their proper places in the Christian

of the word of the Gospel. He remarks that although this emphasis is important in Luther's conception of the "living word," yet it has been largely forgotten in the later identification of divine revelation with the written word.⁵⁷

According to Luther, Kantonen says, "the positive task of presenting Christ and awakening faith belongs primarily to the oral word The living word requires its own dynamic medium, the living voice."⁵⁸ Kantonen concludes that for Luther

the principal function of the written Word is the negative one of defense against corruption, while the positive task of presenting Christ and awakening faith belongs primarily to the oral Word. While his defense of the pure Gospel against the false mysticism of the

Church: the written word of God is primarily a 'revelation-word,' which is the norm and standard of all faith, life, and teaching. The spoken word (in preaching, absolution, and sacraments) is the actual 'means-of-grace-word,' through which God forgives sins, works faith, and imparts His Holy Spirit. . . ." (p. 174). Saarnivaara calls attention to a difference between Luther and the Swiss reformers in their view of the significance of the written and spoken Word of God. According to Zwingli and Calvin, declares Saarnivaara, ". . . God works faith and justifies through the reading of Scripture, and even without it;" (p. 175). On the other hand, according to Luther ". . . God does it through the word proclaimed orally in the Christian Church," (*ibid.*) Having made this distinction, the author then proceeds to point up a strange anomaly: "When we compare the statements of some present-day Lutherans and some modern 'Reformed' we see the amazing thing that the Lutherans teach essentially a 'Reformed' doctrine of the means of grace, while the 'Reformed' in many cases teach an essentially 'Lutheran' doctrine," (p. 177).

⁵⁷Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 122.

⁵⁸Ibid.

"Schwaermer" thus led him to an increasing higher valuation of the written Word, his original inclination was to correlate the written Word with the Old Testament and the spoken Word with the New.⁵⁹

A. V. Neve declares:

Luther did not equate the Bible with the Word of God. Luther made a clear distinction between the written Word and the living and active Word. He was more concerned about the contents of the Bible than about the letter of the Bible. It is the message of the Bible that is important, and that message is the proclamation of the redemption in Christ. The statement, "The Bible is the Word of God," embodies the doctrine of the Word that was formulated during the period of Orthodoxy. The doctrine of the Word presented by Luther was somewhat sidetracked by the doctrine of the Word formulated during that period, and this view of Scripture has, to a very great extent, dominated Lutheran thinking about the Scriptures ever since.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 123. Saarnivaara also maintains that by the written word "Luther means primarily the Old Testament," Saarnivaara, "Written and Spoken Word," p. 169. Herman Sasse observes that the Gospel was oral proclamation before it was written. "As written word it becomes oral word again in the faithful preaching of the Gospel, as Luther always emphasized ('verbum Dei praedicatum est verbum Dei')," Herman Sasse, sub, "Correspondence," Lutheran World, IV (1957-8), 76.

⁶⁰A. V. Neve, sub, "Correspondence and Comment," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), 358.

CHAPTER VII

THE RELATION OF THE HUMAN AND DIVINE ELEMENTS IN THE SCRIPTURES

The title of this concluding chapter is intended to present the problem in its simplest and most basic form. When all polemical considerations have been put aside, it would seem that this is the fundamental issue around which all the discussions revolve. Some theologians have compared the relation of the human and divine elements in the Scriptures to the Incarnation of the divine Logos in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. While the thinking of these divines on this issue will be presented, the writer makes no pretense of offering an ultimate solution to the problem.

"For if we equate the Word of God with the Scripture," Joseph Sittler declares, "we are confusing things heavenly with things historical."¹ Indeed,

The only historical concretion of which we dare say unconditionally, "Here is the Word of God!" is Christ. The Bible itself is more reverent than many dogmaticians. Dogmaticians may, and many have, declared that the Word became Book and dwells among us. . . . Bibliolatry may be a polemical improvisation, a sociological phenomenon, or an ecclesiastical assertion

¹Joseph Sittler, Jr., The Doctrine of the Word (Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1948), p. 11.

of particularity. It surely does not belong to the body of Lutheran theology.²

Only faith can discern the Word of God in the Scriptures, Sittler declares, even as faith alone discerns the God-man in the "incognito" of the Galilean rabbi. Indeed, ". . . the Word of God becomes Word of God for us in the same way Jesus of Nazareth becomes Lord and Savior."³ When God reveals Himself, ". . . he always reveals himself in a veiled way, in such a relationship to the things of earth that man must seek after him in desperate earnestness."⁴ The fact that God reveals Himself as the hidden God is not due to divine arbitrariness. "It is ultimately of the mercy of God that he reveals to me in such a way that only in faith may I know him."⁵ In this connection Sittler calls attention to the fact that ". . . the historical appearance of the God-man is that of a man."⁶ Moreover,

when by the vitality of faith the Apostle Peter is able to lay hold of the God-man who confronts him in the

²Ibid., p. 16 (footnote)

³Ibid., p. 63 (Italics original).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 64.

incognito of a Galilean rabbi, Jesus replies to him that "flesh and blood (that is, the total religious possibility of man) hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in heaven."⁷

Sittler also uses the sacramental union of the human and divine elements in the Lord's Supper as an illustration of his thinking on the relation of these two components in the Scriptures. Lutheranism, he maintains, "has asserted the faith-full character of its theology of the Lord's Supper," by asserting the doctrine of the real presence and passionately repudiating the dogma of transubstantiation.⁸ Once again, the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine can be discerned only by faith: it ". . . is proclaimed as a gift of God to be discerned by faith, received by faith, and given to us to the end that God may '. . . strengthen us through the same in faith . . .'"⁹ On the other hand, declares Sittler, in respect to the doctrine of the Word, Lutheranism has often become guilty of the same rationalism which formulated the canon of transubstantiation.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 68 (footnote).

⁹Ibid.

When, however, we shift our attention from this faith-beheld Word of God in the Sacrament to the same Word of God in the scriptures, we are inclined by an equation of the words and the Word to assert in this area precisely a transubstantiation which we have repudiated in another. An inquiry into the theological method whereby such an equation is defended reveals exactly what one would expect--the operation of the same type of theological rationalism which once declared transubstantiation a true doctrine, and still maintains it.¹⁰

On the other hand, Sittler apparently does not want to "divorce" the Word of God from Scripture. He not only charges Orthodoxy with equating the divine Word with the Bible; he faults Pietism, too, for separating the divine and human elements of Holy Writ. The context indicates that he is referring to these two trends of thought in the following statement:

Here indeed is a strange perversion of the intention of the Reformers. A theological method that sought to lock up, contain, logically explicate the Unconditioned, the Word of God, passed over into a time that divorced the Word of God from Scripture altogether.¹¹

Eric Wahlstrom also uses the Incarnation as an allegory of the divine and human elements of the Bible. "God's word," he declares, "comes to us incarnate in a human book, as in the incarnate Christ."¹² Faith must discern and confess

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 46f.

¹²Eric Wahlstrom, God Who Redeems (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 19.

both natures in the Bible, even as in the Person of Christ.

"The truly human and truly divine Bible is the living and active Word of God which constitutes the authority for faith and life."¹³

This comparison between the Incarnation and the Scriptures reminds Wahlstrom of the docetic heresy, which maintained that finite human nature is not worthy of containing the infinite divine Logos. "The demand for a divine and inerrant book," he writes, "represents the ancient heresy of Docetism, which refused to recognize the true humanity of our Lord."¹⁴ The result of this mode of thought ". . . may be a Savior who is wholly a divine person, the transubstantiated elements of the Lord's Supper, the pure and divine church, or the inerrant and perfect book."¹⁵ In another connection Wahlstrom repeats the thought that faith recognizes the divinity hidden under the veil of humanity. "Christian faith has never yielded to the docetic view. It has found the divine in lowly human form: . . .The Bible, the Word of

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

God and the words of men."¹⁶

In this connection we come upon a profound insight in Wahlstrom's thought. Not only does he charge Orthodoxy with docetism for elevating the human element in the Scriptures to the level of the divine; he charges neo-orthodoxy with the same heresy for creating a cleavage between them. The statement is interesting in that it indicates that Wahlstrom, like Sittler, does not want to separate the human and divine elements in the Bible. In addition, the statement presents a penetrating analysis of the essentially Reformed characteristics of Barthian thought on the Word of God. "The neo-orthodox reaction," says Wahlstrom,

runs the risk of landing in a modern form of docetism. The incarnation is not real, the infinite cannot really unite with the finite. God is the wholly Other, he cannot be found here in the lowly form of a servant, in material elements, in a human book. The Bible as such is not the Word of God, it is only a sign (Hinweiss) a witness (Zeugniss) to the Word. God is the infinite Majesty, the Deus Absconditus, who remains separated and aloof from his creatures. He speaks but his message and his words are not the words of prophet and evangelist."¹⁷

¹⁶Eric Wahlstrom, "Historical Criticism, the Bible and the Word of God," The Lutheran Quarterly, II (1950), 305.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 302.

According to the "fundamentalist" view, declares Taito A. Kantonen, the Word of God is "synonomous . . . with the written documents of the Old and New testament"18 Luther, however, ". . . did not make a simple identification of the Word of God with the text of the Bible and therefore did not set up a 'paper Pope' in the place of the Roman pontiff."19 Kantonen cites St. Chrysostom approvingly, who describes the Scriptures as "all human as well as all divine."20 We must recognize these two natures in the Scriptures as existing side by side and not concentrate on one at the expense of the other, says Kantonen.

Those who concentrate their attention on the human side of the Bible, whether to criticize those aspects in which the scriptural writers were children of their day, or to idolize the scriptural text itself, deal only with the earthen vessel instead of the divine treasure.21

18Taito A. Kantonen, Resurgence of the Gospel (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p. 130 (Italics mine).

19Ibid., p. 113 (Italics mine).

20Taito A. Kantonen, A Theology of Christian Stewardship (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1956), p. 18.

21Ibid.

"God's revelation of Himself," Kantonen insists, "is marked throughout by a bipolarity of the human and divine."²² He also adduces the doctrine of the Incarnation and its perversion in the docetic heresy as evidence for this "bipolarity" of divine revelation.

The Church rejected the docetic heresy which so glorified the divine nature of Christ that it reduced His human nature to an empty shadow. . . . Why, then, should we presume that God's revelation of Himself in Scripture should differ from this basic design? Is not the deification of the Bible into something inerrant a form of the docetic heresy, a denial of the human nature of the Word?²³

²²Kantonen, Resurgence, p. 135 (Italics mine).

²³Ibid. "Any unbiased glance into the Bible reveals that it is not a book which has fallen from heaven," writes Eberhard Mueller, director of the Evangelische Akademie in Bad Boll, Wurttemberg, in his article, "The Word of God in Human Ears," The Lutheran Quarterly, V (1953), 340. We must recognize that human hands wrote it, and ". . . they wrote it in terms of a certain age," (ibid.). "To put it more precisely," says Mueller, ". . . the Bible is not God's immediate Word, but a human copy of it," (p. 343). The holy writers, he declares, ". . . speak in human words about what God has revealed to them," (ibid.). Mueller also emphasizes this two-fold nature of the Scriptures, which can be discerned only by faith. In the Christian view, according to Mueller, the Bible is ". . . a human production, imperfect like everything human and yet repeatedly acknowledged in the human heart as the Word through which God makes his will known to man," (ibid.). God does not reveal Himself transcendentally, but under the guise of humanity and in the realm of time and space. "The revelation of God in this world takes place not in a collection of timeless, divine communications and precepts which man could utilize as a 'God between the covers of a book,' or as an infallible medicine cabinet, or an eternally valid law book. No, God reveals

"Just as the divinity of Christ is concealed under His humanity," writes Warren A. Quanbeck, "so the servant form veils also the Word in Scripture."²⁴ Quanbeck also calls attention to the parallelism in Luther's writings both between Scripture and Incarnation and between Scripture and Sacrament, so important for his doctrine of the Word. For Luther, "Letter and spirit in Scripture are related to each other as are the humanity and divinity of Christ. "And the word is just like the Son of God."²⁵

himself in the history of living men. Only he who approaches this history as a living person can discover in and behind it the history of divine revelation," (*ibid.*).

²⁴Warren A. Quanbeck, "Biblical Interpretation in Luther's Early Studies," The Lutheran Quarterly, I (1949), 290.

²⁵Warren A. Quanbeck, "The Authority and Power of the Word of God," in Luther Today (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1957), p. 84. Ragnar Bring in How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962) also stresses the two-fold nature of the Scriptures under the illustrations of the Incarnation and the Sacrament of the Altar. "Just as God allows His Son to come to us as man," writes Bring, "so also God allows His Word to come to us in the Bible," (p. 26). Christ is both God and man, declares Bring, ". . . he had both divinity and humanity, without confusion or change; both were indivisibly and inseparably united in him. So it is also with the Bible," (*ibid.*). Just as in the Person of Christ, so also in the Scriptures, the divine and human natures must not be confounded, nor dare they be divided. The divine nature is indivisibly bound to that which is human; ". . . so in the Bible it is not possible to separate some kind of an eternal kernel of truth from what is conditioned by time. Rather,

The Word of God in the Bible, declares Walter J. Kukkonen, "cannot be formally distinguished from the Word of man, for the one permeates the other, forming an inseparable unity. In the Bible all is divine and all is human."²⁶ Paul Leo also maintains that the Word became flesh in the Bible ". . . in the same way as in the person of Christ, namely with the weaknesses of human nature. We have to acknowledge. . .

everything is temporal and eternal at once," (p. 26f).

Bring stresses the "real presence" of Christ, both in the sacrament and in the Scriptures in the following statement: "Just as Christ is present in, and comes to us under bread and wine, so also he comes to us in the Word. Just as the sacrifice of the mass in the Roman church denies Christ's real presence, in spite of the idea of transubstantiation, so also the Word is denied if one accepts the Bible as totally transformed into something divine, and thus devoid of anything temporal and historical. . . . In God's incarnation in Christ, divinity is concealed under humanity; in Holy Communion Christ's presence is under the bread and wine; in the Bible God speaks through words written in a specific human language," (p. 30). Cf. p. 31: "Just as the teaching of Christ's real presence does not require the doctrine of transubstantiation, so the teaching of the presence of the Word in the Bible does not require some theory which elevates Biblical words out of their earthly context."

²⁶Walter J. Kukkonen, "The Suomi Synod's Stream of Living Tradition," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), 48 (Italics original).

the form of a servant in the Bible."²⁷ Once more, Wesley J.

Fuerst affirms that

Scripture has two natures. Clearly it is a human document, written by men and recounting events in human history. But it is also the Word of God, the message of his creative activity and the medium of transmission for his activity.²⁸

Wolfgang M. Zucker also stresses "the intrinsic connection between incarnation and inverbation" in Luther's theology.²⁹

Through the incarnation the divine Word has become flesh;

". . . as God and man are reconciled in Jesus, language

is the divine order in which human speech and Holy Spirit are

²⁷Paul Leo, "Revelation and History in J.C.K. von Hofmann," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), 215. Paul Leo (d. 1958) was professor of New Testament in Wartburg Theological Seminary (ALC), Dubuque, Iowa.

²⁸Wesley J. Fuerst, "The Word of God in the Old Testament," The Lutheran Quarterly, X (1958), 324f. Fuerst is professor of Old Testament in Central Lutheran Theological Seminary (ULCA), Fremont, Nebraska.

²⁹Wolfgang M. Zucker, "Linguistic Philosophy and Luther's Understanding of the Word," The Lutheran Quarterly, XV (1963), 210. Zucker is professor of Philosophy in Upsala College (Augustana), East Orange, New Jersey.

united."³⁰ "The Word of God and the word of man are for Luther inseparably connected," says Zucker, "and any attempt to separate the two leads to a heretical error."³¹ In Luther's concept of the Word ". . . language is the human means in which the Spirit becomes flesh . . . and the corpus of the Bible is really a body."³²

Finally, Zucker carries the analogy between Incarnation and "inverbation" to the ultimate logical conclusion. Just as there is a communication of attributes between the divine and human natures in the Person of Christ, even so there exists a similar communication between the divine and human elements of the Scriptures.

thus the word of human language, written in the Bible, becomes efficacious through Jesus Christ who is the lord of the Scriptures. This is Luther's concept of the Communicatio Idiomatum, the sharing of the attributes of Christ's divinity with those of his humanity. Luther's theology of language is the counterpart of his Christology.

³⁰Ibid., p. 206.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 207.

As God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, thus the Word of God is incarnate in the biblical word.³³

Thus the majority of theologians, who address themselves to this problem of the relation between the human and divine elements in the Scriptures, do so under the analogy of the Incarnation of Christ. Some also allude to the sacramental union of the divine and human elements in the Lord's Supper as an illustration of the "communion" of these same elements in the Bible. Moreover, only a Spirit-wrought faith can discern the Word of God under the guise of human words in Holy Writ. To refuse to recognize the true humanity of the words of Scripture or to separate the human from the divine several theologians describe as a revival of the ancient heresy of Docetism.

³³Ibid., p. 209.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY

In this chapter the writer merely intends to summarize the salient points of the preceding chapters. As indicated in the introductory chapter this thesis is intended to be a survey of the broad trends of thought in American Lutheranism on the doctrine of Holy Scripture. The writer has attempted a survey, that is, a presentation of some of the problems and difficulties in this area of theology and the solutions which the various scholars have offered, rather than a study in depth of any one theologian or select group of theologians. This thesis, therefore, had no particular point to prove; rather it has been an attempt to present the results of the writer's research and his analysis of the trends of thought in an objective manner.

In chapter II, entitled "The Critical Involvement," the writer noted that several theologians seem to feel that a conflict exists between biblical cosmology and the modern scientific world-view. The discussion revolves primarily around the creation account in Genesis. The narrative is regarded as being unscientific and as requiring a lot of re-interpretation. On this ground it is asserted that the

doctrine of Holy Scripture requires a re-examination. Higher criticism was another one of the issues raised. Some regard the Pentateuch, not as the work of Moses, but as a later compilation. The division of the book of Isaiah is accepted by several theologians, who regard it as the work of at least two and possibly several authors. The influence of neo-orthodoxy and demythologizing was also noted. Several theologians write approvingly of some of the Barthian concepts regarding the relation of the Scriptures to the Word of God. Only Martin J. Heineken and Eric H. Wahlstrom, so far as the writer was able to discover, discuss the subject of demythologizing the Scriptures, in each case, however, with certain limitations. Neither one would go along with Bultmann to the ultimate logical conclusions of his method, especially with regard to the great salvatory events recorded in the Scriptures.

The concept of the Bible as witness, record and medium, it was pointed out, is not necessarily opposed to the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Attention was directed to the distinction between the Greek and Hebraic views of inspiration. The Judaistic view, it is asserted, sees the Spirit active on both ends of revelation. The Spirit-motivated witness of the first generation Christians as recorded in the

Scriptures is not just a report of God's words and deeds, but an interpretation of their significance as well. The purpose of the biblical record, we are told, was to set down in writing the testimony of the original eye-witnesses, so that it might be preserved and remain as a check upon the oral proclamation. The term "medium" is used to express the concept that revelation is not immediate but always in and through the creature, which must never be identified with the Creator. Moreover, through the Scriptures as medium God continues to speak His Word of judgment and grace.

Under the heading "Inerrancy and Subjective Truth" we noted that several theologians question the inerrancy of the biblical documents as we now have them. It is to be understood that this does not necessarily militate against accepting the Scriptures as an infallible norm for the Church. On the other hand, the theologians are generally agreed that the divine truth contained in the Scriptures does not consist merely in propositional statements, which require no more than intellectual assent. The truths of revelation must be received subjectively in the personal involvement of faith. Moreover, the concept of "truth as subjectivity" does not necessarily deny the substantial historicity of the biblical record.

The cognitive and dynamic views of revelation, it was

noted, are not perforce contradictory. However, most of the theologians reviewed feel that revelation is so much more than an imparting of propositional truths about God. Revelation, they affirm is not static, but dynamic. It is God in action, deed, event. Revelation as God-activity is not simply God in motion; it is God in directional movement. It is God's aggressive self-disclosure for the purpose of restoring men to fellowship with Him. The divine address is more than mere speech; it is charged with power. Indeed, it is similar to the almighty creative fiat which formed the universe. Only one of the theologians studied, Martin J. Heineken, emphasizes the idea of paradox in revelation and that primarily to express the problem of the relationship of the divine and human elements in the Scriptures. The idea of confrontation lays stress upon the fact that revelation is God's self-impartation; it is God coming to meet man in a personal encounter of an "I" over against a "thou." Since revelation is regarded as dynamic, faith, too, must be understood as a dynamic activity--an intensely personal commitment to the living God in His self-communication.

Some of the theologians agree that Orthodoxy lost Luther's dynamic understanding of divine revelation. They contend that

the seventeenth century dogmaticians materialized and objectified revelation by equating the Word of God with the Bible. By its formulations aimed at mere intellectual acceptance, it is said, orthodoxy "stultified" the Reformer's doctrine of the Word and squeezed out of it the decision of faith. Luther's "dynamic" concept of the Word, on the other hand, is generally commended by the theologians under review. Under Luther's expression, the Deus loquens, these theologians emphasize the living, active contemporaneity of the Word of God. God has not only spoken in times past, but He is still speaking through His Word, which is eternally relevant to each human being in the present situation.

Luther's concept of the larvae Dei is used by some theologians to stress the fact that revelation is never immediate or direct but comes to us in and through the creature, so that it cannot be discerned by any rational process but must be apprehended by faith. The unseen and unseeable God always wears a mask in His revelation, and any attempt to elevate the human element in the Scriptures to the level of the divine is symptomatic of the desire to remove the mask from the face of God, in order to apprehend Him with the senses. Finally, under Luther's distinction between the written and spoken Word several theologians stress the fact that the Scriptures are

essentially normative for the church, while the oral proclamation of the Gospel is primarily the means through which God bestows His grace upon men.

In the chapter on "The Problem of the Relation of Divine and Human Elements in Holy Scripture" we noted that several theologians object to the simple equation of the Word of God with Scripture. This, it is alleged, is tantamount to confusing things heavenly with things historical. Some of these divines use the Incarnation of Christ as an analogy or illustration of the union of the divine and human elements in the Scriptures. The sacramental union of the heavenly and earthly elements in the Lord's Supper is also used to explain the relationship of these same elements in Holy Writ. In the Bible, therefore, we must recognize this bipolarity between what is human and what is divine. Human speech and Holy Spirit are united in the Scriptures; they are at the same time all human and all divine. Any attempt, therefore, to elevate the human element to the level of the divine, we are told, is a symptom of the rationalistic tendency which formulated the doctrine of transubstantiation and is virtually a revival of the ancient heresy of docetism. On the other hand, it should also be noted that, while these divines distinguish between the human and divine "natures" of the Bible, they do not wish

to divorce or separate them.

The relation of divine and human elements in the Bible seems to this writer to be the fundamental problem in the current discussion of the doctrine of Scripture. However, a mere recognition of the fact that the Scriptures are both human and divine does not seem to him to help matters much. The final solution should also state the relationship between these two elements in the Bible and the bearing which this "communion" of the letter and the Spirit may have upon the issues of the verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

These then are the trends of discussion relative to the doctrine of Holy Scripture in recent American Lutheran theology. In view of the fact that several of the theologians have described the union of the human and divine elements in the Scriptures in terms of the Incarnation of Christ, the comparison between the current discussions on the nature and authority of the Bible and the Christological controversies of the fourth century is striking. And so we have come round full circle. The statement of Ragner Bring, quoted in a footnote in the introduction, bears repetition and may serve as a fitting conclusion to this study.

In the ancient church the theologically oriented questions of the most urgent sort were related to Christology, while

today the most urgent problems have to do with our relation to the Bible.¹

¹Ragnar Bring, How God Speaks to Us (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), p. 15.

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