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The Doctrine of Scripture in the Light of the Relationship of Inspiration and Inerrancy

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THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE
IN THE LIGHT OF THE RELATIONSHIP
OF INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY

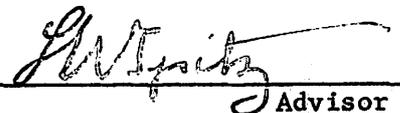
A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the
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by

James W. Hallerberg

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SHORT TITLE

SCRIPTURE, INSPIRATION, INERRANCY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Assumptions

The conviction of the Church through the ages has been that God has given by men and to men a Word about Himself in written form. In an age of ecumenical concern, the Church catholic is again giving careful examination to the Scriptures which she teaches and close scrutiny to her teachings concerning the Scriptures. It is from within the faith of the Church that this paper is written; it is out of a concern for the ministry of the teaching function of the Church that research was made. The doctrine--that is, the teaching of the Church systematically formulated in response to questions raised by the faithful--with which this paper deals concerns the Scriptures themselves and the manner in which the formation of the Word written is related to God and to men.

The problems with which this paper deals are raised less by the Scriptures than by various ideas about the Bible as formulated by "branches" of Christianity and by members of the Body of Christ. The problem, as indicated by the title "The Doctrine of Scripture in the Light of the Relationship of Inspiration and Inerrancy," arises from the various approaches and/or conclusions of men who deal with the Scriptures in a systematic manner. The purpose of this paper is to deal with some of the specific approaches and conclusions within the Church which deal with the doctrine of Scripture in the light of the relationship of inspiration and inerrancy.

This paper is written by one who is a member of the Church catholic, by one who is a Lutheran, and by one who does not necessarily make statement of dogmatic truth the exclusive property of men within the Lutheran tradition. This is said to disparage the Lutheran heritage not at all, but to indicate that one can at least be open to different systematic formulations. The point is also made to indicate to the reader that the student was conscious of his own heritage, but that at the same time both during the research and during the writing of this paper he attempted to prevent this heritage from becoming a bias. And yet the other point must also be made, namely, that the normative function of the Scriptures themselves cannot be lightly dismissed nor heedlessly ignored.

In choosing the topic and in carrying out the research, the student was motivated in part to look for answers dealing with his own individual theological questions and with his own personal reflections in faith. But in presenting this paper, he does not--nor is he allowed to--ever intend to discuss his own personal conclusions. The attempt is made to provide the reader with an acquaintance with specific problems and solutions found in the various works which were read. As objectively as possible he hopes to present what was learned about the doctrine concerning Scripture, inspiration, and inerrancy.

Scope and Plan

To anyone who is even superficially acquainted with the chief doctrines to be dealt with here, it is immediately apparent that the area which must be covered in order to deal adequately with the doctrine of

Scripture, inspiration, and inerrancy is extremely large. At first this student had planned to deal only with the specific area of inerrancy. But it was quickly discovered that inerrancy cannot be approached in isolation, and it was therefore deemed necessary to include the other two "topics," Scripture and inspiration. The specific limiting factor in the presentation is found in the words "doctrine" and "relationship" in the title, "The Doctrine of Scripture in the Light of Inspiration and Inerrancy." In dealing with the doctrine, exegetical considerations will not be explicitly treated. The historical influences and considerations will be dealt with in some sections, but in general the emphasis is not on the study of the history of the dogmatic formulations.

The intent of the writer is to present in an orderly fashion the problems and solutions found in the various works which were read. There is an emphasis on the Lutheran Orthodox Theology of the Seventeenth Century, since it is in relation (or reaction) to the theology of this period that most men stand in agreement or disagreement. In an age which is concerned with criticism, science, and history, much has been written within the Church dealing with Scripture, inspiration, and inerrancy. The attempt is not made to deal with all of the works in the area. But it is the hope and intent of the student that he has limited his investigation and his report to important and representative men and "schools" of thought.

The paper will follow the following outline. Following this "Introduction," Revelation and Scripture will be discussed in the hope of understanding the problems encountered and the approaches put forth. Next, the doctrine of inspiration will be presented, with the emphasis on the problems and solutions offered in the definition of the doctrine. Of special interest

here--especially in its relation to inerrancy--is verbal and plenary inspiration. The fourth chapter will deal with inerrancy itself. The fifth chapter will come as the logical sequence to the former ones and will give the limit to the scope of this paper as is indicated by its title, "The Relationship of Inspiration and Inerrancy." Finally, some questions and implications arising from the study will be presented.

CHAPTER II

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE WITH REFERENCE TO REVELATION

"Since the time of the ancient Church, all statements of the Christian faith have assumed the authority of the Scriptures either directly or indirectly."¹ The existence of the Bible for the purpose of preserving and handing on God's revelation² is appreciated by almost all churches and theologians in history. But the specific relationship between God's revelation and the Scriptures themselves is one which can raise some problems. The fact that God does reveal Himself, that He has manifested Himself in history through Jesus Christ, and that this specific revelation in Jesus Christ provides a point of departure in discussing the place of Scripture in the life of the Christian is the point made most emphatically by most of the contemporary theologians. Lutheran theology also would definitely emphasize that the Scriptures are related to the "unique revelation of God in Christ and conveyed to us by the inspired witness of the Biblical writers, and sealed by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the readers' hearts."³ But agreement with such a statement does not imply systematic adequacy. And this is part of the problem--to look at God's revelation and at His Scriptures (if, indeed, they can even be separated) so that it may be possible to state God's Word without going beyond His words.

The doctrine of Scripture was not in debate in the early Church. Not until the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent is a necessity for definition of the doctrine to be found.⁴ And according to H. Sasse, even to this day the Lutheran Church has no formulated dogma concerning Scripture.

The Lutheran church does not have to this very day a formulated dogma concerning the Holy Scripture. For the only part of our Confession which speaks of the Scripture, the Introduction to the Formula of Concord, contains, as the very title shows, . . . no complete exposition of the doctrine concerning the Scripture and is therefore no substitute for the article so often sought in vain.⁵

Sasse's statement may be somewhat problematic, since he only hints at what he might mean by "formulated dogma," but it does point very clearly to the fact that the doctrine of Scripture in the light of inspiration and inerrancy definitely has some problems involved in it. Lack of dogmatic formulations does not of necessity equal the non-existence of a doctrine, but it does point one in the direction of looking to see how men have tried to deal with the Scriptures.

The Lutheran Orthodox theologians are representative of those who call Scripture the Word of God.⁶ This is not to deny that the Bible is the "authentic witness,"⁷ but it is at the very least a more closely defined statement. Others emphasize that "the Bible is the record of the manner in which men of the chosen nation were moved to interpret their national history."⁸ Already at this point the close relationship of and/or the distinction between the human-divine aspect of the Scriptures as related to revelation is apparent. It is at this early point that the problem of the doctrine of Scripture is discovered.

The point of departure for the old Lutheran dogmaticians⁹ for their discussion of the doctrine of Scripture is their belief that the Bible is inspired. "... Calov speaks of inspiration as the form of revelation, as that which makes revelation divine."¹⁰ They relate the concept of revelation to Scripture in a very specific manner.

All the dogmaticians call Scripture revelation. Scripture was more than merely a record or history of God's revelation; it was revelation, or, to put it more accurately, it was revelation

put down in writing. Hence there was no real difference between the revealed Word of God and Holy Scripture. However, the dogmatists never called revelation Scripture: the two terms were never equated as if Scripture was God's only revelation.

"God's revelation illumines and informs men,"¹² and in Scripture God reveals Himself. It is important to note that the Orthodox theologians do not limit revelation to Scripture; in a sense, they seem to work with the existing evidence--the canonical Scriptures--and from this they draw their conclusions. They can see no essential difference between revelation, Word of God, and Scripture. R. Preus concludes, "There is, therefore, no difference between Scripture and God's Word,"¹³ after quoting the following definition of Scripture given by Gerhard which is typical of the Orthodox viewpoint.

Holy Scripture is the Word of God, reduced to writing according to His will by the evangelists and apostles, revealing perfectly and clearly the teaching of God's nature and will, in order that men might be instructed from it unto life everlasting.¹⁴

Preus goes on to say that these men do not limit Word of God to Scripture exclusively. "Scripture is the Word of God, but the Word of God is not Scripture."¹⁵ F. Pieper says much the same, though he speaks of "the identity of Scripture and God's Word."¹⁶

The assumption of the Orthodox theologians seems to be that revelation is to furnish information. "Specifically the term 'revelation' is used for God's self-disclosure made to the prophets and apostles by the immediate afflatus of the Spirit."¹⁷ John MacKinnon, in writing about The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation, provides a good transition from the view of the Orthodox theologians to much of modern thought about revelation and Scripture. (Here he happens to be speaking of Roman Catholic theology, but on this point there is some agreement between Orthodoxy and Rome.)

What do we receive in Divine revelation? Here comes a great parting of the ways. Traditional Roman Catholic Christian thought takes the position that the aim or purpose of Divine revelation is to furnish information concerning God which reason cannot obtain and which helps in connection with man's salvation. A different and, in our judgment, a truer interpretation of Divine revelation emerges in Protestantism, which affirms that revelation is not intellectual as the Roman church declares, but practical in character. For Protestant thought, Divine revelation is not information concerning God, but God's giving of Himself for the practical purpose of persuading man into a Divine fellowship that will be transforming in its effects.¹⁸

This assumption, that revelation is God's encounter with man rather than propositional truth, leads the contemporary theologian to stress that Scripture is witness to revelation rather than revelation itself.

D. M. Beegle states this position very well in the following paragraph.

The Scriptures, according to the traditional understanding of the church, are special revelation and therefore uniquely inspired. Technically speaking, however, the Bible is a record or witness to revelation, and as such it is a product of inspiration. This is not to deny the amazing accuracy, authenticity, and trustworthiness of Scripture. Rather, it is to recognize that there are two different kinds of truth. Scripture is objective truth. Since it is rooted in history, the key events of redemptive history are to be investigated and authenticated, in so far as is possible, by the same criteria employed in checking all other historical data. Man's rational faculties can also investigate the logic and meaning of the teachings in Scripture. But a thorough study of Scripture by means of unaided human reason can never lead to the act of faith. The facts and teachings of Scripture do not possess the power to coerce trust and commitment on the part of the reader.¹⁹

T. Lindsay interprets the Reformers, in opposition to Medieval scholastic theology, as meaning that Scripture "contains, presents, conveys, and records" when they say that Scripture is the Word of God.²⁰ This sweeping generalization--the "retranslation" of the word "is"--is questionable. From the "Reformed" background it may be valid to speak in this way, but in the history of Lutheran theology it is quite questionable to do so. At any rate, the existential approach of some men to Scripture as Word of God and revelation is apparent in the same author's following words.

The common doctrine of the Reformers about Holy Scripture . . . may be summed up under two principal and four subordinate statements. In the first place, they held, in opposition to mediaeval theology, that the supreme value of the Bible did not consist in the fact, true though it be, that it is the ultimate source of theology, but in the fact that it contains the whole message of God's redeeming love to every believer--the personal message to me. In the second place, they held that the faith which laid hold on this personal message was not mere assent to propositions, but personal trust on the personal God revealing Himself in His redeeming purpose--a trust called forth by the witness of the Spirit testifying in and through the Scripture, that God was speaking therein. These two thoughts of Scripture and faith always correspond. In mediaeval theology they are primarily intellectual and propositional; in Reformation theology they are primarily experimental and personal. Hence the witness of the Spirit, which emphasizes this experimental and personal character of Scripture, forms part of almost every statement of the Doctrine of Scripture in Reformation theology.²¹

Karl Barth says that Scripture is a human historical record and that when looking for authority for faith one must look directly to the Holy Spirit.²² Barth does say that the Scriptures are the Word of God, but by that he means that they point to Christ.²³ What Barth really points to is that the Bible becomes the Word of God, for faith. He says, "'The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be His Word, so far as God speaks through it' (I, 1, 123)."²⁴ He calls the Bible "witness" and "sign" not in order to subordinate Scripture or to detract from its dignity or validity, but to indicate that a witness must not be identical with that to which it bears witness. He concludes that one must therefore distinguish between the Bible and revelation.²⁵

The approach of the Old Lutheran dogmatists is one which is closely connected to the concept of authority in the church for faith and practice. They teach that the Scriptures alone are the source of theology (principium cognoscendi, principium theologiae). "'The norm and standard for portraying [Christ],'" says Dannhauer, 'is the revealed Word. If one departs from this, he portrays not Christ, but his own dreams.'²⁶

There is a distinction in their writings between the Revealer and the revealed.

The dogmaticians think of Scripture as the organic foundation of our faith. Scripture is the source of theology only in an instrumental sense. It is not the cause of the being of theology; that would be a deification of Scripture. God is the so-called principium essendi, the first cause of theology; He is its foundation, its beginning and its end. This important point is brought out by Quenstedt in the following manner. We must distinguish, he says, between the one who reveals truth, who is God, and the truth which is revealed, which is Scripture. The former is the principium essendi of theology, for theology has its being from God; the latter is its principium cognoscendi, for from Scripture theology is known and understood.²⁷

Emil Brunner seems to reflect almost the same idea when he says that Scripture "is an instrumental authority, in so far as it contains that element before which I must bow in the truth, which also itself awakens in me the certainty of truth."²⁸ But Brunner questions the assumptions of the Orthodox theologians when he says that their making Scriptures the Word an article of faith is based upon a wrong conception of the word "faith." He believes this to be a Roman Catholic conception of faith, where faith is "first of all related to the divinely revealed doctrine as its real content."²⁹ He also believes that the a priori recognition of the authority of the Scriptures has behind it a wrong concept of faith. His emphasis is that faith is related to Christ and His event in the Christians' lives; to relate it to dogmatic formulations is very unbiblical.³⁰

The conflict between the two different ways of looking at the concepts of revelation and Word of God in their relationship to Scripture are quite apparent. For the contemporary theologian, as shall be seen presently, in more detail in the discussion of inspiration, the presupposition in approaching the Bible is revelation. It is in a large respect viewed from man's standpoint; it emphasizes that God remains in a different category

which indicates that it is entirely questionable for one to speak of God communicating propositional truth when speaking of revelation. They therefore emphasize the personal divine-human encounter³¹ of faith. The Orthodox theologians dealt in a lesser degree with such a concept. They were not ready to exclude the intellectual side of life from faith. Thus they sought an authority, and they made use of the authority which the Church had always used. The question of authority, especially as it is related to the question of certainty, without a doubt had some influence upon so strongly holding for the statement that Scripture is the Word of God. Their definition of doctrine would tend to come very close to identifying God's Word and God's will with dogma. The contemporary theologian most definitely questions this.

Need the two ways of looking at Scripture be of necessity mutually exclusive? The Missouri Synod Commission on Theology and Church Relations draws a conclusion which indicates that they are not necessarily so. Their statement draws the two views together and emphasizes the close relation between revelation, Scripture, truth, and encounter.

God reveals Himself by His created works, by His mighty acts in the history of His people and the life of His Son, and by a direct verbal communication to men. His Word foretells and initiates the history in which He discloses Himself; it accompanies and interprets that history; and it reports and recalls that history and brings it effectually into the life of man.

God in His words and works reveals Himself as One who is fallen man's Judge and yet wills to be man's Father. God wills that man shall be in conscious, personal, willed, responsible, and obedient fellowship with Himself. The content of revelation, His revealed truth, is therefore both: a personal confrontation and concrete, "propositional" truth. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord when men face Him as their Lord (personal confrontation) and know that He is the Lord who has created, judged, and redeemed them (propositional truth). This revelation culminates in the sending of the Son, the Word of God; the Word is the focus and the interpretive center of all the words of God.³²

CHAPTER III

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE RELATED TO INSPIRATION

The doctrine that the Holy Scripture is given, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the self-understood presupposition for the understanding of the Bible which Luther and the Lutheran Confessions had Therefore even though the Lutheran confessions do not contain an extended doctrine concerning the Holy Scripture, it must definitely be asserted that they do teach the inspiration and the consequent absolute trustworthiness of the Bible as God's Word. The Lutheran Church does not, however, know of a detailed dogma about the nature of Inspiration.¹

Sasse's statement, as quoted above, indicates that the same problem which was found in dealing with the doctrine of Scripture is also found when one looks at inspiration. The problem for the Lutheran approaching inspiration is that the Confessions do not speak of it explicitly in a systematic manner. But outside the Confessions much has been written by Lutherans on the subject, and outside Lutheran circles much has also been written. This chapter will give definitions of inspiration, comment on some of the general views of inspiration, speak of the manner of inspiration, look at approaches to the problem, and speak specifically of verbal inspiration. The relationship of inspiration to the doctrine of Scripture will hopefully be clear to the reader in the process.

As stated earlier, revelation is tied closely to the Scriptures by the Orthodox theologians. Revelation and Scripture are manifestations of something unknown and hidden. The action of the Holy Spirit is necessary to make known to these men the Word of God, and this action in which knowledge is supernaturally communicated to them is called inspiration.² Preus gives the definition of inspiration for these men as follows:

Inspiration is generally defined by the dogmatists as the act whereby God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man's sake and the very words expressing that content. It connotes a communication of the content of Scripture (suggestio rerum), a communication of the words (suggestio verborum) and the urge (impulsus), or, which is the same thing, the command, to write (mandatum scribendi).³

Warfield presents the "conservative" Reformed point of view. He says that inspiration views the Bible "as an oracular book" in the sense that whatever it says God says. It is a book, which by virtue of its divine inspiration, in which man will not by searching find some word of God, "but a book which may be frankly appealed to at any point with the assurance that whatever it may be found to say, that is the Word of God."⁴

Sasse, in his definition, begins by discussing what inspiration is not--it is not just God's providence guiding the history of Christian literature nor simply the assistance of the Holy Spirit in "inspiring" the writers in a manner like Luther was "inspired" in his work of translating the New Testament. Positively stated, inspiration is the phenomenon in which the Holy Spirit placed His Word of revelation, which is the Word he wanted to reveal of Himself to the world, "into the heart of a person for oral proclamation or written deposition, so that it must be said without equivocation of the Word that is thus spoken or written that it is God's Word."⁵ In the same context he also states that in this sense inspiration "is completely independent of all attendant circumstances of psychological nature."^{6,7}

Burnaby believes that "inspiration" means that the Bible is "unique."⁸ Before defining it more specifically, he gives the following premises. First, he states that the human mind because it is human is incapable of adequately

comprehending or expressing divine truth. He then goes on to state that in Scripture one finds an adequate comprehension and expression of divine truth. "It follows that Scripture cannot be the work of human minds." This implies the result of inspiration.⁹ He concludes in defining inspiration as "the power of the Spirit active in man in such manner that the human personality, atrophied and fettered by sin, is set free to fulfil itself, to be what it was meant to be, and to work the works of God."¹⁰

The Roman Catholic doctrine is defined in the following quotation.

We Roman Catholics thus assume the traditional teaching of the Church as binding. The Scriptures have God as their author: he is the 'author' in the literary sense of the word, because he inspired the Scriptures. This inspiration does not consist in the fact that the Scriptures have been accepted as canonical by the Church, nor that they interpret free from error the revelation of God.¹¹

Paul Tillich argues that inspiration is a receptive, creative response to revelatory events. The Scriptures contain the original witness of those who "participated in the revealing events." The witness and the revelation cannot be completely separated, for revelation can only be seen with the object of the subject in mind. He concludes that "the inspiration of the writers of the New Testament is their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, and with him, of the New Being, of which they became witnesses."¹²

It is from definitions such as listed previously that Beegle speaks of four general views of inspiration. 1) Intuition. According to those who hold this view, the emphasis is upon the person rather than the content. He is the "religious genius who has a talent for spiritual thought."¹³

2) Illumination. This theory emphasizes a deep religious experience with

God. God has "illuminated" all his followers, but in speaking of inspiration the point is that the Biblical writers were the objects of an intensification of the work of the Holy Spirit. 3) Dictation. This is a mechanical concept in which the Holy Spirit dictates the precise words of God's message to the person inspired. 4) Dynamic. "The inspired person has the extraordinary help of the Holy Spirit without violating his individuality and personality."¹⁴

The Orthodox theologians attempt to demonstrate that "properly speaking," inspiration deals with the writings themselves. But they also point out that the writers were also the objects of inspiration--they wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Beegle believes that there is some justification in this, but he indicates that problems arise. He himself sees a validity in speaking in terms of the book, and he sees the evidence for this emphasis in II Tim. 3:16. There the Scriptures are related to the term "inspiration." But he feels that II Peter 1:21 is more representative of the Biblical viewpoint when it speaks of the men who were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak for God. Inspiration is involved in the whole revelatory activity of God, whether one looks at the means of His communicating His revelation or the end result of this revelation. He concludes, therefore:

The book, the end result, is inspired because it is God's message, but there would have been no book if first there had not been an inspired channel. As Orr observes, "Inspiration belongs primarily to the person, and to the book only as it is the product of the inspired person."¹⁵

With this in mind, it has already been intimated that the manner or mode of inspiration plays an important role in defining the relationship of inspiration to Scripture. Beegle tends to lean toward the fourth view

(dynamic) as stated on the previous page, but he hesitates to state more concerning the manner in which the Holy Spirit inspires the writers than that it is "extraordinary." The Orthodox theologians are not so cautious and are therefore more specific. They speak of the Holy Spirit "accommodating Himself to the understanding and natural endowments of the holy writers in order that He might record the mysteries according to the usual mode of speaking!"¹⁶ The writers were the instruments of the Spirit, and though He accommodated himself to their mode of writing, they could write only what was "dictated" to them.¹⁷ Most contemporary theologians (Barth, Brunner, Beegle) believe that because the Orthodox describe inspiration as the Holy Spirit dictating words to the writers the manner of inspiration is thereby made purely mechanical. Preus counters this charge as follows:

It has been said that the scholastic Lutheran dogmaticians taught a mechanical theory of inspiration. If this description of their view--it is usually given in the form of an indictment--means that they held a verbal inspiration according to which the amanuenses were efficienter and originaliter passive instruments to whom God dictated the very words to be recorded in Scripture, it is correct. If it is meant to convey the idea that the dogmaticians wished to reduce the writers of Scripture to the level of mere lifeless machines which experienced no mental activity but only moved their hands unconsciously in obedience to an irresistible impulse of the Holy Spirit, it is not in accordance with the facts in the case. It is true that Quenstedt, for instance, says that the prophets and apostles contributed nothing of their own in writing Scripture except their pens. But from this statement it cannot be concluded that he wishes to reduce the writers of Scripture to a state where they experienced nothing during the act of inspiration. Quenstedt himself makes this fact clear when he says in the same paragraph that the writers took up their pens consciously. Actually the mechanical idea of inspiration was not only foreign to the dogmaticians, it was loudly and consciously condemned by them. They were opposed to every conception of inspiration which would degrade the writers to the status of inanimate objects which neither thought nor felt in the act of writing but to which God imparted revelation as one might pour water into a pail.¹⁸

This rather lengthy quotation is important because it demonstrates that the contemporary theologian must be very cautious in interpreting the Orthodox

theologians as teaching a mechanical manner of inspiration when they speak of God's "dictating" His Word to His writers. It would appear as though the Orthodox maintain a tension (which is one of the favorite words for many in the Twentieth Century) when they speak of the manner of inspiration. In fact, one must ask some of the modern theologians if they have not in attempting to retain the tension of the divine-human aspects of the manner of inspiration resolved the tension by almost completely ignoring to give a concise statement on the manner of God's inspiring activity.

At this point it is once again important to mention that one of the possible causes for the different views of inspiration, as was the case in the different views of the assumptions and conclusions concerning the definition and purpose of Scripture itself, is dependent upon one's view of the intent and result of God's revelatory activity. If a person is convinced that God reveals propositional truth in Scripture (as does the Orthodox theologian), he also maintains a "stricter" view of inspiration. There is a reciprocal relation between Scripture and inspiration rather than a direct cause-effect relationship as God communicates his truth to man. It emphasizes the initiative of God, and it stresses the receptivity of man. On the other hand, those (contemporary) theologians who would tend to separate propositional truth from the revelation of God in order to stress His action use "inspiration" with a more specific reference to the effect of the Scriptures. The difference between the two views is quite apparent when one finds "that the religious content of Scripture cannot be dissociated from other interests" (Calov)¹⁹ for the Orthodox theologians with Abba's contention "that the inspiration of the Bible has to do with its content rather than with its evolution. Its real significance is not merely formal but religious."²⁰

It is with such thoughts in mind that one is led to consider verbal inspiration. Brunner, who rejects verbal inspiration because he feels that it is in conflict with the Biblical concept of revelation, gives a brief historical background of this doctrine which is defined as teaching that "every word of the autographs was equally inspired."²¹ He states that the doctrine "was probably also taken over by Paul and the rest of the Apostles" from pre-Christian Judaism. Later this "literalistic theory of the authority of Scripture" was somewhat modified by the allegorical method of exposition. But it was again maintained by the Orthodox theologians as they searched for a certain authority in reaction to Rome.²²

Preus states the teaching of the Orthodox theologians in what is perhaps a more objective way when, in reference to verbal and plenary inspiration, he says:

Inspiration pertains to all of Scripture; there is nothing in Scripture which is not inspired It was also the opinion of the orthodox Lutheran theologians that everything contained in Scripture was divinely and verbally revealed by God to the writers. True, not everything in Scripture needed to be revealed to the writers . . . but all the contents of Scripture were actually revealed in the exact manner in which they were recorded. If therefore it was taught that some portions of Scripture were not revealed to the writers by God, this amounted eo ipso to a denial of the inspiration of these portions. Such a conclusion is consistent with Calov's idea that inspiration was the forma of revelation in the case of Scripture and with Quenstedt's opinion that God revealed the mysteries of His hidden wisdom to the writers through inspiration.²³

The Orthodox theologians believed that they were simply restating what Scripture and Luther²⁴ said about inspiration, namely, that it was verbal.

Brunner disagrees with this view and says that though Luther could fight Rome only with the Scriptures he "did not set us a doctrine of Verbal Inspiration, and thus the Infallibility of the Text of the Bible," but was very

critical of it in his practice of distinguishing between Scriptures that were "canonical" and those which were not.²⁵ Abba agrees.²⁶ Beegle argues that the Scriptures themselves do not point to a verbal inspiration by referring to Paul's "forgetfulness" about how many people he baptized in Corinth. He asks how Paul could have been verbally inspired and still have to correct himself.²⁷ He also feels that inspiration which is defined of necessity as verbal is based upon a false logic. Such logic argues that if one falsehood is found, everything is false. This, he argues, is not necessarily true in any other area of knowledge, and he therefore can see no validity in applying a logic to Scripture which is applicable no place else. But the logic is the basis for the teaching of verbal inspiration. His conclusion is that verbal inspiration still does not guarantee the security which it intends to provide. He says that many are concerned with this proverbial "camel argument" in which if one error is admitted (if the camel gets his nose through the tent) everything or anything may be in error (the camel finally occupies the whole tent). He feels that there is some validity in this argument, but that it presents only one side of the story. It still does not guarantee security, for there are many temptations which beset the Christian. He concludes: "There is no security outside of daily commitment of oneself as a living sacrifice to God. Creeds cannot protect. The one who holds to inerrancy is in as grave danger as the person who rejects the doctrine."²⁸

Many, then, do not see the necessity of a verbal inspiration. Even beyond this, they criticize the doctrine and deny it because of various reasons. Warfield lists four reasons which he feels are actually assumptions why men criticize the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. 1) They attempt to

"establish a false distinction between the teaching of Christ and the teaching of His apostles," and they refuse "the latter in favor of the former."²⁹ 2) They represent inspiration as "merely a matter of accommodation to the prejudices of the Jews."³⁰ He disagrees with this idea by pointing out that accommodation assumes that "the apostles did not share these views, and, secondly, that they nevertheless accommodated their teaching to them. 'Accommodation' properly so called cannot take place when the views in question are the proper views of the persons themselves," and since the apostles were themselves Jews they expressed the views which they themselves believed.³¹ 3) These same theologians often try to draw "a distinction between the belief and the teaching of these writers" and affirm that though they believed in a "high doctrine" of inspiration they did not teach it. Warfield believes that this is going against the evidence of Scripture.³²

In summary, the basic opposition to verbal inspiration is found in the indictment that it implies a mechanical manner of the work of the men to whom the Spirit dictated His Word. In defense of verbal inspiration it is pointed out that the specific mode of inspiration is not of necessity implied by the teaching.

The classic exponents of the doctrine of verbal inspiration have not attempted to define the mode of inspiration. It is true that the word "dictation" sometimes occurs. But it is also obvious that the use of this word was not intended to specify the mode of inspiration as that of dictation.³³

One of the strongest arguments for teaching verbal inspiration is the following:

Actually the content of Scripture cannot be separated from its words. The meaning of God's self-communication to us is inextricably bound to the words of Scripture. Content cannot be expressed without words; the very purpose of words is to convey thoughts or content. . . . Consequently, unless we say that the words of Scripture are given by God, we cannot say that Scripture is inspired!

for Scripture consists of words /Calov/. Letters and words without meaning and content are like a man's body without a soul. Finally, we can never be certain of what the Spirit of God means in Scripture unless we can be sure that the words of Scripture were expressly given by Him.³⁴

Thus Preus can make the statement that "The only alternative to verbal inspiration is no inspiration."³⁵

CHAPTER IV

THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE IN RELATION TO INERRANCY

According to the Orthodox theologians the Scriptures themselves witness to the fact that they are revelation and the Word of God because they have been given by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Because the Scriptures have been divinely inspired, "it follows, therefore, that these Scriptures possess certain divine characteristics, or properties."¹ One of these properties is inerrancy. Preus, in a very important part of his book dealing with the Orthodox theologians, defines the assumptions, implications, and meaning given by these men in their teaching concerning inerrancy in the following words.

The possibility that the prophets and apostles could err in their writings is unthinkable. . . . It is infallible. It can never be called into doubt. It was written for the very sake of our certainty. Quenstedt, true to form, states the orthodox position in a manner which defies misunderstanding. He says: "The Holy canonical Scriptures in their original text are the infallible truth and free from every error, that is to say, in the sacred canonical Scriptures there is no lie, no deceit, no error, even the slightest, either in content or words, but every single word which is handed down in the Scriptures is most true, whether it pertains to doctrine, ethics, history, chronology, typography or onomastics; and no ignorance, lack of understanding, forgetfulness or lapse of memory can or should be attributed to the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit in their writing of holy Scriptures." Scripture, then, is the source of truth (principium veritatis) from which all derived, or revealed, theological truth is to be gained. Inerrancy, of course, pertains only to the canonical Scriptures and only the original autographic texts; there is no preclusion of error in copies and versions of the Bible.²

Years later Dr. Walther found himself in the same tradition, that is, in agreement with the Orthodox statements on inerrancy, though he perhaps came into more contact with opposition to the doctrine because he was well acquainted with the rise of rationalism in his day which called inerrancy into

question more than had the previous ages.³ He believed that inerrancy must be accepted a priori by faith. By inerrancy he meant more than a stress upon the fact that God's Word inerrantly accomplishes His purposes.⁴

He means what the church has always meant, that all the declarative statements of Scripture are true, that they correspond to fact, that they correspond (as the case may be) to what has happened or to what will happen or to what obtains. Everything which is presented in Scripture as factual is-factual. There can be no falsehood, no mistake, no slip, in Scripture. A correlate of the above is that there are no contradictions in the Holy Scripture.⁵

From the Orthodox viewpoint, inerrancy is thus an article of faith. It is of necessity to be predicated to the Scriptures because they are the Word of God Himself, and God would never perpetuate a falsehood.

T. Lindsay raises a question in relation to this point of view. He concludes that the Orthodox teaching makes "the special and distinctive characteristic of Scripture . . . inerrancy." And his question is the following: "Now I ask, is this a theory which can be called religious in the deepest sense of the word? Inerrancy makes no appeal to heart or conscience."⁶ Such a statement would imply that he feels that inerrancy appeals to reason rather than to faith. The Orthodox theologians may answer his question in the affirmative, but if one were to attack inerrancy in order to destroy its relevancy for faith, it would be at this point--by making it more closely related to reason.

Emil Brunner objects very strongly to the teaching of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He believes that the Orthodox teaching identifies the Word of God with doctrine and makes faith simply assent to this doctrine.⁷ He feels that the search for certainties which is indicated by inerrancy is always disastrous for the Church, for it leads to a legalistic approach.⁸

He feels that inerrancy is based upon verbal inspiration, and that verbal inspiration is based upon a wrong translation of II Timothy 3:16.

The expression in II Tim. 3:16, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching" ("Lehre" in German. Tr.), which, wrongly translated, became the locus classicus for the doctrine of verbal inspiration, betrays the beginning of this unfortunate identification.⁹

Brunner's claim for himself is that he begins from the Reformation principle of the Scriptures, Christus dominus et rex scripturae. His next sentence, following immediately after quoting this Reformation principle is, "The Bible is the human, and therefore not the infallible, witness to the divine revelation in the Old Covenant and in the history of the incarnate Son of God."¹⁰ The exact logic of the two statements is not comprehended by this student.

Abba is more clear in his rejection of the teaching of inerrancy. He makes the following distinction between "infallibility" and "inerrancy."

Infallibility is not to be confused with inerrancy: they are quite different. Infallibility pertains to the message of the Bible--the Divine Word; inerrancy is attributed, wrongly, to the record--the Book. We may frankly acknowledge the presence of contradictions and errors of chronology, for example, in the Bible and yet assent to what the Westminster Confession says about "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority" of the Holy Scripture.¹¹

Infallibility and divine authority are descriptive of the religious significance of the Bible; inerrancy is concerned with its form. And to interpret the former in terms of the latter is to empty them of their distinctively religious content.¹²

Beegle accepts the doctrine of the inspiration of the Scriptures, but he sees no need to accept "the qualification of inerrancy." He states that by virtue of its inspiration and because of the convincing work of the Holy Spirit the basic matters (doctrines) which are repeated often in Scripture are most certain; however, when the "Christian interpreter leaves the central path of doctrine he must be less dogmatic because the fringes shade off."¹³

If, as all evangelical leaders now acknowledge, the doctrine of inerrancy is not necessary for salvation, why is this view of inspiration considered so vital? The basic reason is doctrine. According to this argument, if the doctrine of inerrancy is given up, all confidence in the Biblical writers as trustworthy witnesses to doctrine is undermined. If they prove to be wrong in their claim of inerrancy, where are they trustworthy? But this line of reasoning is nothing more than "False in one, false in all" applied to the area of doctrine. There are other choices than the either-or presented by this argument.¹⁴

Beegle concludes that the historical is vital to faith, but he does not feel that minor historical errors in Scripture make faith or true doctrine invalid.¹⁵ He also states that the doctrine of inerrancy does not fulfill the duties which the men who hold it maintain that it does. For instance, one can accept the doctrine of inerrancy, and still be outside the elect. In fact, he goes on to say that instead of protecting the doctrine of the Church it restricts the outreach of the truth, for it is a needless barrier to some becoming Christian.¹⁶ His "contribution" to the problem of inerrancy is found in the Gospel. He believes that one can deny inerrancy and still have trustworthy and authoritative doctrine, for, "according to the New Testament writers, Christ and the gospel are determinative."¹⁷

The Church of England in 1938 rejected the traditional teaching concerning inerrancy. The Commission on Doctrine stated at that time, "'The tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible commonly held in the Church until the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal.'"¹⁸

In an article dealing with the term, inerrancy is a historical term, especially as one attempts to define it. This is A. E. Piepkorn's insight as he stresses two points. He feels "that we are not "serving the best interests of the church when either we continue formally to re-reaffirm the inerrancy of the Sacred Scriptures or even continue to employ the term."¹⁹

"Again, we cannot refuse to employ the word 'inerrancy' on the ground that the Biblical doctrine of inspiration is docetic. . . ."20

The implication of the discussion of inerrancy as it relates to the doctrine of Scripture is that, for the Lutheran at least, it is highly questionable to deny the truth which the doctrine attempts to communicate; at the same time, because of a generally scientific understanding of the word by modern man, one must be cautious in using the term lest the impression be given that the contemporary way of looking at things is equal to God's manner of providing an infallible rule for the faith and life of the Christian.

CHAPTER V

THE RELATIONSHIP OF SCRIPTURE TO INSPIRATION AND INERRANCY

From what has been reported in the previous three chapters, it should be quite clear that there is a very close relationship between statements about Scripture and statements about inspiration and inerrancy. It should perhaps yet be pointed out once more that part of the problem in trying to determine the relationship of the three is created by the approach which the theologians bring with them as they attempt to state their conclusions. It appears to be very hard to have what one might call a purely objective approach. On the one side the point is made that faith of necessity excludes objectively approaching the Scriptures. The other side seems to say that it is possible to approach the Scriptures objectively, for the only object of faith is Jesus Christ. When the views concerning the Scriptures are stated in such general terms as found in the last two sentences, it is indeed hard to come to terms with the problem. It is also difficult to define the role of the search for authority in the Church; authority is most important in trying to come to any conclusions about the Doctrine of Scripture in the Light of Inspiration and Inerrancy. The treatment of authority, however, was beyond the scope of this paper. The concept of truth is also important; it was touched on, but not in a manner which could adequately make a conclusion possible.

As the Church continues to witness to Jesus Christ it will be forced time and again to come to terms with the problems involved in the doctrine of Scripture. As the Church strives to make the unity which is hers manifest she will continually be faced with the witness of Scripture itself. This paper has treated the theoretical side of the problem. It would conclude by

asking if it is not even more important to approach the Scriptures from the practical, pastoral point of view, a point of view which would emphasize the place of the Scriptures in the lives of Christians. The intent of such an approach would not be to ignore the doctrine of the Scriptures but to stress that the Scriptures have been given "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

¹R. Klann, "Lecture Outline for Unit II: The Holy Scriptures," Christian Dogmatics S-150 (/printed lecture notes for Concordia Seminary students/ no publisher given, no date given), p. 1.

²H. L. Ellison, "Some Thoughts on Inspiration," The Evangelical Quarterly, XXVI (1954), 216.

³John Burnaby, Is the Bible Inspired? (London: S. P. C. K., 1959), p. 9.

⁴Hermann Sasse, "On the Doctrine De Scriptura Sacra," Letter Addressed to Lutheran Pastors, Number 14, translated by R. Gehrke (n.p.; n.p.), p. 4.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶F. Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c. 1950), passim.

⁷Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason, (translated by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c. 1946), passim.

⁸Burnaby, p. 107.

⁹"Old" does not imply out-moded or wrong or dead. It is one of the ways of referring especially to the Orthodox theologians. Pieper uses the word often.

¹⁰R. Preus, The Inspiration of Scripture (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, c. 1957), p. 31.

¹¹Ibid., p. 31.

¹²R. Preus, The Word of God in the Theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy (/printed class distribution at Concordia Seminary/ n.p., n.d.), p. 3.

¹³Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴Preus, Inspiration, p. 14.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁶F. Pieper, p. 214.

¹⁷Preus, The Word of God, p. 3.

¹⁸John Y. MacKinnon, The Protestant Doctrine of Revelation (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, c. 1946), pp. 2-3.

¹⁹Dewey M. Beegle, The Inspiration of Scripture (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, c. 1963), p. 190.

²⁰T. M. Lindsay, "The Doctrine of Scripture. The Reformers and the Princeton School," The Expositor, I (1895), 283.

²¹Ibid., pp. 278-280.

²²Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God, translated by G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, first printed 1956), I, 2, p. 541.

²³R. Preus, "The Word of God in the Theology of Karl Barth," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXI (February 1960), 111.

²⁴Ibid., p. 114.

²⁵Ibid., p. 111.

²⁶Preus, Inspiration, p. 1.

²⁷Ibid., p. 3.

²⁸Brunner, Dogmatics, p. 110.

²⁹Brunner, Revelation, p. 37.

³⁰Ibid., passim.

³¹Ibid., passim.

³²Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations 1964, A Study Document on Revelation Inspiration Inerrancy (St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 11.

Chapter III

¹Sasse, p. 5.

²Preus, Inspiration, p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 27.

⁴Benjamin B. Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948), p. 106.

⁵Sasse, p. 19.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁷Preus, Inspiration, p. 69. To Sasse's comment on the "psychological nature," Preus makes the following statement. "At this point Sasse has gone too far; the dogmaticians never teach that the human will was inactive or neutral psychologically . . . as if they experienced nothing when they wrote the Scriptures. . . ."

⁸Burnaby, p. 13.

⁹Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹Karl Rahner, Inspiration in the Bible (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), p. 10.

¹²Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, c. 1951), I, p. 35.

¹³Beegle, p. 14.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 15-16.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 72-73.

¹⁶Preus, Inspiration, p. 61.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 66-67.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 84.

²⁰Raymond Abba, The Nature and Authority of the Bible (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1958), p. 108.

- ²¹Beegle, p. 86.
- ²²Brunner, Dogmatics, p. 107.
- ²³Preus, Inspiration, pp. 33,34.
- ²⁴M. Reu, Luther and the Scriptures, (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, c. 1944), passim.
- ²⁵Brunner, Dogmatics, p. 109.
- ²⁶Abba, p. 56.
- ²⁷Beegle, pp. 76-77.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 176.
- ²⁹Warfield, p. 183.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 189.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 189.
- ³²Ibid., pp. 195-196.
- ³³John Murray, "The Attestation of Scripture," The Infallible Word, edited by N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, c. 1946), footnote 12, p. 38.
- ³⁴Preus, Inspiration, p. 45.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 47.

Chapter IV

- ¹Preus, Inspiration, p. 76.
- ²Ibid., p. 77.
- ³Preus, "Walther and the Scriptures," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXIII (November 1961), 685.
- ⁴Ibid., p. 685.
- ⁵Ibid., pp. 685-686.
- ⁶Lindsay, p. 287.
- ⁷Brunner, Truth, p. 128.
- ⁸Brunner, Revelation, p. 8.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 9 (footnote 13).
- ¹⁰Ibid., p. 276.
- ¹¹Abba, pp. 290-291.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 291.
- ¹³Beegle, p. 176.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 169.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 170.
- ¹⁶Ibid., p. 179.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p. 174.
- ¹⁸Burnaby, p. 27.
- ¹⁹A. C. Piepkorn, "What Does 'Inerrancy' Mean?," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVI (September 1965), 582.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 583.

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