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What the Liberal Theologian Thinks of Verbal Inspiration

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alles in seiner Hand, und er hat aus großer Gnade uns die Zukunft verborgen. Aber er gibt uns die tröstliche Gewißheit, daß auch in diesem letzten Kampf und Streit die Kirche nicht unterliegen, sondern schließlich den Sieg davontragen und in die Vollendung und Herrlichkeit übergehen wird. Auch die Pforten der Hölle sollen sie nicht überwältigen. Aus der streitenden wird eine triumphierende Kirche werden. Die Einzelheiten über diesen Kampf und Sieg hat Gott uns nicht näher mitgeteilt, und der große Hesekiel macht es wie sein kleiner, aber ganz herrlicher Vorgänger, der ebenfalls eschatologisch gerichtete Joel. Wenn dieser die Schrecken des Endgerichts ankündigt, das Brüllen des HErrn aus Zion und das Hörenlassen seiner Stimme aus Jerusalem, so daß Himmel und Erde beben werden, dann malt er das entsetzliche Bild nicht weiter aus, sondern zieht einen Vorhang vor die Schreckniſſe und schließt: „Aber der HErr wird seinem Volk eine Zuflucht sein und eine Feste den Kindern Israel", Joel 3, 14—21. Und so schließen wir diese Erörterung mit dem Wort, mit dem St. Johannes seine auch auf Hesekiel ruhende Weissagung schließt: „Es spricht, der solches zeuget: Ja, ich komme bald. Amen. Ja, komm, HErr JEsu!" Offenb. 22, 20.

L. Fürbringer

What the Liberal Theologian Thinks of Verbal Inspiration

1. *He thinks it is an obnoxious thing.* He abhors the doctrine that the whole Bible is given by inspiration of God, every word of it absolutely infallible. He execrates verbal inspiration. J. S. Whale, a Congregationalist, president of Chesunt College, Cambridge, takes occasion to speak of it in his treatise *The Christian Answer to the Problem of Evil*, published 1936. He speaks of it in this wise: "The modern man is not impressed by the mere citation of texts; he rightly wants to understand them in their context. His very certainty that the Scriptures are the fount of divine wisdom — that it is indeed the Word of God which is spoken to him in the words of the Bible — has set him free from the bondage of the letter, the prison-house of verbal infallibility. It is no use shilly-shallying here; loyalty to truth in the shape of literary and historical criticism forbids it. A Christian knows that he has to serve God with the mind as well as with heart and will and that the obligation to be intelligent is itself a moral obligation. The Bible is abused when it is used merely as an armory of proof-texts for defending some theological scheme (a game at which more than one can play, notoriously enough). We use the Bible rightly only when, to quote Luther, we see that it is the cradle wherein Christ is laid; that is, when we worship the holy Child and not His crib. These letters" (after the author had delivered four lectures on "The Chris-

tian Answer to the Problem of Evil," he received letters by "not a few earnest people who would solve and dismiss the immemorial problem of evil by quoting texts from Holy Scripture") "have renewed my conviction that blind bibliolatry can be as pathetically wrong as what is called blind unbelief and that the way of obscurantism is the way of disaster." (P. 77 f.)

The liberal theologians use plain language. They want us to know exactly what they think of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. They abhor it because it leads men into idolatry. They refuse to accept it because they are unwilling to commit "bibliolatry." To say that every word in the Bible is absolutely true, to be received with unquestioning faith, is to put a book in the place of God. They revolt at such "blind bibliolatry." Again, they refuse to submit to "the bondage of the letter." When we ask them to bow before the words that Moses and Matthew and Paul wrote centuries ago, they declare that they will not enter "the prison-house of verbal infallibility." Furthermore, the belief in the inspiration and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures is not created by the Holy Ghost. It is not Christian enlightenment. It is "obscurantism." The enlightened Christian casts out this gross superstition. Finally, "the way of obscurantism is the way of disaster." This "blind bibliolatry" is as bad as "blind unbelief." The teachings of the infidel cause many to lose their faith. And the teaching of verbal inspiration causes many to lose their faith.

President Whale's denunciation of the doctrine of verbal inspiration as sinful, criminal, and pernicious is not an isolated case. Many in all sections of the visible Church are supporting him. "Orthodoxy has made the Bible an independent, divine thing, which just as such, as a *corpus mortuum,* is stamped with divine authority. This materialistic or, to be more exact, this idolatrous acceptance of Bible authority has done great damage to Christian faith." (E. Brunner, *The Word and the World,* p. 92 f.) For because "in traditional Christian doctrine the infallibility of the Bible and the revelation of God in Christ had been coupled together too closely, the destruction of the dogma of verbal inspiration, with its emphasis upon an infallible Book, by the modern process of research in natural and historical science inevitably carried with it the whole Christian faith in revelation, the faith in the Mediator." It is a good thing that we have been freed from "the incubus of the old mechanical theory of inspiration." (E. Brunner, *The Mediator,* pp. 34. 105.) "Only God knows how many souls that folly ruined." (N. R. Best, *Inspiration,* p. 150.) Speaking the language of Liberalism, Professor Baumgaertel, Rostock, declares: "Diejenigen, die glauben, die hier vorgetragene Ansicht" (which permits science to correct the Bible) "als pietaetlos ablehnen zu sollen, moechten

doch ueberlegen, dass mit Ablehnung dieser Anerkennung der Naturwissenschaft den Gebildeten der Weg zur Kirche versperrt wird. Es geht nicht an, dass den Gebildeten ein *sacrificium intellectus* zugemutet wird, das sie einfach nicht bringen koennen." (Quoted in W. Moeller, *Um die Inspiration der Bibel*, p. 35.) "Seelenmordende Verbalinspiration" is the term used by D. Dr. Johannes Meinhold, — the doctrine of verbal inspiration is murdering souls! Reviewing a book by W. Moeller, *Pastoralblaetter*, April, 1933, p. 443, says: " 'Seelenmordende Verbalinspiration,' wie Meinhold sie nennt, wird hier verfochten. . . . Es ist mit Moeller keine Diskussionsmoeglichkeit gegeben, solange er noch in den Schuhen der Verbalinspiration steckt und drei Jahrhunderte Forschung unbekuemmert an sich voruebergehen laesst." Dr. S. Parkes Cadman puts it this way: "Slavery, polygamy, incest, needless wars, cruel massacres, and other non-moral acts and crimes can all be justified by the baseless assumption that every word of Holy Scripture must be regarded as practically infallible and then literally construed. It is not too much to say that this dogma has been prolific of skepticism upon an extended scale." (*Answers to Every-day Questions*, p. 253.) "The claim of Scripture infallibility in all historic and scientific details is making infidels by thousands. Very clear and decisive upon this point is the language of the late Professor Evans: 'You may be sure that, so long as you hang the infallible authority of Scripture as the rule of faith on the infallible accuracy of every particular word and clause in the Book, as long as you exalt the Bible to the same pinnacle of authority in matters respecting which God has given us fuller and more exact revelation elsewhere, as in matters respecting which the Bible is the only revelation, the irrepressible conflict between faith and science will go on. . . . Shipwrecks of faith without number have been caused by it. It is the very thing, according to his own confession, that made an unbeliever of the most brilliant scholar of France, Ernest Renan. It is the very thing that drove into infidelity the strongest champion of infidelity in England, Charles Bradlaugh.' " (J. De Witt, *What Is Inspiration?* P. 43.) "The old dogmatic view of the Bible is not only open to attack from the standpoint of science and historical criticism, but if taken seriously, it becomes a danger to religion and public morals." (C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 13.) There is certainly no shilly-shallying on the part of the liberal theologians. Accept verbal inspiration? This wicked thing, this bondage of the letter, this blind bibliolatry, the way of obscurantism which is the way of disaster? [1]

1) Verbal inspiration, offensive to the liberal theologian, is offensive also to a number of leaders in the Lutheran Church of America. See closing paragraphs of this writing.

What did Augustine think of verbal inspiration? It will not be out of place to compare his attitude with that of the liberal theologian. He writes in the *Epistle to Jerome:* "I hold the canonical books of Holy Scripture in such reverence that I firmly believe that their authors, in writing these books, never erred. And when I find things here that do not seem to agree with the truth, I do not doubt for a moment that either the copy is incorrect or that the translator did not exactly express the thought of the original or that I do not understand the matter. It would be a sin to question the inerrancy of the books of the apostles and prophets." (See Moeller, *op. cit.*, p. 56.) What did Luther think of the Bible? He believed that every word of it was given by inspiration. "The Scriptures are written by the Holy Ghost." The very words? Read on: "Holy Scripture is God's Word, written and (let me express it thus) lettered and cast into letters, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God, veiled in the human nature.... It is the written Word of God." (IX, 1770.) "There is not a single letter in the Bible that is worthless." (X, 1018.) Believing that, Luther taught the verbal infallibility of Scripture. Having quoted Augustine's statement, he writes: "Since the holy teachers of the Church have sometimes erred, being men, I accept their statements only in so far as they prove them from Scripture, *which has never erred.*" (XV, 1481.) "Scripture cannot err." (XIX, 1073.) Believing in verbal inspiration, Luther held the Bible in high reverence. He approached every word of the Bible with holy awe. Indeed, to use stronger language, he accepted, and bowed to, every word of it, as though it were God's own word, issuing from the mouth of God. *For that is what it is.* "A single letter, yea, a single tittle of Scripture counts for more than heaven and earth." (IX, 650.) "Mir ist also, dass mir ein jeglicher Spruch die Welt zu enge macht. — As for me, every verse makes the world too narrow for me." (XX, 788.) Luther and the liberal theologians do not think the same thoughts. Luther abhorred their way of thinking. "If the people will not believe, you are to keep silence; for you are not under obligation to compel them to regard the Scriptures as God's Book or Word; it is enough if you give your reason therefor. When you hear such people as are so completely blinded and hardened as to deny that what Christ and the apostles spoke and wrote is the Word of God and to have doubts concerning it, then you keep silence; do not speak one word to them and let them go their way; say only this: I shall give thee sufficient ground from Scripture; if thou believest, well; if not, just go thy way." (IX, 1238.) No, say the

liberal theologians; if Renan and Bradlaugh take offense at certain portions of Scripture, cancel those portions as not inspired; we cannot afford to uphold the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, since many refuse to believe it. Luther takes those to task who refuse to accept any teaching of Scripture (for instance, the doctrine of verbal inspiration). The liberal theologian takes the Bible to task for proposing such unacceptable teachings to men and insisting on their acceptance.

How does the attitude of the liberal theologian compare with that of the Apostle Peter? The apostle declares: "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," 2 Pet. 1, 21. Taking up the Sacred Volume and reading what Moses and the prophets had written in "the Scripture," v. 20, his heart was filled with holy awe: God is here speaking to me! And when St. Paul had occasion to speak of what he and the other apostles had preached and set down in the books of the New Testament, he bespoke for his words unquestioning reception and the holy reverence that is due the words of God. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth," 1 Cor. 2, 13. "When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God," 1 Thess. 2, 13. Scripture was to Peter and Paul a holy thing, a sacrosanct volume, endued with all the majesty and authority of the eternal God. Luther and Augustine would rather lose all the world than give up one word, one letter, of Scripture. The Christian loves the Bible, the whole Bible. His assurance of salvation is bound up with the truth, the certainty, of Scripture. He knows the grace of God because Scripture assures him of it. And when men tell him that the words which assure him of the grace of God are not exactly God's words, but words of fallible men, or when they tell him that this book is not reliable in its every statement, that the Sacred Volume is shot through with erroneous, false, dangerous statements, dread alarm seizes him, and he cries out in anguish: If I cannot rely on the Bible in some points, I cannot rely upon it in any point; if "the holy men of God" erred in relating temporal things, I cannot but mistrust them when they speak of spiritual things. That is the reason why we cannot give up verbal inspiration. We refuse to be robbed of one letter of Scripture. The assurance of our faith is at stake, and with St. Peter and St. Paul we love and prize and reverence every word penned by the Holy Ghost. Hearing which, the liberal theologian shakes his head and talks about blind bibliolatry and the prison-house of verbal in-

fallibility and the way of obscurantism which is the way of disaster.[2])

What did the Lord Jesus make of verbal inspiration and the infallibility of Scripture? Did He look upon David's words and the prophets' words as mere words of men? "David himself said *by the Holy Ghost*," Mark 12, 36. Is there a single statement in the writings of Moses and the prophets that must be rejected as false? "The Scripture cannot be broken," John 10, 35. Every statement of Scripture stands. Not only the most important ones, but also the less important ones, as, for instance, the relatively unimportant one concerning the question whether the magistrates may be called "gods." Jesus' statement is of the most general nature. No liberal theologian can make His statement mean that only certain parts of the Scriptures cannot be broken. Again, when Jesus quoted Scripture to His disciples and the Jews and Satan, He considered the matter settled. He had placed the highest authority, the final authority, before them. "It is written!" "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected" etc.? Matt. 21, 42. Again, dealing with a matter which did not belong to the saving Gospel: "Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning," etc.? Matt. 19, 4. And finally, as to those matters which the liberal theologian stamps as false and which he would delete from the Bible because they are offensive to Renan and Bradlaugh, Jesus accepts them as true and puts the stamp of His authority on them. There is, for instance, the story of Jonah. The liberal theologian declares that it never happened, could not have happened, and that therefore the Bible, which tells this story, cannot be verbally and plenarily inspired. But Jesus declares: "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly," etc. Matt. 13, 40. Jesus taught the absolute infallibility of Scripture. We do not know what the Sadducees said to Him on this point. But when we repeat the teaching of Jesus, the liberal theologians meet us with the cry of "blind bibliolatry," "obscurantism, the way of disaster."

2. *The liberal theologian thinks he is justified in rejecting verbal inspiration.* He thinks it would be immoral to accept it.

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2) "Only God knows how many souls that folly" (the insistence on verbal inspiration) "has ruined." Only God knows how many souls the doctrine of the fallibility of the Bible has ruined! There is this difference: When the carnal wisdom of Renan and Bradlaugh rebels against the teaching of the infallibility of the Bible, the disaster is on *their* heads; they are rebelling against God's truth; but when the liberal theologian leads Christians to believe in the partial fallibility of Scripture and to doubt the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture, of all of Scripture, the disaster is on *his* head who teaches this doctrine; he is in conflict with God's truth.

He thinks that those who accept it are unfaithful to their moral obligations. President Whale declares: "It is no use shilly-shallying here; loyalty to truth in the shape of literary and historical criticism forbids it. A Christian knows that he has to serve God with the mind as well as with heart and will and that the obligation to be intelligent is itself a moral obligation." Science, literary and historical criticism, has knocked the props from under the doctrine of "verbal infallibility," that is the fond belief of the liberal theologians. They keep telling us: "We used to think of inspiration as a procedure which produced a book guaranteed in all its parts against error. . . . No well-instructed mind, I think, can hold that now. . . . All such ideas have become incredible in the face of the facts." (H. E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 30.) "Reverent appreciation of the Bible . . . does not compel one to accept blindly or to interpret literally every narrative or statement it contains. Here as in all ancient history and literature, criticism has a great sifting process to perform." (W. Hyde, *Social Theology*, p. 192. See P. E. Kretzmann, *Foundations*, etc., p. 9.) Karl Barth declares in his *Credo:* "Wir duerfen uns nicht wundern, in der Bibel dauernd Texten zu begegnen, die dem Wahrheitsbegriff der Geschichtswissenschaft nicht standzuhalten vermoegen, sondern die der Historiker eben nur als 'Sage' oder 'Legende' wird bezeichnen koennen." (See *Ev.-Luth. Freikirche*, Sept. 13, 1936.) "Wahrheitsbegriff der Geschichtswissenschaft" — you cannot preserve your honesty as a historian if you retain verbal inspiration. Professor Baumgaertel, in a letter to the *Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenzeitung*, Nov. 12, 1926, insists that he never said: "Die heutige Kritik weiss es besser," but that he did say: "Die Auffassung, die Jesus von der Geschichte und von der Entstehung der alttestamentlichen Schriften hatte, die war *vor* ihm schon da, bei den juedischen Gelehrten. Inwiefern waere diese Anschauung dann unfehlbar? Wir wissen heute infolge unserer modernen Hilfsmittel besser Bescheid ueber die Geschichte Israels und ueber die Entstehung seiner Schriften als die juedischen Schriftgelehrten vor 2,000 Jahren und als der von ihnen in diesen Erkenntnissen abhaengige Jesus." "We recognize now that the Protestant emphasis upon the plenary verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture and upon the paramount and determinative place of Scripture in Christian thought, belief, and practise was chiefly a useful fulcrum providing leverage against Catholic institutionalism; its first premise is a questionable one, and modern historical and literary criticism, not to mention 'science' generally, has rendered it increasingly untenable." (*Christendom*, 1936, p. 242.)

These men are convinced that science has disproved many statements contained in the Bible and that Higher Criticism has

proved the human origin of the individual books of the Bible, so that the "inspiration" back of the Bible cannot be verbal inspiration, carrying with it "verbal infallibility." They honestly believe that. And so they consider it a moral obligation, a sacred duty, to denounce the doctrine of verbal inspiration. We cannot call the honesty of their belief in question. And we readily admit that, if a man believes that the Bible is full of misstatements and errors, it would be morally wrong for him to teach the verbal infallibility of this same Bible. We cannot, however, stop to show in detail that these assertions of the liberal theologians are based on false premises. The premise is false that science has disproved many statements contained in the Bible. Science has not disproved one single statement of the Bible. And the premise is false that fallible men may sit in judgment on the Bible. It is not true that the Lord permits men to give more credence to what a scientist or a higher critic says than to what He says in His Word. It is not true what Whale implies and what Dr. S. P. Cadman says in so many words: "The authority of the Bible is established by divine inspiration, but it is also addressed to human intelligence. The Book itself invokes finite reason and appeals to its decision. . . . Plainly, the Scriptures themselves do not outlaw man's judgment on their contents. Why should we do so?" (*Answers to Every-day Questions*, p. 258.) We shall not examine these premises farther. Our sole purpose is to discover and uncover the Liberalist's way of thinking. He insists that human reason is a safe guide to eternal truth, the judge of the saving truth revealed by the eternal God. He tells God that, since He has given him reason, he is going to make full use of it. He refuses to believe that reason is corrupt, blind in spiritual things. He has a high opinion of the power and privilege of reason. Yes, he even goes so far as to state that, since God gave him his reason, He asks him to reject verbal inspiration because reason finds fault with many statements of the Bible. He is doing God's work in fighting the obscurantists, who insist that the Bible is infallible. He charges those who refuse to depart from the plain statements of Scripture on the behest of Higher Criticism with moral obliquity. — When we tell these men, "It would be a sin to question the inerrancy of the books of the apostles and prophets" (Augustine) and they indignantly challenge us, How can you prove that the claim of Scripture that it is inspired word for word is true? the argument ends. We believe what Scripture says because Scripture says it. We place the plain statement of Scripture before them, and if they will not accept it, we close the argument. Luther: "Say only this: I shall give thee sufficient ground from Scripture: if thou believest, well; if not, just go thy way." (IX, 1238.)

"The obligation to be intelligent is itself a moral obligation." That implies, of course, that, as your intelligence grows, you are morally bound to cast off views which you held when your intelligence was at a low level. Applied to the present matter, it would mean that formerly men believed in verbal inspiration and could not be blamed for doing so, but at the present stage of critical research and scientific progress men must take a different attitude. They must not set themselves against the progress which God provides. That would be immoral. The sentence preceding the paragraph we are discussing reads: "Any man who reads the Old Testament with understanding will discover that there are at least *five* distinct and different answers to the problem of suffering in that corpus of writings; they spring from different periods of history and belong to different levels of spiritual vision." That means that we must give a different answer to the question of suffering than men on a lower level of spiritual vision could give. And so, say the liberal theologians, we cannot, if we would be honest, believe what the ancient Church and, for that matter, the Biblical writers believed concerning inspiration. — What are we going to answer? Our one answer was and is and shall be that the apostles and Jesus taught verbal inspiration. But that answer makes no impression on the liberal theologians. They say: We know better; since those days religious thought has progressed. They actually take that attitude. Read the statement of Baumgaertel a few pages back: "We know more concerning the genesis of the Scriptures of Israel than the Jewish scribes and Jesus, who got His knowledge of these matters from them." President Whale has similar ideas concerning Jesus. He tells us on page 83 that Jesus, when using the term "Satan," "was merely using the thought forms of His day, which have since been abandoned. . . . He did use the categories of His age. We could not expect Him to do anything else without surrendering our conviction of His true manhood." So we do not get far with these men when we insist that Jesus and the apostles taught verbal inspiration. We will have to follow Luther's advice: "Willst du es glauben, gut; wo nicht, so fahr immer hin." They do so and keep on insisting that it is not wrong to take a different view of matters than the apostles.

The liberal theologian feels himself morally obligated to repudiate verbal inspiration. For it would be morally wrong to sacrifice one's spiritual freedom, to submit to "the bondage of the letter," to reenter the "prison-house of verbal infallibility. It is no use shilly-shallying here: loyalty to truth, etc." The liberal theologian sets up the claim that he is not bound by the letter of Scripture. He is willing to bow to *God's* Word, but not to the human words of the Bible. The holy men of God who wrote

these words were, after all, human, and God does not ask His children to accept their statements unconditionally; God has freed us from "the bondage of the letter." Dr. Paul Althaus, Erlangen, championing the liberal view, puts it this way: "Wir sind in dem Hoeren auf das Wort *Gottes* in dem biblischen Worte von diesem letzteren als Menschenworte frei" — submitting to the Word of *God* in the Biblical word we are not bound by the Biblical word as such, for that is the word of man. (*Die letzten Dinge*, p. 61.) We have not the time now to examine closely what is back of this denunciation of "the bondage of the letter." We only want to establish the fact that the liberal theologian abhors the idea that he is bound to accept every single doctrine and statement of the Bible as infallibly and absolutely true. He refuses to be thus fettered in his thoughts. And he declares that that is the God-pleasing attitude. — It will not be amiss to illustrate how the liberal theologian makes use of this freedom from "the bondage of the letter." On page 37 f. President Whale says: "From the Paleozoic era until now we can discern a progressive principle in nature, making the world no safe place for sluggards. Whether you call it natural selection or use the *language of Scripture about the divine election*, it was this principle which drove out the invertebrates, etc. . . . Why did the dinosaurs ultimately perish from this earth? Probably because in this vast process, which refuses to define progress in terms of stagnant ease, *the divine election passed them by.*" If we should ask the writer to study the texts speaking of the election of grace and tell him that these texts do not describe evolution, he would tell us that he has emancipated himself from "the bondage of the letter," that proof-texts must not be adduced in good theological society. (See point 3.) Another example: "The account of the Creation in Genesis, the Christmas-story of the Incarnation, the resurrection of the body of Christ, . . . the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, the doctrine of the Virgin Birth and the divinity of Christ, — all these conceptions, intended at first quite literally, have for many devout Christians today only a symbolic function. To many a deeply religious Christian who cannot accept their literal intellectual meaning they are full of emotional power, and the emotion, the total attitude of the soul, which they express to the liberal Christian of today, is probably not very different from that which they have expressed and helped to nourish through all the Christian centuries. Hence they are still scrupulously retained, lovingly cherished, but considered as poetic expressions of some profounder or larger truth than that which their formulators realized." (*Christendom*, 1936, p. 492.) Not until men free themselves of "the bondage of the letter" and break out of "the prison-house of

verbal infallibility," can they attain to these profounder truths! If they fail to do so, they fail in their duty towards God!

3. *The liberal theologian does not think much of proof-texts.* He gets impatient when the old-fashioned theologian or common Christian appeals to a definite Bible-passage as establishing a certain truth. Naturally, since there is no verbal inspiration, these particular words in a particular text are not absolutely reliable; and they do not in every case mean what they say. President Whale declares: "The modern man is not impressed, therefore, by the mere citation of texts; he rightly wants to understand them in their context. . . . The Bible is abused when it is used merely as an armory of proof-texts for defending some theological scheme (a game at which more than one can play, notoriously enough)." You cannot use the common proof-texts to prove, *e.g.*, the Virgin Birth. E. Brunner tells us: "In earlier days this discussion [concerning the Virgin Birth] used to be cut short by saying briefly, 'It is written,' that is, with the aid of the doctrine of verbal inspiration; today we can no longer do this even if we would." (*The Mediator*, p. 323.) Discussing the doctrine of verbal inspiration, H. Wheeler Robinson insists: "The revelation must be sought in that experience which God has made the medium of His revelation, in its entirety, rather than in particular 'texts' taken from it. . . . Does not this make impossible the confident appeal to the Scriptures as affording an infallible direction of faith and conduct? It certainly does if that is sought in the *letter*" (italics in original) "of the Word of God to men. . . . We may confidently claim that the fuller recognition of the principle of mediation, by throwing us back on the inner content of the revelation instead of its *literary expression*" (italics ours) "and record, is part of the unceasing providence of God over His people." (*The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 170. 175.) Is Dr. John Oman of Cambridge in sympathy with the proof-text theologians, or is he sneering at them? He says: "Doctrines are drawn from Holy Writ like legal decisions from the Statute Book. . . . As soon as the final ground became 'Thus saith the Scriptures,' controversy entered the large field of differences in interpretation. . . . In the days of an articulated system of doctrine the theologian was unhesitating on any detail of the abstrusest questions of the faith and had no inconsiderable endowment of God's omniscience through a Scripture inspired in every letter." (*Vision and Authority*, pp. 182. 184.) Von Hofmann: "Not to individual statements wrought by God (*gottgewirkte Aussprueche*) do Jesus and the apostles refer, but to the Scriptures. . . . The totality of Scripture is the only Word of God for his congregation. . . . It is such as a whole." (*Schriftbeweis*, I, p. 576. See Kretzmann, *Founda-*

tions, p. 6.) Baumgaertel: "The letter (*Wortlaut*) of Scripture we consider of secondary importance. . . . The outstanding features, the *whole,* is what counts, not the details, which are in many instances erroneous and objectionable." (See Moeller, *Um die Inspiration der Bibel,* p. 57.) Dr. E. E. Flack: "No fundamental doctrine rests on a single isolated passage. Nor may several passages strung together in proof-text fashion fix faith. It requires the analogy of Scripture, the whole Scripture corroborating and authenticating its own testimony in the life of the true Church, to establish the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The standard by which all dogmas and teachers are to be judged is not the Scriptures standing utterly alone, but the Word of God attested and authenticated in the Spirit-filled life of the early Church and projected through the centuries from faith to faith in the corporate mind of the true Church." (*The Lutheran,* Oct. 11, 1936.) [3] V. Ferm: "A literally infallible Bible, an assumption implied throughout the Lutheran Symbols, verbally inspired, is a view that has passed by the board for good. The authority of the Sacred Writings is no longer found in 'the letter' and sustained by some artificial theory of divine inspiration, but in the appeal of its spiritual content. Not all passages have equal value. Some are plainly interpolations, and *some represent the transitory colorings of a bygone social culture.*" (Italics ours.) . . . "Passages may no longer be wrested from their context and indiscriminately ascribed to 'the Word of the Lord.'" (*What Is Lutheranism?* p. 279 f.) — When we discuss matters of doctrine with the liberal theologian, he tells us: Quote me no proof-texts; but if you must quote them, look at their context and quote them correctly. Very well, we shall look at this word "context."

"The modern man is not impressed by the mere citation of texts; he rightly wants to understand them *in their context.*" "Passages may no longer be *wrested from their context.*" Certainly Whale and Ferm know, they must know, that long before the modern man appeared upon the scene, people insisted that passages must not be wrested from their context. The theologians of a bygone generation knew that you must look at the context in order to get the right understanding of the passage. In the days of old, when the students took up their *Hofmanni Theologia Exegetica,* they studied *Caput Quartum: De Consideratione Contextus.* They studied *Regula I: Antecedentium et consequentium consideratio in nullius loci Scripturae S. explicatione est omittenda.* They were given as a sample the text "In the beginning אֱלֹהִים created the heaven and the earth." They were told that *Elohim*

3) Just what this "Word of God" which is not identical with Scripture is, will be looked into later on.

could mean angels or the gods of the Gentiles or rulers or the true God. They were told: *Contextus praecise determinat sensum vocabuli.* They were told to look at the words in the context, and they would find that "יְהוָה made the earth and the heavens." Whale and Ferm know very well that the old-style theologians did not permit the texts to be wrested from their context — the old-style context. And so they are using this word "context" in a new sense. We have just been told that the sense of a passage is not found in "the letter," but in its "spiritual content"; not in Scripture standing alone, but in Scripture as authenticated by the Spirit-filled life, etc.; not in that which the words say, but in what "the whole" of Scripture says. We heard Hyde say we must not "interpret *literally* every narrative or statement the Bible contains." And that means — if you will please read again the quotation from *Christendom* given a few pages back — that the story of Creation, the Incarnation, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, etc., were intended at first quite literally, but must now be interpreted in the light of the profounder and larger truths the present age has experienced. We are afraid that, when the liberal theologian speaks of the "context," he means that, when a passage does not agree with what according to modern thought or experience is the sense of "the whole" of the Bible, does not agree with what modern thought has fixed as the "spiritual content" of the Bible, it cannot mean what the words and letters say. Yes, they must mean something of that sort. Prof. Edwin Lewis of Drew University says in *Great Christian Teachings* (p. 61) that we may well regard the resurrection narratives "not as literal statements of fact, but as a more or less pictorial effort on the part of the earlier Christian community to account for their experience of Christ." (See Conc. Theol. Mthly., IV, p. 758.) Experience, Scripture read in the light of experience, constitutes this "context" of the liberal theologians. If you still doubt it, read the excerpt from H. Wheeler Robinson's *Christian Experience* printed a few pages back. Do the texts "An enemy hath done this," "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out," prove the existence of the devil? President Whale would say: Not if you take them in their context. For on page 26 he states that it can hardly be denied "that Jesus Christ Himself, who said, 'An enemy hath done this,' etc., accepted a dualism of some kind as a fact of religious experience"; and on page 35 he declares, speaking of the fall of man, of original sin, and of the devil: "These are at best great mythological theories." What is the "context" that justifies President Whale to find the doctrine of evolution taught in "the language of Scripture about the divine election"? Why, the fact that evolution is divine truth, one of the greatest truths, gives us reason to believe that God revealed

or at least confirmed this truth also in the Sacred Scriptures, pointed to it in those obscure passages about "election." Take the teaching concerning miracles. We offer as one of the proof-texts Jonah 1, 17; 2, 10. The liberal theologian tells us to consider the "context." Well, we read the entire Book of Jonah and conclude that there is nothing there that compels us to deny what the words and letters of 1, 17 and 2, 10 say. But the liberal theologian tells us that, if we get the real spirit of the Bible, read the Bible with the enlightened mind of the modern man, who knows that no real miracles occur, we shall find that this story was meant to convey a *spiritual* truth — and that is the "context." Prof. H. L. Willett says: "The Book of Jonah is one of the Old Testament works of fiction, along with Ruth and Esther. The story of Jonah was a prophetic protest against the narrowness and race prejudice of a dominant group in Jerusalem. . . . It may be that the escape of the prophet from death as the result of his being swallowed by the sea-monster was a figurative reference to the preservation of the Hebrew people in the land of exile and their restoration to their own land to continue their prophetic mission to the world." (*Christian Century*, Dec. 9, 1936.) The liberal theologian, in effect, makes the title-page of this prophetic production read: "The Story of Jonah. — *A piece of fiction. A parable.*" Now we can understand why they say that Jonah 1, 17 cannot be understood, according to the context, as saying that the prophet was literally in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. But we are wondering how Jesus could so completely fail to see the character and scope of the Book of Jonah. He did not see the "context" of the liberals, but took Jonah 1, 17 literally. Read Matt. 12, 40.

The liberal theologians abhor the proof-text method of establishing the doctrine. Whatever they mean by the "context" which must be considered with the text, their complaint is really this, that "the Bible is abused when it is used merely as an armory of proof-texts for defending some theological scheme." This means that they will not be bound by the letter of the text. And this means that, if they were constitutional lawyers, they could not long practise before our Supreme Court. If the question were whether the Constitution permits the State of Missouri to send fifteen Senators to Washington and the opposing lawyer appealed to Section 3 of the Constitution: "The Senate of the United States shall be composed of two Senators from each State," etc., and the "liberal" lawyer cried out: "Quote me no proof-texts! The *letter* does not count!" what would the Chief Justice say? And this provision of the Constitution is no plainer than the proof-text quoted against the evolutionist: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

Nor would they have any standing in a court where Luther presided. Luther was strong for the proof-text method. Therein lay his strength. "Ich bin gefangen, kann nicht heraus: der Text ist zu gewaltig da." (XV, p. 2050.) One little proof-text was enough for him. "'This is My body' — this one single verse is strong enough to silence their idle, wicked twaddle." (XX, 777.) Luther insisted on the *letter:* "Let them get a boy to spell out to them these words 'This is My body.'" (*L. c.*, 846.) And what did Jesus think of the proof-text method? Did He combat the lies of Satan and of the scribes with the "whole" of Scripture or with specific passages of Scripture? See Matt. 4, 4. 7. 10; 22, 43 f.; John 10, 34; etc. And is there a single verse in the Bible which Jesus stamps as unfit for a proof-text because of its erroneous content? See John 10, 35.

"The Bible is abused when it is used merely as an armory of proof-texts for defending some theological scheme (*a game at which more than one can play, notoriously enough*)." The argument here is that the proof-text method is wrong because, while you quote proof-texts for your teaching, say for the universality of grace, *your opponent* will also quote a lot of proof-texts for his teaching of particular grace. Or put it another way: the same passage has been used for and against a certain teaching. You cannot therefore rely on proof-texts; they are subject to different, contradictory interpretations. — This argument declares, in effect, that Scripture is obscure. We shall not take up here the question of the clarity of Scripture beyond stating that with Lutherans the question is settled. The Catholics agree with President Whale and insist that the Bible is an obscure, confused book. The Lutherans declare: "There is no clearer book upon earth than is Holy Writ, which in comparison with all other books is like the sun in its relation to all other lights." (Luther, V, 334.) They declare with their Formula of Concord that Scripture is "the pure, clear fountain of Israel," "as it is written Ps. 119, 105: 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.'" (*Trigl.*, pp. 851. 777.) A Lutheran is so constituted, through the grace of God, that, when Scripture makes a definite statement on any matter, the matter is settled for him. He will cling to that proof-text in spite of the fact that others refuse to accept its plain meaning. The fact that some put a different interpretation on that text does not prove that the text is subject to different interpretations. As has been said: "The fact that a question has been much debated is no proof that it is debatable." The fact that many interpret "world" in John 3, 16 to mean "the world of the elect only" does not make John 3, 16 ambiguous. We shall continue to bring forward John 3, 16 as a proof-text for the doctrine of universal grace.

The controversy on verbal inspiration furnishes another illustration of the present point. We say that 2 Tim. 3, 16, for example, clearly teaches verbal inspiration, the infallibility of every Scriptural statement. Dr. S. P. Cadman says: "It is a baseless assumption that every word of Holy Scripture must be regarded as practically infallible and then literally construed. Yet nowhere does the Book itself claim for the entire content of its literature what you assert in its behalf." (*Answers to Every-day Questions*, p. 253.) We say it does. Proof-text: 2 Tim. 3, 16. The liberal theologian may make a twofold answer. First, he might say, "Quote me no proof-texts!" He might apply his new-fangled rule that you must not base doctrines on "single, isolated passages," not on "individual statements," but on "the whole" of the Bible; not on "the literary expression," but on "the inner content of revelation." Or he may take up 2 Tim. 3, 16 and put a different interpretation on it. He can play that game, too, says Whale. We thus have different "interpretations" of 2 Tim. 3, 16. But that does not prove that this proof-text is obscure. It permits only one interpretation. It is so clear that it forces its sense upon the reader. There is the clear statement, in plain language: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God — πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος." There should be no dispute about the meaning of the word "Scripture." And the lexicographers have no trouble with the Greek word θεόπνευστος. Suhle and Schneidewin's *Handwoerterbuch*, non-theological, "fuer die ganze griechische Literatur," says it means: "von Gott eingehaucht, inspiriert." Consult any other lexicon, and you will find this meaning: God-breathed, inspired by God. Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Whatever goes to make up Scripture proceeded out of the mouth of God. And now let the "interpreters" play their game. (a) The text says that Scripture is God-breathed. The interpreter says that means that the writers were inspired. It does not. You cannot make Paul say that the holy writers were θεόπνευστοι, that Moses proceeded out of the mouth of God.

(b) The text says that Scripture is an inspired book. The interpreter says: "Its claim to the term *inspired* lies chiefly in its power to inspire those who expose their lives to its influence." (H. L. Willett, in *Chr. Century*, Sept. 5, 1934.) But the word in the text has the passive meaning. The interpreter plays the game of simply turning the passive into the active; *inspired* means *inspiring*. — Surely the Bible is an inspiring book. You may find that thought expressed in the words that follow: "and is profitable for doctrine," etc. But if you put it in the word here used, you will get something like this: All Scripture is inspiring and is therefore inspiring. Besides, you will have trouble in thinking the thought: Scripture is inspiring *of God*.

(c) The text says: *Scripture* is inspired. That means, says the interpreter, that only the thoughts, the concepts, were inspired; inspiration does not extend to the *words*. However, Scripture is made up of words. What the writers used when they composed the books of Scripture was words. If they had used only thoughts, you could not see, handle, read the Scriptures. Paul is encouraging Timothy to read the Scriptures. Timothy begins to read Genesis or Romans. Paul stops him and says: You are reading *words*. That will not help you. Words are not inspired. Go find a Bible made up of thoughts.

(d) The text says: *All* Scripture is inspired. The interpreter says that that means that only *some* Scripture is inspired. "Inspiration includes only the knowledge essential for knowing God and His plan for man." (*The Lutheran*, Jan. 23, 1936.) It does not include the scientific and historical statements. Only the doctrinal portions or perhaps only the Gospel portions are inspired. — Where does that leave Timothy? He relies on the πᾶσα and begins to read: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." He is ready to believe that and to rejoice in it. But Paul stops him: This is not a Gospel statement. Timothy: Why, then, did you say πᾶσα? Paul: I meant only the important parts. Timothy: All right; how then can I know which are the important parts? Paul: *Da siehe du zu.* — The interpreter insists here that Paul is using πᾶσα in a restricted sense, meaning: All Scripture, *in so far* as it is inspired, is profitable. And that would mean that Scripture contains portions which are not profitable because they are not inspired. — Paul protests with a loud voice against the insertion of the "in so far." He would point to the context, the old-fashioned context. Paul is lauding Timothy for having studied "from a child the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation," v. 15. His intention is to animate Timothy to keep on studying this salutary book. So he adds v. 16 for the purpose of emphasis. He wants to stress the wonderful origin, quality, and power of this book. And right here he is supposed to make that restriction: a good part of the Holy Scriptures which thou hast known from a child is of doubtful value! Such a caution certainly does not fit in the context. Such a statement would not give Timothy much confidence in Scripture. He would have to be asking right along: Is this passage inspired or just human wisdom? Again, Paul would indignantly ask the modern misinterpreter of his words to read Rom. 15, 4. *There* Paul says that *"whatsoever things* were written aforetime were written for our learning." *Here* he is made to say that only *some* of the things written aforetime are profitable for doctrine.

(e) Interpreter Dodd says: "The passage leaves open the question whether inspired Scripture is infallible; that it is profitable no one would deny." (*The Authority of the Bible*, p. 15.) He accepts interpretation (d) and adds the new thought that an inspired saying, a saying issuing from the mouth of God, may be fallible. He is making quite a game of the matter.

(f) Professor Dodd asserts in this connection: "Neither passage (2 Tim. 3, 16 and 2 Pet. 1, 21) claims the rank of inspired Scripture for the writing in which it occurs." Which means in effect that, even if you could prove the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures with 2 Tim. 3, 16, that does not prove the inspiration of the New Testament writings. — We cannot take time to discuss that point now, but we cannot suppress this remark: If a man is willing to grant the verbal inspiration of the Old Testament, we shall have no further trouble with him.

(g) Those interpreters make game of 2 Tim. 3, 16 who read it thus: *Any* Scripture which is θεόπνευστος is useful, etc., as, for instance, the writings of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Darwin. And von Hofman declares that "the πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος applies with the same right and in the same sense, only in different degree, to all histories written by men." (See *Lehre u. Wehre*, 17, p. 73.)

Yes, President Whale is right when he observes that the proof-texts have suffered a variety of interpretations. But his inference that for that reason Scripture is obscure and that no reliance can be placed on the proof-texts is wrong. There are indeed obscure passages in Scripture. Such passages will not serve as proof-texts. But when a man asserts that there are no clear proof-texts (this is a pleonasm) in Scripture, he is asserting that the Holy Spirit was not able to say what He wanted to say in definite passages and clear words. When he asserts that the Holy Spirit asks us to turn away from the plain sense of a particular passage and find the sense in the nebulous context of "experience" and "the whole" of Scripture, he is asserting that the Holy Ghost gave us a useless book.

What does Luther think of those who as a consequence of their rejection of verbal inspiration denounce the use of proof-texts? What would be the result if people followed their advice? Speaking of those who say, "Scripture is obscure," Luther uses this strong language — and it applies to the case before us —: "They speak such things only in order to lead us away from Scripture and to make themselves masters over us that we should believe their dream-sermons (*Traumpredigten*)." (V, p. 334.) Indeed, when a man will no longer believe that the words of Scripture are inspired and infallible and can no longer rely on the clear statements of the proof-texts, he will have to rely on what he dreams to be

the sense of Scripture or on what some master dreams for him. Dr. Robert F. Horton, as quoted from the *Contemporary Review*, January, 1917, in *Modern Religious Liberalism*, by J. Horsch, p. 30, states the case thus: "The real difficulty of our time is the dethronement of the Bible from its position of unquestioned authority. Up to the middle of the last century the imposing fortress of the Book remained practically unquestioned and certainly unbreached. No one within the borders of the Church hesitated to regard the Bible as effectively infallible. A *quotation* from *any part of it* carried unquestioned weight, and decisions drawn from its decretals were the settlement of all strife. . . . [Liberal] Protestants have lost their Bible and, in losing it, have lost their religion. How can they shelter in a building which is demolished or which is ever hidden by the scaffolding about it, necessary for perpetual repairs?" TH. ENGELDER

(To be concluded)

Preliminary Report of the Committee

representing synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America to supply a revised translation of Luther's Small Catechism to supplant the three or more translations now in use

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

As the Head of the Family Should Teach Them in All Simplicity to His Household

I AM THE LORD, THY GOD

The First Commandment

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

What does this mean?

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.