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## The Inspiration Question

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for the arrival of the entire company. On February 14 the trip of the *Selma* could be resumed; but after five miles it ran aground with such force as to throw one of the ship's firemen down a hatch and the nine-year-old son of one of the passengers, by the name of Barthel, into the river. Fortunately one of the sailors immediately jumped in after the boy and rescued him. The captain now boarded one of the small steamers which plied the river in order to charter some small steamers at St. Louis for the purpose of setting the *Selma* afloat again. In the absence of the captain the crew of the boat, under the direction of the mates, determined to move the steamer over the mud bar. This they managed to do by using the full capacity of the boilers and then shifting the weight of some heavy chains and of the passengers from side to side, so that the vessel was set into a rocking motion and finally managed to crawl over the bad place.

Guenther here remarks: "The journey now continued without hindrance. Everybody was happy over the impending arrival in St. Louis, where the three ships which had preceded them had already arrived. The *Selma* reached this goal on February 19."

Thus ended the voyage of the Saxons. They were in the land of religious liberty.

P. E. KRETZMANN

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### The Inspiration Question

On November 1, 1937, Lutheran pastors of Washington, D. C., discussed the doctrine of Inspiration on the basis of two essays on "The Inspiration Question," one presented by Dr. H. W. Snyder of the U. L. C. and the other by Rev. Th. P. Fricke of the A. L. C. Dr. G. E. Lenski of Washington was asked "to forward copies of these essays to the theological journals of different bodies for publication." The *Journal of the American Lutheran Conference* received them and published them in the March issue of this year together with introductory remarks by Dr. G. E. Lenski and an "Epilog" by the editor, Dr. J. A. Dell, of the Columbus seminary.

Dr. G. E. Lenski remarks: "The idea underlying this dual presentation was to bring into light any fundamental differences that might serve as barriers and hindrances and sources of controversy in Lutheran church-life. Such differences, though expected, failed to put in their appearance. Unlike our official committees, which have gone forth from their meetings with many headshakings and grumblings, the members of the Washington ministerial group ended their deliberations with the kindest of feelings toward one another and with the earnest conviction that, whereas disunity may exist among Lutherans, it does not exist in the heart of our great Church so far as the Bible itself is con-



cerned." On reading the two essays, we cannot see how Dr. Lenski can say that "such [fundamental] differences, though expected, failed to put in their appearance." Dr. Snyder wrote: "Some of our theologians, on the other hand, accuse the Synodical Conference of lending its weight to the verbal-inspiration theory. Why should we dogmatize where we do not have a positive 'Thus saith the Lord'? . . . Shall we quarrel over an adiaphoron while a sin-sick, needy world is hungering for the Bread of Life?" Pastor Fricke wrote: "The fundamental doctrine of the Christian Church is that of inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures. Let this doctrine be called into question and the foundation of Christian faith is shaken." One man says it is a fundamental doctrine. The other man says it is an adiaphoron. And the third man says that no disunity exists between the first two!

Dr. Snyder states: "There seems to be no question in the mind of Christendom about there being an inspiration, but the manner and extent of it are a matter of dispute." Let us strike out the word "manner." We are not disputing about that. The manner and method of inspiration is a mystery. But we are disputing about the "extent" of it. Here there is a wide disagreement, and a fundamental one. Are the very words of the Bible given by inspiration? Dr. Snyder says, No. Pastor Fricke says, Yes. And Dr. Lenski says these two are agreed. Dr. Snyder's statement: "Then comes the special act of the Holy Spirit, which is the inspiration that qualifies chosen ones to record in human language the content of the message of the Word. This is the *inspiration of the Scriptures.*" (Italics in original.) Pastor Fricke's statement: "The thoughts and words are inspired. If the words are not inspired, then there is a vast element which is not inspired; for no thought can be expressed without words, and the entire Bible is made up of words. Thoughts are wedded to words as necessarily as soul to body. On the other hand, if the thought is claimed to be inspired and not the words, the thought can never be certain at any point; for it turns often on a single word and comes to us wholly in words. . . . Too numerous for consideration are the references in Scripture which support the fact of verbal inspiration. . . . 2 Tim. 3:15; . . . Gal. 3, 16: St. Paul rests the burden of his powerful argument upon the singular form of the word 'seed.' How could the apostle do this if he was not firmly convinced that every word of Holy Writ, and also its form, was inspired of God? . . . 2 Sam. 23:2, 3: Here David asserts that the words of the Holy Spirit have been transmitted to his tongue. Emphatically he declares his words to be the words of the Holy Ghost. . . ." And the Washington Association got the impression that the two essays are in fundamental agreement!



Just by the way, we wonder if the discussion clarified the meaning of Dr. Snyder's statement that the holy writers "recorded the content of the message of the Word." They got the message of "the Word" and recorded its content. The meaning cannot be that the words which they wrote are divine words, God's very words. The use of the phrase "human language" forbids that. The words of Scripture contain the "message of the Word" — what was this "Word"? Did God tell them to write down certain statements? No; that would be "verbal inspiration." Then what *was* this "Word"? If that was made clear, we wish we could have attended the Washington conference. We have been asking ourselves for years what this "Word" is in contradistinction to the Bible word. We cannot rid ourselves of the idea that this "Word of God" which is said to lie back of Scripture is too hazy a thing to be made the foundation of our faith, particularly as it comes to us in fallible human language.

Dr. Snyder makes this statement: "As one writer on this questions says: 'It [the Bible] has carried with it the husk as well as the kernel,' and in illustration of his meaning he quotes some stories of vengeance, cruelty, *lex talionis*, polygamy, adultery which it relates." What do our Lutherans think of such a statement? Did the conference consider the teaching that parts of the Bible are mere "husk" to be an adiaphoron?

There are some matters broached in Dr. Snyder's essay which are not of fundamental importance, but they might be looked into. For instance: "The Lutheran Church, outside perhaps of the Missouri Synod, has never subscribed to a verbal theory of inspiration." Salvation does not depend on the truth or falsity of this statement; but if it is a false statement, it should not be made. Dr. Dell will presently say something on this adiaphoron. In addition to what he will say, we submit the following statement: "Truly, it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture. . . . Do they think that *these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?*" That statement is made in the *Apology* (*Trigl.*, p. 153.) It teaches verbal inspiration. And there are more statements of a similar nature found in the Lutheran Confessions. It is not only the Missouri Synod which teaches verbal inspiration. We submit another statement: "The Holy Scriptures are written by the Holy Ghost. . . . Holy Scripture is God's Word, written and (as I might say) lettered, spelled out in single letters." That is verbal inspiration. It is a statement by Luther, on Ps. 22:7. (IX:1770.) And it is not an isolated statement. The same Luther said: "Holy Scripture is spoken by the Holy Ghost, as I have already often said. . . . The entire Holy Scripture is the Word of the Holy Ghost. . . . First David names the Holy Ghost, 2 Sam. 23:2. To Him he gives all that the prophets



foretell. . . . Therefore these words of David are also the words of the Holy Ghost, which he speaks by the tongue of David." (III:1889-1907.) Luther on the inerrancy of Scripture: "This is certain that Scripture does not lie." (I:714.) "Scripture has never erred. . . . 'None of the Scripture-writers has ever erred.' (Augustine.)" (XV:1481.) "Scripture cannot err." (XIX:1073.) Luther's language is the language of one who believes in verbal inspiration. Dr. Snyder has no right to say: "Luther's attitude on this question was one of freedom." He has no right to say that Luther's teaching on inspiration differs from that of the Missouri Synod.—Luther made such verbal-inspiration statements not once or twice, but a few hundred times. If you will take the time to read Volumes I-IX and XIV of the St. Louis edition of Luther's works, you will find Luther declaring again and again that every word the prophets and apostles wrote is God's Word, that every word is the absolute truth, that the Holy Scriptures are inerrant in every detail. The *Theologische Quartalschrift*, October, 1936, submits a great number of such statements. The writer found "more than a thousand such statements" (p. 246)—in those ten volumes. By the time the writer finishes his survey, there will be not a few more such statements. Men tell us that they can furnish an equal number of statements by Luther which reject verbal inspiration. We ask them to furnish not a thousand, not a hundred, but one single statement by Luther that not every single word of Holy Scripture is inspired, that the holy writers made a single misstatement. They are not able to do that. All of this does not of course *prove* the doctrine of verbal inspiration; but it does prove the falsity of the assertion that such a doctrine is peculiar to the Missouri Synod.

Another matter brought up by Dr. Snyder which has nothing to do with the *doctrine* of inspiration but which needs to be examined as to its historical correctness is this. He says: "The important thing now before us is the fact that inspiration has been injected into the question of further Lutheran unity. . . . One might have expected the question to center in the Galesburg Rules or the controversy over secret orders. But not so; the question of inspiration now occupies, or bids fair soon to occupy, the field. We should not like to charge any Lutheran group with insincerity in its desire for greater Lutheran unity; but can it be possible that, when many other seeming obstacles are being removed, some new one should be trotted out? Were the matter not too serious, one might be reminded of the wag who said, 'If we had some eggs, we could have ham and eggs for breakfast, if we had the ham.'" Dr. Snyder ought to know that the controversy within the Lutheran Church of America on inspiration is not of recent origin. It has been going on for these many years. It began, say in 1871,



when a prominent Lutheran in America had to call attention to the heretical views regarding the inerrancy of Scripture expressed by a prominent Lutheran in America. (See *Lehre und Wehre*, 1871, p. 126.) Furthermore, it was in 1907—and Dr. Snyder surely should be familiar with this—that the General Council adopted a resolution protesting against the charge that the Council had repudiated verbal inspiration. (*Luth. Herald*, quoted in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1907, p. 468.) This question certainly was not “trotted out” in 1937. In 1909 the General Synod addressed this official declaration to the General Council: “Whereas the General Synod has ever occupied the same position with reference to the true and complete inspiration of the canonical Scriptures, therefore resolved that we herewith declare our adherence to the statement ‘The Bible is the Word of God’ and reject the error implied in the statement ‘The Bible contains the Word of God.’” (Neve, *History*, etc., p. 451 f.) So there was a controversy on these questions even within what is now the United Lutheran Church of America long before the present days. Surely some men in the Washington Ministerial Association know this. This is true, of course, that at the present day the controversy is reaching a climax. But who is to blame for that? In which Lutheran body are the men to be found who deny, contrary to the resolution of the General Council, verbal inspiration and defend, contrary to the resolution of the General Synod, the thesis that “the Bible is not, but only *contains*, the Word of God”? But let Dr. Dell speak on this point—and others.

The “Editorial Epilog” declares in the introductory paragraphs: “We desire unity among Lutherans but not unity at the expense of truth. If it comes to a choice between these two: (1) outward unity, with a hushing up and smoothing over of deep-going differences in our views regarding the reliability of the Bible, and (2) outward disunity, even controversy, with the result that this doctrine of inspiration is thrust into the foreground and thought about and debated,—if it comes to a choice between these two, I say, the second alternative is much to be preferred. For the former can never lead to a real unity but the latter may.”

Dr. Snyder's question “Can it be possible that, when many other seeming obstacles are being removed, some new one should be trotted out?” gets this answer: “Well, that is turning the tables on us in good style. We who ‘profess’ a desire for Lutheran unity have ‘injected’ the doctrine of inspiration and have thus ‘trotted out a new obstacle’ to unity. Surely, if the Washington pastors are desirous of showing that no difference exists, this is not a good way of going at it. It reminds me of a passage in the Old Testament. King Ahab had been harboring the priests of Baal, and



as a result drought and famine came upon the land. But when he met Elijah, the king said, 'Art thou he that troubleth Israel?'

"So now those who believe in verbal inspiration — and they are a large and respectable majority, as we have seen — are suddenly accused of troubling Israel by trotting out a new obstacle to Lutheran unity. They might well point out that verbal inspiration proved no obstacle to the formation of the American Lutheran Conference in 1930 and that, when the intersynodical committee of the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church met in 1937—38, verbal inspiration was no obstacle at all. They might well point out that they did not trot out that one volume commentary on the New Testament. They might well say, 'We have not troubled Israel, but — somebody has.'"

The Washington pastors were told by Dr. Snyder that "the Lutheran Church, outside perhaps of the Missouri Synod, has never subscribed to a verbal theory of inspiration." Dr. Dell tells them: "In the May, 1935, *Pastor's Monthly* (A. L. Church) Professor Lang investigates this 'Missouri doctrine' and finds that it is also American Lutheran Church doctrine, also Norwegian Lutheran Church doctrine, also Augustana Synod doctrine, and even United Lutheran Church doctrine in at least a part of the U. L. C. A. Some of the authorities he quotes in that article are given here. Dr. R. C. H. Lenski (A. L. C.): 'Verbal inspiration, then, is simply that the divine act, moving, enlightening, controlling, and governing the holy writers, extended to the words which they used, so that only those words were chosen which God wanted for the conveyance of the thought. . . . If the thought is said to be inspired and not the words, we can never be certain even as to the thought; for it often turns on a single word and comes to us wholly in words.' *Dogmatic Notes*. Dr. Lenski is dead, but if you will turn back to Rev. Fricke's paper, you will see that what Dr. Lenski taught is still held in the A. L. C. . . . Dr. J. A. O. Stub (Norw. Luth. Ch.): 'Today almost the entire Lutheran Church of America holds to this belief' (verbal inspiration). 'The Synodical Conference in particular and the Norwegian Lutherans are here in accord. The Norwegian Synod has stood as an unwavering champion of this doctrine.' *Verbal Inspiration*, 1915. . . ." Four additional representative theologians are quoted.

Dr. G. E. Lenski thinks that the Washington Conference did better than the intersynodical committees with their headshakings and grumblings. What does Dr. Dell think of this? He writes: "It seems rather futile to say, as I have read elsewhere (*Lutheran Church Quarterly*), 'If this intersynodical committee cannot get together, let us appoint another that will'" (Rev. G. E. Lenski speaking). "Isn't that a rather naive viewpoint? As if all that is



required for unity on this basic doctrine is to keep on appointing committees until we find one that is indifferent enough to say, 'It doesn't matter'!

"The members of the intersynodical committee (U. L. C. and A. L. C.), whether members of theological faculties or not, were honestly chosen as men capable of representing the position of their respective churches. They found serious differences, in their opinion, in the views of the two bodies on inspiration. . . . Shall we now suppose that, because they were of the theological faculties, they did not know what the pastors and people of their groups really hold? Who should know better than theological faculties what the pastors, especially the younger ones, hold and teach? And if the theologians who find these differences in doctrine are mistaken, if behind the disagreeing theological faculties stand two church-bodies the rank and file of whom believe the same thing, then it seems to me it is time that one or the other set of theologians was repudiated by its church-body, which it is supposed to represent but does not."

The intersynodical committees honestly said they do not agree. At the Washington Conference the same opposing, contradictory teachings were presented—and we are told that the conference was convinced that no disunity exists. We do not know what to make of that. Dr. Dell says on this point: "When I study these two papers by the Washington pastors, I cannot help feeling that the members of the intersynodical committee were not mistaken; that there is a difference in the viewpoint of the two bodies that is deep and shocking. The difference comes out in these very papers which are supposed to bridge the gap. Compare, for instance, these two statements, the one by Dr. Snyder, the other by Rev. Fricke:

"Shall we quarrel over an adiaphoron while a sin-sick, needy world is hungering for the Bread of Life? (U. L. C.)

"If behind Inspiration is placed a question-mark, then all Christian doctrine is questionable. (A. L. C.)

"Would it be better to pretend that the difference is not there, to heal the skin over the wound, and leave the festering sore beneath? I do not think so. Better to keep the wound open until it heals from within, even if the process is painful for the time being."

Did Luther and the Confessions teach verbal inspiration? That has nothing to do with the case. We say they did. Others say they did not. We shall not start a doctrinal controversy on that point. But let those who find comfort in the fact that the Confessions, for instance, contain no separate article on Inspiration ponder the words of Dr. Dell: "The question did not come up in their day.



But it has come up in ours. It is now entirely too late to say, 'They believed in inspiration, and we believe in inspiration; that is all that is necessary.' No; unfortunately that is not all that is necessary now. Due to some regrettable teachings and publications it is now necessary to ask, What do you mean by inspiration? To what extent is the Sacred Record reliable? May one throw out portions of it and cast doubt on other portions at will?"

We wish we could have the whole of Dr. Dell's straightforward and forceful "Epilog" reprinted here. We do have enough space for the concluding paragraph: "I do believe, though, with the Washington pastors that there is a great deal more unity of belief on the subject of inspiration between the rank and file of United Lutheran Church pastors and people and the pastors and people of other American Lutheran bodies than would be suspected from certain semiofficial statements of the U. L. C. A. It is only with the purpose of strengthening that real unity and bringing it out into the open beyond all camouflage that these words are written."

TH. ENGELDER

### Sermon Study on Col. 3:1-4

Eisenach Epistle Selection for Ascension Day

*If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth, vv. 1, 2. "If ye, then, be risen with Christ." The if does not denote any uncertainty, but from the certain fact of their resurrection with Christ, chap. 2:12, their quickening together with Him, 2:13, Paul draws certain necessary inferences and conclusions. They have risen, συνηγέρθητε, have been raised with Christ. The aorist describes this act of God as definitely accomplished. When did this raising with Christ take place, and what is the nature of this quickening? The apostle had answered both questions in the preceding chapter. In Baptism they had been buried together with Christ, 2:12. On the mystic union with Christ effected in and by Baptism compare such passages as Rom. 6:3 ff.; Gal. 2:27. Faith, which is engendered through Baptism, unites the believers with Christ, makes them members of His body, participants of the fruits of His burial and resurrection. Therefore the apostle had at once added that in Christ, united with Him, they had risen with Him, συνηγέρθητε, were raised together with Him, "through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead," 2:12. (Note that Paul uses the same word, raised together, as in 3:1.) The same almighty power operating in the resur-*