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Holy Scripture or Christ?

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must learn from the Bible that Baptism is the means through which God bestows grace and works regeneration in the heart. Whoever understands the Biblical teaching of the natural depravity of children and of the benefit and power of Baptism will not hesitate to have his children baptized.

River Forest, Ill.

E. W. A. KOEHLER

Holy Scripture or Christ?

In his *History of Christian Doctrine* G. P. Fisher points out that "among Protestants and Roman Catholics the old question respecting the seat of authority in religion is once more eagerly disputed. Since Coleridge and Schleiermacher insisted that the primary object of faith is not the Bible but Christ, there has been a growing tendency to regard the Scriptures less as an authoritative manual of revealed tenets in theology and morals than as the medium of disclosing to us the personal Christ and the import of His mission and teaching. The absolute inerrancy of Scriptural statements, especially in the narrative portions of the Bible, is no longer maintained in England and America by numerous theologians who are firmly attached to the principal doctrines of the Evangelical system" (p. 547). Is Christ the primary authority in religion, or is it Holy Scripture? In other words, is the source and fountain of the Christian faith (*fides quae creditur*), of the Christian doctrine, the Bible, or Christ? And that means, Is saving faith (*fides quae creditur*) based on the word of Scripture or on the word of Christ?

1

Christ is the sole authority in religion. That goes without saying, among Christians. Only His Word counts, only His Word gives life. Christ Himself declared that "one is your Master, even Christ" (Matt. 23:10), and the Father's voice spoke out of the cloud: "This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him," Matt. 17:5. There can be no other authority: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him," John 1:18. And these words of Christ are the source of life. They offer us the life eternal, gained for us by Christ; they create faith, and faith relies upon them. "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life," John 6:63. They give us confidence and assurance. We are sure of the forgiveness of our sins, because we have Christ's word for it.—There is but one authority in religion, so that "if any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, he is proud, knowing nothing,"

1 Tim. 6:3 f. Saving faith has but one object, one foundation, one source, even Christ. The disciples declare: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life," John 6:68.

Scripture is the sole authority in religion. That goes without saying, among the Bible Christians. "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them," Luke 16:29. Men are seeking other authorities, but the Lord declares: "To the Law and to the Testimony! If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Is. 8:20), "surely there is no morning for them" (Rev. Vers.). "To the Law and to the Testimony"—that means "to Scripture." For "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine," 2 Tim. 3:16. And being the source of doctrine, it is the source and foundation of faith, for "the holy Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Tim. 3:16. The Bible Christians accept no other authority than that of Scripture. They declare: "We receive and embrace the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the pure, clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true standard by which all teachers and doctrines are to be judged." (Form. of Con., *Trigl.*, p. 851.) The Bible Christian Walther declares: "The Ev. Lutheran Church recognizes the written word of the apostles and prophets as the only and perfect source, rule, norm, and judge of all teaching." (*Walther and the Church*, p. 122, Thesis XIII.) The Bible Christian Krauth declares: "It is a fundamental principle of the Reformation that God's Word is the sole and absolute authority and rule of faith and of life, a principle without accepting which no man can be truly Evangelical, Protestant, or Lutheran." (*The Cons. Ref.*, p. 17.) And the written Word, the sole source of all teaching, is the sole source and the sole foundation of saving faith: "Faith is conceived from the Word." (*Apology*, *Trigl.*, p. 141.) We have no greater treasure in this world than the Bible. It is the Book of Truth, revealing the saving doctrine; and it is the Book of Life, creating saving faith.

Christ is our one and only authority. The Bible is our one and only authority. That means that whatever Christ would say to us, He says through Scripture. And whatever Scripture tells us, Christ tells us. It is Christ's Word we hear when we read our Bible. What the prophets wrote, they wrote not of themselves but by "the Spirit of Christ, which was in them," 1 Pet. 1:11. Asking us to accept "the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul points to his epistles and declares: "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." (1 Cor. 14:37. "What I write that is of the Lord.") And whatever power unto salvation inheres in the words of Christ,

which "are spirit and life," inheres in the word of the apostles: Men "shall believe on Me through their word," John 17:20. There is but one Master, one Teacher, but you can hear His voice nowhere but in Scripture. Holy Scripture is profitable unto doctrine, Scripture alone. Men shall believe in Christ through no other word than that of the apostles. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name," John 20:31. What men hear outside of, and apart from, Scripture is not the voice of Jesus. It is a Satanic delusion. In the words of Luther: "God will not permit us to rely on anything else, to place our trust on anything which is not Christ in His Word, let it be never so holy and full of spirit. Faith has no other foundation on which to stand. . . . Everything else is useless and futile. You are seeking Christ in vain. Only one thing will do, and that is that you turn away from yourself and all human comfort and throw yourself on the Word and nothing but the Word." (XI, pp. 453, 455.)

Christ is the chief, the only authority in religion. But we have to state just as emphatically: Holy Scripture is the chief, the only authority. When men ask, what is the primary object of your faith, what Christ says or what is written in Scripture? we ask them not to discuss a situation which does not exist. The authority that Christ wields is lodged in the Bible and nowhere else. It is only when we hear the Bible speaking that we hear Christ speaking. If a man says that Christ is his authority and says nothing else, he is saying absolutely nothing. And if in saying this he means to give Christ the primary place and the Bible the secondary place, he is putting Christ out of the only place where He may be found by men. There is only one authority in religion: Christ speaking in the Bible.

And Christ is speaking to us *everywhere* in the Bible. Let us emphasize this point in dealing with the question whether Christ or Scripture is the primary authority. There is not a single passage in Scripture from which men may appeal to the higher authority of Christ. Every word written in the Bible was spoken by the Spirit of Christ (1 Pet. 1:11); what Paul writes is "of the Lord," written by His authority, 1 Cor. 14:37. Moreover, *every word has to do with Christ*. Everything in the Bible is Christ. That is Luther's strong expression: "Thus the entire Scripture is throughout nothing but Christ, the Son of God and Mary's Son; all of it concerns Him. . . . Scripture is open to him who has the Son, and as his faith grows stronger and stronger, the light of Scripture shines the more brightly for him." (III, p. 1959.) Luther's expression is no stronger than that of St. Paul: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we

through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Luther and Paul are not saying that only some portions of Scripture deal with Christ, but they are saying that everything was written with a view to the creation and strengthening of faith and hope in Christ. When St. Paul said: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), he did not mean to say that he preached only the Gospel, but he did say that whatever else he preached and wrote when he expounded the Law and dealt with historical matters, served the preaching of Christ, of the Gospel. Even so, when Moses related the story of creation and Matthew dealt in genealogies, they were driving forward to their real theme. The Bible contains, says the superficial theologian, much useless material, of no spiritual value. He would be right if these things stood by themselves. Says Luther: "*Tolle Christum e Scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies?*" (Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find remaining in them?) (XVIII, p. 1681.) Or, as H. Sasse puts it: "Without this Gospel, the Scriptures would be either an unintelligible, fragmentary document of a chaotic history of religions or a revelation of the incomprehensible wrath of God." (*Here We Stand*, p. 115.) But you will no longer speak of useless material and a chaotic condition in the Bible if you accept the truth of Rom. 15:4 and say with Luther: "Christ is the center of the circle, and all stories in Holy Scripture, viewed aright, have to do with Christ." (VII, p. 1924.) Everything in the Bible has spiritual value; all Scripture is profitable for doctrine and every spiritual need (2 Tim. 3:16); and if you are ready to accept Christ as your Teacher, you will accept all that the Bible tells, for in all of it Christ is speaking.

But that would be making out of the Bible a manual of doctrine! And it would be putting Christendom under a yoke of legalism! We thank God that He has given us such a perfect manual, in which every doctrine is set down in clear, definite terms. Things would be in a chaotic condition if we had to wait till a conclave of theologians settled these terms. But are we bound to the letter of Scripture? Would that not be a legalistic procedure, demanding of us a slave mentality? You do not know your Bible, who speak of it as a taskmaster. Scripture requires of us indeed that we accept its teachings, unconditionally and absolutely; but in presenting these teachings, it exerts a divine power upon us, a gracious power, a gentle persuasion. Through these teachings it creates faith and willing obedience. "The Word of God is quick and powerful," Heb. 4:12. "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only but in power," 1 Thess. 1:5. "My preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God," 1 Cor. 2:4, 5. And remember that this powerful Word of God is nothing else than Scripture. Scripture and Word of God are interchangeable terms. *Scripture* is the Word of God that makes us wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus, 2 Tim. 3:15.¹⁾ What Christian will say, when Scripture is creating in him willing acceptance of the saving truth and filling his heart with joy and happy obedience, that he is being enslaved and subjected to a hard "code"? Luther did not think so. To him "Scripture was the foundation and evidence of our faith." It "filled his heart with joy and happiness" (XI, p. 1025). And "if you take the Word of God away, that would be the same as taking the sun out of the world" (IV, p. 1806). Oh, how gladly we accept the instruction of Scripture, how joyfully we bow to its authority! The Word of *Christ* is not a heavy burden upon us. "To a careful hearer the message of Jesus in its purity still has the challenge of acceptance as an authoritative appeal. Its authority can be accepted or rejected, but the latter attitude does not destroy its authority. When the Word of Christ is accepted, men bow under its authority joyfully and gladly." (J. A. W. Haas, *The Truth of Faith*, p. 34.) This writer is speaking of the Word of Christ in contradistinction to Scripture. But what he says of the Word of Christ we say of *Scripture*. When the Christian reads Scripture, he declares: "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart," Ps. 19:8. He rejoices in the word of Scripture, because it is the Word of Jesus. We want to hear the voice of Jesus teaching us, comforting us, admonishing us, and we can hear Him only in Scripture.—The question "Is it Christ or is it Scripture that teaches the saving truth and implants it into the hearts?" is easily resolved by us. We do not set the two in opposition. As far as the instruction in divine revelation is concerned, Christ and Scripture are one.

2

Others make a distinction here—a fatal distinction. There are those—and they constitute the majority of present-day theologians—who say: Not Scripture but Christ! First go to Christ and then use whatever portions of Scripture you may find profitable! It seems incredible that Protestants in general, and

1) "The efficacy of the Bible is that property by which the Bible has indissolubly united with the true and genuine sense expressed in its words the power of the Holy Spirit, who has made it for all times the ordinary means by which He operates on and in the hearts and minds of those who properly hear and read it. Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; Ps. 19:8; Rev. 1:3," etc. (A. Graebner, *Doctrinal Theology*, p. 12.) Cf. Baier, I, p. 153: "*Scriptura habet vim aut potentiam activam, supernaturalem ac vere divinam, ad producendos supernaturales effectus, scilicet mentes hominum convertendas, regenerandas et renovandas,*" etc.

Lutherans in particular, should thus put Christ in opposition to Scripture. We submit a few statements, samples of many similar ones, to show that they are actually doing this.

W. Hermann: "It would be unchristian if this principle of the authority of Scripture adopted by the Evangelical Christianity meant the acknowledgment of any chance sentence of the Scriptures as God's word, by which a Christian ought to be guided in his life, and the community in its doctrine. Such a principle of the authority of Scripture would set a book above God's revelation, which we can receive only through personal influences, above all from the personal life of Christ. . . . What we should apprehend in the Scriptures as the indispensable means to salvation is what God is seeking to say to us through the personal life revealing itself there, and preeminently through the power of the person of Jesus." (*Systematic Theology*, p. 58 f.) A. Deissmann: "This dogma of verbal inspiration of every letter of the New Testament, which rightly can be called mechanical inspiration, is now abandoned in all scientific theology. . . . The only basis of our faith is the present living God, and Jesus Christ when He has become for us in some way or other a present and effective Reality." (*The New Testament*, etc., pp. 12, 174. See *C. T. M.*, I, p. 234.) Th. Harnack: "*Die Frage nach der Schrift ist darum immer erst die zweite; die erste ist und bleibt Christus.*" (See *Lehre u. Wehre*, 32, p. 346.) L. Ihmels: "Today also only that is real faith in Christ which is thrust upon man by the appearance of Christ Himself." (*Zentralfragen*, p. 89.) The Commission on Christian Doctrine (Episcopalian) states that "stages of Biblical revelation are to be judged in relation to its historical climax," the standard being "the mind of Christ as unfolded in the experience of the Church and appropriated by the individual Christian through His Spirit" (*The Living Church*, March 9, 1938). At the World Conference at Lausanne, 1927, the extreme Liberals expressed their teaching thus: "The object of our faith is not any statement about Christ but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself."²

2) Most certainly Christ is the object of saving faith. Most certainly we tell men: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," Acts 16:31. But when these men ask, What should we believe concerning Christ? we tell them: "Believe the Gospel" (Mark 1:15), accept by faith those wonderful "statements about Christ" which you will find only in Scripture, those statements containing the offer of the forgiveness of sins gained by Christ. And what happens? "So then faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17), not by hearing what some apparition is telling you, but by hearing the word of Scripture. — Consult Dr. Pieper's *Christliche Dogmatik*: "One party contends that justifying faith does not spring solely from the word of the Gospel and consequently does not have only the word of the Gospel for its object, but that faith springs primarily from 'historical impressions' and has for its object historical impressions and 'the facts of salvation' separate and apart from the Word of God. The other party

All of this sounds familiar. We have been hearing it here in America. *The Lutheran* of Nov. 22, 1928, declared: "We are not founded upon any book nor even on the Scriptures. Christianity is founded upon the living Christ." J. A. W. Haas: "It is not a set of writings nor the unity of the Scriptures as such and in themselves upon which we can rest as authority that is infallible apart from their connection and derivation from Jesus and the guidance of His Spirit. *The ever-living Christ is our infallible norm and standard.*" (*The Truth of Faith*, p. 38. Italics our own.) *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, April 1937: "What Luther meant by the Word of God, as is well known, was something different from the original words written by the original authors on the original parchment. It was the Word that was spirit and life, free and not bound. . . . There is a tendency to identify the object of faith with doctrines instead of with the *living Christ*, whom the doctrines are intended to set forth. This naturally happens where the Word of God is so identified with the written Scriptures that no differentiation is made between them" (Pp. 195, 194).³

This modern teaching: Not Scripture but Christ, is nothing new. Schleiermacher indeed popularized it in this form, but it is an old heresy. John Goodwin, Independent († 1665), wrote: "Jesus Christ and not the Scriptures was the foundation of the Christian religion. . . . The true and proper foundation is not ink and paper, not any book or books, not writing or writings whatsoever, whether translations or originals, but that substance of matter, those glorious counsels of God concerning salvation of the world by Jesus Christ." (See *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1931, p. 152.) And before him the "heavenly prophets" of Zwickau and the rest of that ilk had said the same in principle.

Just how these men who make Jesus, not Scripture, the source and foundation of saving knowledge, get into communication with Jesus, they do not tell us. John De Witt tries to tell us when he writes: "All historic, prophetic, and didactic revelation of God in the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is inferior and subordinate to His revelation of personal truth and grace in the Christ of the historic Gospel; and whatsoever the former may con-

teaches that any faith outside and apart from God's *Word* and promise is enthusiasm. . . . Therefore the Lutheran Confessions so strongly emphasize the fact that the object of justifying faith is the forgiveness of sins *offered in the Word*: *Diximus promissionem et fidem correlativa esse. and: Fides justificans est velle et accipere oblatam promissionem remissionis peccatorum et justificationis.*" (II, pp. 505, 537.)

3) "Not Scripture, but Christ" comes under the general heading of "Not Scripture, but the Word of God." The discussion of the concept "Word of God" as opposed to the word of Scripture must await another opportunity. It will suffice to point out here that the moderns are using these two terms ("Christ" and "Word of God") indiscriminately.

tain that is incongruous therewith, whatever be the explanation of the incongruity, is not to be held as authoritative for us, but is virtually superseded as an imperfect and provisional inspiration. . . . Let the disciple of Christ come closer to Christ in His pervasive, effluent, and communicative moral purity. Let him take John's position, pillowing his head on the Master's bosom, where he can hear His faintest whisper and feel every throb of His pure, tender, and loving heart, and he will come to a better mind. . . . We go fearlessly, therefore, to the old inspiration, approving or rejecting it, as it may be." (*What Is Inspiration?* pp. 168, 180.) That is a fine Christian phrase: "pillowing his head on the Master's bosom." On Jesus' bosom we find comfort and rest. But resting on the bosom of Jesus, you will never hear a voice telling you to reject certain portions of Holy Scripture. And where will you find Jesus apart from Scripture? The directions De Witt gives are just as hazy as those of Prof. John Oman, who, rejecting the authority of Scripture, says: "The true ambassador of Heaven sits in heavenly places, seeing visions and dreaming dreams" (*Vision and Authority*, p. 166), or those of Prof. J. F. Vichert, who says: "The ground of my confidence is not something written long ago, though that has helped me, . . . but a song, a light, a life, within my own soul" (*Watchman-Examiner*, Feb. 28, 1929). That is exactly what the "heavenly prophets" of Zwickau said.

So much is clear from the statements submitted that these men refused to accept the Bible as the primary, the chief, the only authority. We do not have to point that out to them. They are pointing it out to us. We shall enlarge on the disastrous results of such a theology later on. For the present we want to emphasize the fact that, according to their own statements, they have deposed the Bible as the chief and only authority. They have much to say in praise of the Bible; but submit to its authority absolutely? Never! — We know, of course, that it will be useless for us to quote 2 Tim. 3:15 f.; 1 Tim. 6:3 ff.; Is. 8:20; etc., to them in this connection. That will make no impression on them. They will tell us to save our breath since they do not accept the Bible as the chief authority. They will ridicule us for operating with the obsolete method of quoting Bible-texts. Well, let them, if they must. It will clarify the situation. We will know that we are dealing with men who think nothing of rejecting certain statements, certain portions of Scripture.

They tell us that very plainly. We submit a list of statements to that effect. These statements are of the same general nature as the preceding ones, but emphasize the teaching that the authority of the Bible ceases where the alleged authority of Christ sets in. That is to say, on the authority of Christ or of the Spirit of Christ

or of the Gospel of Christ or whatever other term may be used, certain portions of Scripture must be ruled out; not every word of the Bible counts, but only such words as are stamped with the authority of Jesus.

Dr. De Witt told us that a moment ago. Read once more the first part of his statement. The Bible contains incongruities, which are no longer authoritative for us! W. A. Brown: "But if the Bible records such widely different stages of spiritual development, how are we to discriminate between them? How can we tell what part of the Bible is revelation and what is setting? There is one very simple and effective way to do this. It is to bring everything the book contains into touch with the central personality in whom the story culminates—the Lord Jesus Christ." (*Beliefs That Matter*, p. 226.) H. F. Rall: "Is not the authority of the Bible gone if we cannot say of every word that it is the Word of God? . . . The final authority for our faith is God, and God alone. The Bible is authority for us only in so far as it brings God, only so far as through the Spirit of God it wakens conviction in our heart. . . . The Bible has a center toward which the old tends from which the new flows—Jesus Christ. Bring all else to that test, make Him supreme." (*A Faith for Today*, p. 232.)⁴ E. Brunner: "It is well known how Luther himself freely criticized the writings of the Old and the New Testament, without being in the least shaken in his faith. When he used his critical understanding, he did what the pearl-fisher does when he wipes away the sand from his new-found pearl to uncover its pure whiteness. He removed what covered the meaning of God's Word. . . . It is like chiseling off the incrustations of the past from the old inscription, to make it legible. No doubt we have to chisel off much more than Luther believed necessary, but the inscription has remained the same: Jesus Christ, the Word of God." (*The Word and the World*, p. 102.) E. Schaefer: "The Spirit-wrought faith applies a sifting process to the Bible-word. Through this sifting process it gets the Word of God, the Word of Christ, to which it pneumatically adheres." (*Theozentrische Theologie*, II, p. 69.) F. Holmstroem: "Die Spitze [von P. Althaus' Darlegung der 'Methode der Eschatologie'] ist ja eigentlich gegen die schlendrianmaessige biblizistische Reproduktion der apokalyptischen Vorstellungen gerichtet. . . . Eine theologisch haltbare Eschatologie muss vielmehr ihre Aussagen organisch aus dem lebendigen Zentrum der biblischen Offenbarung, der 'Christustatsache,' herleiten." (*Das Eschatologische Denken der Gegenwart*,

4) Both Luther and Rall put Christ in the center of the Bible. But Luther goes on to show that therefore everything in the Bible is of value; Rall, however, finds therein his authority to discard much of the Bible.

p. 312.) That is to say, the single texts treating of eschatology (or any other doctrine) are not decisive. What counts is the living center, "die Christustatsache." If an individual statement of the Bible does not agree [in your judgment] with "Christ," with the fact that Christ lived and died, etc., you may discard it.⁵⁾

5) Let us take time to discuss the term "*schlendrianmaessige bibliistische Reproduktion*." When we base our teaching on proof-texts, these men look down upon us as backward Bibliacists and charge us with taking things too easy, adhering to the old slovenly methods of Scripture-interpretation. Study the Bible, these men say, but you need something better than proof-texts to get the sense of its teaching. A writer in the *Christian Century* of Feb. 22 says: "Back to the Bible! I am convinced that we are to fall short of the necessary spiritual resilience which this day demands, unless we rediscover the sources of spiritual power in the Bible." He goes on to speak of "the inexhaustible resources of beauty and grandeur, of sharp insight and sweeping profundity that crowd the pages of the New Testament. There's a book!" But he hastens to declare: "This does not mean that we shall be saved by a return to proof-texting. Perish the thought!" Proof-texts!? "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." (Dr. E. E. Flack, in *The Lutheran*, Oct. 11, 1936.) These men look down with infinite contempt on the Bibliacists who say: "That the question of inspiration is of vital importance for the Christian Church is easily seen. If she has a definite and authoritative body of Scripture to which she can go, it is a comparatively easy task to formulate her doctrine. All she has to do is to search out the teachings of Scripture and embody them in her creed." (L. Boettner, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 10.) No, say the moderns, it is not so easy as all that. That would make theology too simple a matter. Much more is required than the study of simple proof-texts. They have the same contempt for Luther, who also dealt with proof-texts. Luther, too, said that it is an easy matter for the Church to establish her doctrines, for there are the clear passages of Scripture! "There is no clearer book upon earth than is Holy Writ. . . . Some passages in Scripture are obscure, but in these you find nothing but what is found in other places, and in clear and plain passages. . . . So the fathers fought them [the heretics] with the clear passages." (V, p. 334 f.) When Luther had found one single proof-text, he was sure of his case and declared: "The text stands there too mightily." (XV, p. 2050.) Poor, backward Luther, piddling around in theology, imagining that he is getting anywhere with his proof-texts! *Solch ein Schlendrian!* Zwingli used to scoff at Luther for clinging to "*funf arme und elende Worte*." The moderns deride him for staking his doctrine, his salvation, on a string of insignificant proof-texts, and Luther answers: "They are revealing what kind of spirit is in them and how much they think of God's Word, ridiculing these precious words as five poor, miserable words; they do not believe that they are God's words. For if they believed that they are God's words, they would not call them miserable, poor words, but would prize one tittle and letter more highly than the whole world." (XX, p. 1040.) And what is that great and strenuous work, calling for the best effort and deepest thought of the theologian, far surpassing the piddling, easy-going, slovenly method of the proof-text theologian? They say: "Theology must derive its truths out of the living center of the Biblical revelation, out of the '*Christustatsache*.'" G. Wehrung says: "Der evangelische Schriftgebrauch sucht nicht Lehrformeln oder Beweisstellen (proof-texts) dafuer, sondern lebenweckende Zeugnisse; er sucht in und hinter diesen mannigfachen Christusbekennt-

W. C. Berkemeyer had declared in the Alleman Commentary that he disagrees with St. Paul's "allegorical exegesis of Genesis" and "the belief in the literal historicity of the Biblical account of creation of man and woman" and that he "doubts the traditional Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles." He was taken to task for this, but insists that he has the right to reject certain statements of Scripture on the principle "that we judge Scripture by Christ." (See *Luth. Church Quart.*, 1938, p. 67 f.)

One can hardly trust his eyes. Have Christian theologians written these things? The Church has indeed come upon evil times. The majority of her leading theologians, liberals and conservatives, Reformed and Lutheran, is claiming the right, and exercising it to the full, of revising the sacred oracles of God, of deleting great portions, sifting the wheat from the chaff, chiseling off the incrustations, removing the blemishes, and discarding the harmful elements — and they insist that they are doing this on the authority of Christ!

They also appeal to Luther as their authority for treating

nissen die innere Einheit, das eine Evangelium, das eine Gotteswort in den vielen Worten. . . . Eine gesetzliche Benutzung einzelner Saetze oder gar der ganzen Schrift kann dem Glauben nicht in den Sinn kommen; er muss ueberall die Linien zum Mittelpunkt ziehen, aus allen Stimmen den einen evangelischen Klang heraushoeren." (*Geschichte und Glaube*, p. 306.) H. Wheeler Robinson says: "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. . . . We may confidently claim that the fuller recognition of mediation, by throwing us back on the inner content of the revelation instead of its literary expression and record, is part of the unceasing providence of God over His people." (*The Chr. Experience of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 170, 175.) And it is not an easy matter to establish what revelation "in its entirety" really reveals. F. Buechsel tells us: "Selbstverstaendlich kommt diese Bedeutung ["Wort Gottes"] nicht einer Anzahl aus dem Neuen Testament herausgehobener Worte zu, sondern nur seinem Gesamtzeugnis," and then warns us: "Dies Gesamtzeugnis des Neuen Testaments zu erheben, erfordert ein betraechtliches Mass theologischer Arbeit." (*Die Offenbarung Gottes*, p. 112.) To get at the sense of revelation "in its entirety," of the Gesamtzeugnis, calls for an adept. We have always thought that it takes the best efforts of the Christian theologian to lift the treasures which these simple proof-texts carry. But now come the moderns, the adepts, and engage themselves to do better, more thorough work than that of piddling, slovenly Luther. Yes, better work than that of St. Paul. For the "literary expression," the words of Paul, as Robinson just told us, is inadequate. Go back to the "literary expression" to get the inner content of the revelation! — What intolerable conceit! Luther describes their conceit thus: "Grund und Ursach solches ihres Duenkels (conceit) ist erstlich, dass man diese Worte 'Das ist mein Leib'" (the proof-text!) "muesse aus den Augen tun und zuvor durch den Geist die Sache bedenken. . . . Da hast du eine gewisse Regel, die dich besser leitet in alle Wahrheit, denn der Heilige Geist selber tun kann, naemlich, wo die Heilige Schrift deinen Duenkel irret oder hindert, da tue sie aus den Augen, und folge zuerst deinem Duenkel, so triffst du den rechten Weg gewiss aller Dinge fein." (XX, p. 1022.) The word which St. Paul uses in this connection is *τετρωται*, 1 Tim. 6:4.

Holy Scripture in this way. They say that Luther set up the principle that only those portions of Scripture are authoritative which deal with Christ—"was Christum treibet." They found these words in Luther's Preface to the Epistle of St. James and St. Jude: "All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with Him." (Lay emphasis on Him [*Christum treiben*].) "That is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ, Rom. 3:21, and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, 1 Cor. 2:2." (XIV, p. 129. Translation from the Holman edition of Luther's works.) Hiding behind Luther's name, the moderns, liberals and conservatives, Reformed and Lutheran, insist that the criterion of truth is not: What is written? but: *Was treibt Christum?* We submit a list of statements which develop the general theme "Not Scripture, but Christ" in this particular form: Only those portions of Scripture are profitable which—according to the judgment of the masters—deal with Christ; the rest of Scripture can safely be junked.

Lic. Dr. Stier (Breslau): "Holy Scripture is 'the Word of God' inasmuch and so far as it is the record mediating the divine revelation of salvation (Luther: *Gottes Wort ist, 'was Christum treibet'*)." (*Ev.-Luth. Freikirche*, May 13, 1928.) P. Althaus: "Hier wie dort sind wir in dem Hoeren auf das Wort Gottes in dem biblischen Wort von diesem letzteren als Menschenworte auch frei." Footnote: "Es handelt sich also um das Verhaeltnis des Wortes zu den Worten, des Apostolischen im Sinne Luthers ('was Christum treibet') zu dem gesamten Inhalt der biblischen Schriften." (*Die letzten Dinge*, p. 61.) G. Wehrung (Tuebingen): "In unuebertrefflicher Weise hat Luther den Pruefstein fuer alle Schriften darin gefunden, ob sie Christum treiben oder nicht." But, adds Wehrung, Luther did not go far enough. What Luther's alleged principle involves is this: "Wir muessen aber in tieferem Sinn mit Luther und seinem Freiheitsgeist einig bleiben, indem wir alles Schriftwort danach abschaetzen, ob es das Evangelium rein und ungetruebt zum Ausdruck bringt." We are in accord with Luther and his spirit of freedom only then, if we apply this test to all words of Scripture: Do they express the Gospel as gospel clearly and purely? (*Geschichte und Glaube*, p. 307 f.) C. Stange: "In diesem Sinne ist auch die Formel Luthers gemeint, dass die Schrift Gottes Wort sei, soweit sie Christum treibt. . . . Es wird damit ein Massstab fuer das, was an dem Inhalt der Schrift wesentlich ist, aufgestellt." (*Dogmatik*, I, p. 195.) E. Brunner: "Luther, perhaps the most congenial interpreter of Scripture the Church has ever had, explicitly asserted the subordination of the Scripture to Christ in such well-known utterances as these: . . . 'The Scrip-

tures are apostolic and canonical in so far as they teach Christ and no further.'" "Luther would never have approved of the opinion of later orthodoxy that everything in the Scriptures is equally inspired by the Holy Spirit." "No doubt we have to chisel off much more than Luther believed necessary." (*The Word and the World*, pp. 84, 102.) H. C. Alleman: "It must have been along lines like these that Luther came to his test of Scripture: 'Herein agree all the genuine holy books, that they all preach and exhibit Christ.' The Bible contains the Word of God. It is the rule of our faith because it enshrines this Word. Luther saw that it was this which made it an inspired book, without the necessity of claiming for it verbal inspiration. He is not the author of that theory. The Bible is not of uniform value and perspicuity. It has carried with it the husk as well as the kernel. There are many things in the Old Testament and some in the New Testament which are temporal and even provincial. When we read Old Testament stories of doubtful ethics," etc. (*Luth. Church Quart.*, July, 1936, p. 240.) Alleman and Brunner and Stier and the rest have subscribed to the Declaration of Independence of the Authority of Scripture proclaimed by the Eisenach convention of 1917: "Gebunden und doch frei! Gebunden an das Ganze der Offenbarung in der Schrift, gebunden an den Christus Gottes, den die Schrift treibt, aber frei gegenueber Einzelheiten, frei in der Beurteilung der menschlichen Huellen, in die die Gottesherrlichkeit der Schrift verkleidet ist. Bound, yet free! Bound to the revelation within the Scriptures taken as a whole; bound to the Christ of God whom the Scriptures urge. But free with respect to particulars, free to form our opinion of the human garments making the divine glory of the Scriptures." (See *Theol. Monthly*, V, p. 6.)⁶⁾

6) Did Luther set up the canon that only those portions of Scripture which—according to the opinion of the master theologians—deal with Christ are inspired and authoritative? If he did, he was wrong and we should be doing wrong in following him. But he did nothing of the kind. He is not discussing the question whether everything in Scripture is God's inspired Word, but the question of the canon of Scripture—which books constitute the canon? Some of the writers just quoted are free to admit this. They admit it by declaring that Luther was at fault in not subjecting Scripture ("*alles Schriftwort*," "all words of Scripture") to the test: Does it deal with Christ? The question before Luther was whether James and Jude belong in the canon. He doubted it. Others before him have doubted it. James and Jude were always in the class of the *antilegomena*. Whether the test that Luther here applied (Do these books preach Christ?) is the proper one does not concern us now. The question before us is: Does Luther say that certain portions of Scripture are chaff, husk, blemishes, mistakes, and are seen to be such in that they do not deal with Christ? His words must be twisted unmercifully to make them say this. Why, in this very passage he states emphatically: "All the Scriptures show us Christ." He had to say this, because Rom. 15:4 says it. He said: "Scripture forms a harmonious whole, and all examples, histories, yea, the entire Scripture, in all its parts, aims at this,

It passes belief. Here are men who are ever harping on the authority of Jesus; but when Jesus declares: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), they coolly renounce His authority. Jesus declares that not a single statement of Scripture may be annulled, denied, deleted, put aside; every single word is authoritative. (See Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, I, pp. 158, 258, 266 f. L. Boettner, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 28. Kretzmann, *The Foundations Must Stand*, p. 40.) But these men say: We know better than Jesus what is fit and proper. Jesus asks us to stake everything on the authority of Scripture and accept everything in Scripture as profitable for doctrine; He should have known that there are many things in Scripture that are unimportant and even harmful.

We submit a final series of statements which use instead of the concepts "Christ" and "*was Christum treibet*" the term "Gospel" or the more general terms: "saving truth," "spiritual content," or "spirit," opposed to letter.⁷⁾ These statements express the idea

that we should learn Christ." (III, p. 18.) He said: "The entire Scripture is throughout nothing but Christ." (III, p. 1959.) He said: "All stories in Holy Scripture, viewed aright, have to do with Christ." (VII, p. 1924.) He said: "Thou must not think or wonder why the Holy Ghost delights in describing such paltry and contemptible things, but listen to what St. Paul says Rom. 15:4: 'Whatsoever things. . . ' If we firmly believed that the Holy Ghost Himself and God, the Creator of all, is the true Author of this Book, we should find the greatest comfort therein." (II, p. 469.) And Alleman and Brunner cannot make us believe that in this Preface to James Luther wanted to say the very contrary. And did Luther himself ever apply this alleged canon of his? Where did he say that such and such a passage must be separated from the true Scriptures because it does not deal with Christ? Luther will give you a hundred dollars if you can find, say in his exposition of Gen. 1 a statement to the effect: Out it goes, for it does not urge Christ. He will give you another hundred dollars if you can find him saying, in writing on the imprecatory psalms: Out they go, for they do not reflect the mind of Christ.— See further *C. T. M.*, IX, p. 383; Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, I, p. 353; Hoenecke, *Ev.-Luth. Dog.*, I, p. 362 (there W. Walther [Rostock] is quoted: Luther recognized open questions respecting the extent of the canon, but as to the canonical books, they possessed for him absolute authority, as being the inspired Word of God); C. F. W. Walther in *Lehre und Wehre*, 1886, p. 8 ("We pass over those who here bring up Luther's judgment concerning the antilegomena [St. James, etc.] as proving Luther's alleged liberality on the question of inspiration, since even the weakest intellect will see at once how foolish it is to make a disparaging judgment of Luther concerning a writing which *he did not look upon as canonical* express a liberal view concerning the inspiration of the canonical books; the very opposite is expressed in such a judgment.")— Hans Asmussen speaks of those who are always ready to trot out Luther's statement in the Preface to St. James in this wise: "Ueber die Grenzen, in welchen Gottes Reden nach Ansicht Luthers in der Bibel sich vollzieht, ist das bekannte Lutherzitat von der Schrift, 'soweit sie Christum treibet,' mit besonderer Inbrunst in allen Lagern kolportiert worden," and then he quotes Luther, IX, 655; III, 21; III, 1890; VI, 742; VII, 1111, etc. (*Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1928, p. 31.)

7) All these terms are used interchangeably. Luthardt for instance uses them thus in this statement: "Th. Harnack geht nun auf die falsche unlutherische" (!) "Stellung zur Heiligen Schrift ein, demgemaess man

that not everything in the Bible is God's Word, trustworthy and authoritative; that, since Christ is the only authority, only the Gospel portions of the Bible are authoritative. Following the lead of Calixt, who restricted inspiration to the saving truths (*Heilswahrheiten*—see Luthardt, *Compendium*, p. 117), O. Kirn says: "Aus diesem Grundsatz folgt nicht nur die Beschraenkung der Schriftautoritaet auf das Gebiet der *Heilswahrheit*, sondern auch das abgestufte Verhaeltnis des Alten und Neuen Testaments innerhalb des Schriftganzen." (*Grundriss*, p. 30.) H. Martensen: "In the orthodoxy of the seventeenth century the Scriptures are regarded as a book of laws; and the individual Christian, not maintaining a relative independence over against the Scriptures, is unable to distinguish in the Scriptures between the *essential and the incidental* and practises a genuine relic-worship towards the letter of the Bible." (*Chr. Dog.*, p. 45.) We heard Wehrung declare that we must apply this test to all words of Scripture: Do they express the *Gospel*? J. A. W. Haas: "What the theologian calls the Word of God, namely, the *spiritual content* of the Bible, is an authority of freedom." (*What Ought I to Believe*, p. 30.) M. G. G. Sherer: "Christian liberty knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture, between the shell and the content, between the chaff and the wheat, between the *letter and the spirit*. . . . Christian liberty does not fall into the sin of Bibliolatry." (*Chr. Liberty and Chr. Unity*, p. 81.) V. Ferm: "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 to the *spiritual content*. . . . To us the 'Word of God' is the validly spiritual content which rises unmistakably in Scriptural utterances and in the pronouncement of Christ-like seers" (*What Is Lutheranism?* p. 294.) H. C. Alleman: "What is infallible in the Bible? The good news, or the *Gospel*, of God, which God revealed in the prophets and fulfilled in the Christ. . . . We must do what Luther said in a homely but penetrating sentence: 'The pure Scriptures must be separated from their dregs and filth, which it has ever been my aim to do, that the divine truths may be looked upon in one light and trifles of men in another.'" (*The Lutheran*, Jan. 14, 1937.—This matter is examined in *C. T. M.*, VIII, p. 542 ff.) The Declaration of the U. L. C. A. on "The Word of God and the Scrip-

sie, anstatt vor allem Christum, zum Grund und Eckstein des Glaubens und zur Offenbarung selbst macht. . . . Danach bemisst sich auch die Irrtumslosigkeit der Heiligen Schrift als eine nach der eigentlichen Abzweckung der Schrift zu verstehende und zu bemessende. 'Die Schrift,' sage ich mit Volck, 'ist eben etwas Besseres als ein Buch ohne Fehler'; so dass also ausser der Heilsoffenbarung die Moeglichkeit irrtuemlicher Zeitvorstellungen und dergleichen von vornherein vorauszusetzen ist." (See *Lehre und Wehre*, 37, p. 277.)

tures": "III. We believe that in its most real sense the Word of God is the Gospel, i. e., the message concerning Jesus Christ, His work, His teaching," etc. . . . "V. We accept the Scriptures as the infallible truth of God in all matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation." 8)

Two generations ago Robert Ingersoll traveled up and down the land, lecturing on "The Mistakes of Moses." He held the Holy Scriptures up to scorn for the alleged mistakes, contradictions, and immoral teachings they contained. He was an avowed agnostic, infidel. How the times have changed! Today we hear Christian theologians speaking of the mistakes of Moses and the prophets and the apostles, of the chaff and husk and filth found in the Bible, of the mistaken scientific beliefs and backward culture and immoral ethical teaching of the sacred writers. And they are doing that, they say, under the authority of Jesus! The Bible must be subjected to a thorough cleansing, sifting, winnowing process in order that the purity of the teaching of Jesus might be preserved.

And what is the result of all of this as it affects the question before us? (We are discussing the question: Is Holy Scripture the primary authority or is it Christ?) If the men who make Christ the primary authority are right in their contention and arguments, a terrible situation ensues. Those who substitute for the authority of Scripture the authority of Jesus or subordinate the authority of Scripture to that of Jesus, leave us without any authority. Let us look into that more closely.

TH. ENGELDER

(To be concluded)

8) Dr. A. J. Traver points out, in *The Lutheran* of Feb. 22, that the U. L. C. Declaration restricts the authority and infallibility of the Bible to the Gospel-message. Interpreting the Declaration for the Young People, he states: "This whole revelation of God to man, completed in Jesus Christ, is faithfully recorded and preserved in the Holy Scriptures and comes to us alone through them. *They are the infallible truth in all matters that pertain to His revelation and our salvation.*" Italicizing this sentence, Dr. Traver is informing his readers that the Declaration does not mean to say that every statement of Scripture is true. To make that clear, he adds another paragraph: "Does not modern science contradict the Scriptures? God did not inspire the writers of the Scriptures to know all truth. He gave men minds to use in investigation and discovery. For instance, the laws governing the use of airplanes have been learned through the painful processes of many years. It is not necessary that men should know how to fly in order to be saved from their sins. Bible writers wrote with the background of their age and its scientific beliefs. *The one thing that they were called to do was to reveal God to men.*" (Italics in original.) The statement of the Declaration "We believe that the whole body of the Scriptures in all its parts is the Word of God" does not mean that all parts and statements of the Bible are true, for did not the holy writers write false scientific beliefs into the Bible? Only the Gospel portions are true and profitable. The rest is husk, shell, chaff.