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Holy Scripture or Christ?

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for the assertion that today it is the practise of between 500 and 1,000 churches, almost exclusively within the Northern Convention. The status of these members coming from non-immersing churches is not yet uniformly fixed. Their status ranges all the way from loosely affiliated members, with limitations of rights and privileges, to membership in complete and regular standing.—This means a decided change of the hitherto uniform basis of membership: a change from the regenerate, immersed believer to the regenerate, baptized (of whatever mode) believer. This shift will be seen to be a lineal development of open Communion. . . . In fairness to the increasing number of open membership Baptist churches we must set down their conviction that by this practise they in no wise relax their allegiance to the New Testament mode of baptism; for whenever they baptize, they immerse. They administer the rite in no other form, nor do they contemplate doing so. They are as positive immersionists as their fathers; they merely eschew their sectarianism by freely fellowshipping Christians to whom time has given many names.”²¹⁾ WALTER A. BAEPLER

Holy Scripture or Christ?

(Concluded)

Men are asking us to substitute for the authority of Scripture the authority of Christ or at least to subordinate the former to the latter. If we did that, we would be left without any authority for our teaching and without any foundation for our faith. And that means, of course, that there would be no Christian theology and no Christian religion.

III

These men are, *in the first place*, asking us to discard the authority of Scripture, of parts of the Scripture and of all Scripture.

We shall have no difficulty in proving that they deny the authority of *parts of the Bible*. They say it loudly enough. Before we can raise the charge, they admit it; for they glory in it. They raise the charge against us that we believe every word of the Bible. They insist that it is the right and the duty of the Christian theologian to free the Bible of its many blemishes and to inform the Christians of its many mistakes. You have heard Brunner saying that much of the Bible needs to be chiseled off. You have heard Alleman declaring that that part of the Bible is infallible which is Gospel, and must be accepted, but that the other parts, the dregs, the trifles, and the filth, must be cast out. These men do

21) McNutt, *Polity and Practise in Baptist Churches*, 127 ff.

not want it to be kept secret that in their estimation the Church would have been better off if certain portions of the Bible had never been written. But since they have been written and incorporated in the Sacred Volume, the Christians must be trained to read it with caution and discrimination. They must be trained to "search the Scriptures" not as humble disciples studying and treasuring each word, but as cautious critics, who will not take anything on trust. Says Brunner: "The revelation of God is not a book or a doctrine, but a living person. The relation between the Scripture and this person is clearly one of subordination: 'Search the Scriptures, . . . and they are they which testify of Me.' . . . Of course, it was easier to have God's Word enshrined in the Holy Book, so that whatever you took out of this sacred cupboard was divine inspiration, than to search the Scriptures for their witness of Christ. So far as the orthodox theory of Scripture is concerned, there is no distinction between this and the Indian or Mohammedan belief in their sacred books: the Bible has become a divine oracle. . . . This materialistic, or, to be more exact, this idolatrous, acceptance of Bible authority has done great damage to Christian faith." (*The Word and the World*, pp. 84, 92, 94.) Says Pfarrer Hoff, addressing a meeting of students in Germany: "Wir unterscheiden bei aller Ehrfurcht vor der Autoritaet der Heiligen Schrift als Ganzes das, was goettlich darinnen ist, von dem, was menschlich, allzu menschlich, was juedisch ist. . . . Das unterscheidet uns von der starren Orthodoxie, dass wir die sogenannte Verbalinspiration ableugnen, dass wir nicht gewaltsame Beziehungen auf Christum setzen, dass wir vielmehr den Ton legen auf das 'Suchet in der Schrift.'" (See *C. T. M.*, V, p. 407.) Search out in Scripture what is authoritative and reject the rest! Prof. Baumgaertel: "The letter (*Wortlaut*) of Scripture we consider of secondary importance. . . . The outstanding feature, the *whole*⁹⁾ is what counts, not the details, which are in many instances erroneous and objectionable." (See Moeller, *Um die Inspiration der Bibel*, p. 57.) We raise the charge that the modern theologians divest a great part of Scripture of its authority, and they tell us: That is exactly what we are doing; we teach our people that half of Scripture is true and half of it false, that half of it is saving truth, the other half faulty dressing; we want them to distinguish between the spiritual content of Scrip-

9) The concept "the whole of Scripture" (*das Schriftganze*) belongs to the stock in trade of the theologians who put Christ and Scripture in opposition. It is a variation of the "Christ," "Word of Christ," "Word of God," concept. The discussion of this monstrosity, which makes the "whole to be of an entirely different nature than its component parts" (Kliefoth calls it *eine unvollziehbare Phrase*—a phrase expressing an unachievable thought; Pieper: "This phrase cannot be invested with sense and meaning," *Chr. Dog.*, I, p. 243) must await another opportunity.

ture and the unspiritual admixture, the historical, scientific, and moral errors; it is high time that Christendom ceased taking everything in Scripture for God's truth. They tell us: "The Bible is not of uniform value and equal 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 and *lex talionis* reprisals, with their cruelty and vengefulness, their polygamy and adultery, it is difficult for us to sympathize with the theory of verbal inspiration, however much we may sympathize with the motive which led to it." (H. C. Alleman, in *Luth. Church Quart.*, 1936, p. 241.) George R. Andrews, Congregationalist, writing in the *Christian Century* of March 15, 1939: "What is the Bible, this text-book of religious education? It is the literature of the Jewish people until about two thousand years ago, containing fragmentary history, poetry, romance, myth, legend, biography. . . . We have said it was the word of God, authoritative from cover to cover, infallible in form and spirit. . . . In the record, i. e., in the Bible, is to be seen the expression of all the smallness, meanness, ignorance, superstition, and chicanery as well as the nobleness, generosity, and moral inspiration of which the Jewish race was and is heir. If the Bible is the word of God, it is so entangled in the mass of human weakness, ignorance, and depravity that great moral and religious understanding and insight are required to separate the wheat from the chaff." H. C. Alleman: "The Bible is not a sacred oracle speaking infallibly in every book on everything that is contained in it." (*The Lutheran*, Jan. 14, 1937.) — Our charge stands.

And then we raise the further charge that they are depriving the Church of the spiritual treasure which these discredited portions of Scripture carry. They will not admit *this* charge, but we maintain it. We say with Luther: "Sintemal kein Buchstabe in der Schrift vergeblich ist." (X, p. 1018.) And if they refuse to accept Luther's word in this instance, Luther will refer them to St. Paul: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning," etc. Rom. 15:4. "All Scripture . . . is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim. 3:16. And if they will not take St. Paul's word for it, — some do not hesitate to declare that he blundered now and then, — St. Paul will refer them to Jesus, who insists that not a single statement, a single word, of Scripture can be divested of divine authority, John 10:35. All of Scripture has a spiritual content. Which story of Scripture is unspiritual and must be classified as husk, dregs, filth? Is it the story of Jesus' changing the water into wine? Some of them, impelled by the subjective authority which we shall presently examine, may stamp it as harmful. St. John

judges of it in this wise: "Jesus manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him," John 2:11. Well, St. John was mistaken. Is it the story of Abraham and Hagar? Did St. Paul consider it unspiritual? See Gal. 4. What about Gen. 1 or the story of Jonah? Mistakes, legends, lacking spiritual value? Jesus puts the stamp of His approval on these and similar accounts, finds them true and worthy of study. "Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?" Matt. 19:4. "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," Matt. 12:40. And when they so glibly speak of the trifles and filth in the Bible, we turn away from them in disgust and listen to Luther, who with a reverent spirit and a full sense of the spirituality of the Bible speaks thus: "What is here [Gen. 24:22] related is adjudged by reason to be a most carnal and worldly affair; and I myself often wonder why Moses expends so many words on such trifling things, since he was so brief on much more important things. But I do not doubt that the Holy Ghost wanted these things to be written down for our instruction. For nothing is presented to us in Scripture that is trifling and useless; for all that is written was written for our learning, Rom. 15:4." (I, p. 1711.) On Gen. 38: "Why did the Holy Ghost have these shameful and unspeakable things written down and preserved to be told and read in the Church? Who will believe that such things are profitable for edification and salvation? . . . These examples are set before us for instruction and comfort and for the strengthening of our faith; they show the great grace and mercy of God." (II, p. 1167 f.) Everything written in Holy Scripture is of importance to our spiritual well-being. Everything is, we know, not of the same importance. The Gospel content is of supreme importance. But everything else contained in the Bible serves the Gospel-message, even what they call "moral incongruities," such as the doctrine of eternal damnation, the sentence pronounced against the Canaanites, the imprecatory psalms, etc. Spurgeon said: "We could not afford to dispense with one verse of Holy Writ. The removal of a single text, like the erasure of a line of a great epic, would mar the completeness and connection of the whole. As well pluck a gem from the high priest's breastplate as erase a line of revelation." "Nothing," says Luther, "is presented to us in Scripture that is useless." And they who rob the Church of one line of Scripture are guilty of a grievous wrong. They may come under the sentence pronounced Rev. 22:19.

We charge these men, however, not only with annulling parts of the Bible, but with subverting its authority *in toto*. They do that, first, by discrediting portions of the Bible. Let this once sink

into the minds of men that a book which claims that it is absolutely true in its every statement and spiritual throughout is full of contradictions and errors, deals with trifles, and contains unethical teachings, and they will discredit it in general. Speaking of the Koran, Luther says: "Des wird mich (achte auch wohl auch keinen vernuenftigen Menschen) niemand bereden ewiglich, dass ein Mensch (so er anders ein Mensch ist, der bei Vernunft ist) sollt' mit Ernst glauben koennen einem Buche oder Schrift, davon er gewiss waere, dass ein Teil (schweige denn drei Teile) erlogen waere, dazu nicht wissen muesste, welches unterschiedlich wahr oder nicht wahr waere, und also im Sack kaufen muesste, oder drei Lot Gift unter einem Lot Zucker gemischt essen und trinken sollte." (XX, p. 2275.) Apply this to the Bible as edited by the moderns. It is psychologically impossible that the pupils of Schleiermacher, Althaus, and Alleman who have been filled with suspicion of parts of the Bible should not lose confidence in the Bible as a whole, the more so as these men cannot, as we shall presently show, provide us with a sure criterion for distinguishing between the true and the false. Who will accept any particular statement of the Bible with full confidence if he thinks that the preceding and the following statement is untrustworthy? Such a book can no longer serve as the source of doctrine and the foundation of faith.

Again, it is the declared purpose of these men to depose the Bible as the chief, the only, authority. Not Scripture, but Christ! They are willing indeed to let Scripture stand as the secondary authority. But that is divesting Scripture of all authority, all real authority. No man will accept the teaching of Scripture as binding if he is told that Scripture cannot speak the final word. Whatever these men write in defense of their thesis can only wean men away from putting their trust in Scripture.

Moreover, they are rather outspoken in warning men against bowing to the authority of Scripture. We heard Martensen deplore the fact that the "individual Christian does not maintain a relative independence over against the Scriptures." And M. G. G. Scherer told us that "Christian liberty knows how to distinguish between Scripture and Scripture," that "Christian liberty does not fall into the sin of Bibliolatry. We refuse, they declare indignantly, to submit to a paper pope—*der tote papierne Papst des Bibelbuchstabens.*" To accept the Bible as infallible requires "a slave-mentality," says R. H. Strachan (*The Authority of Christian Experience*, p. 16). Obtaining doctrine out of Scripture, says Hofmann, "would imprint a legalistic feature (*gesetzlicher Zug*) on doctrine"; it would make of Scripture "a code of laws of faith (*Sammlung von Glaubensgesetzen*)." (*Schriftbeweis*, I, p. 9. See Pieper, *Chr. Dog.*, III, p. 510.) We ask them to take the Christian

teaching word for word out of Scripture, to be bound absolutely by what Scripture states on any given doctrine, and they tell us: Scripture is not a manual of doctrine.¹⁰ To bind men to every single statement of Scripture would be intolerable legalism. A writer in the *Luth. Church Quarterly* of this year (p. 33) says: "There is a spirit of legalism that pervades many of the ranks of Mid-Western Lutherans, a kind of approach to the truth of God which insists on 'book, chapter, and verse' for all the 'eye-blinks' of life and must be undergirded by the authority of print on paper for every conscious breath in order to be assured of full salvation.

10) Let us take time out to discuss the use of this term "manual of doctrine." Our moderns do not like it. In the statement quoted in the first paragraph of the preceding article we read: "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." The Bible is not "a code of doctrines"; absolutely not, says Wehrung: "Der evangelische Schriftgebrauch sucht nicht Lehrformeln oder Beweisstellen"; and Driver: "The Bible is not a logically articulated system of theology"; and Oman: Doctrines must not "be drawn from Holy Writ like legal decisions from the statute book"; and Alleman: "The Bible does not contain even a system of theology"; and M. Kaehler: "Die Bibel ist kein Lehrbuch"; and R. F. Grau: "Die Heilige Schrift ist uns nicht mehr ein grosser vom Himmel herabgesandter Gesetzkodex mit seinen einzelnen Paragraphen, Beweisstellen genannt"; and the *Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenz.* 1931, p. 52: "Luther hat die Bibel nicht zu einem Paragraphenkodex gemacht." Dr. Pieper does not hesitate to say: Die Heilige Schrift ist das Lehrbuch der christlichen Religion (I, p. 79). Why do these men oburgate us for saying that the Bible is a manual of doctrine, ein Lehrbuch? They know well enough that nobody ever said that the Bible is written in the form of a handbook of dogmatics. But they hear us saying that the Christian theologian must take his teaching directly from the Bible, that he dare not construct his own doctrines, and that whatever the Bible teaches in any of the proof-texts is binding upon him. And that they resent. They resent the idea that they must teach what is there written, exactly as it is written. They say that would require a slave mentality which they do not possess; children might be expected to do that but not they. That is why they proscribe the term *Lehrbuch*. We cannot understand these men. We do not feel enslaved when God requires us to teach exactly what He has set down in Scripture. And while we do not customarily use the term *Lehrgesetz*, we will use it when it is necessary to point out what God teaches in the Bible requires unconditional, absolute acceptance. We are willing to be slaves in this respect. Paul gloried in the term "slave of Jesus Christ." The Christian theologian is ready to say with the child Samuel: "Speak, for thy servant heareth." He uses the words "law" and "statutes" in this connection, Ps. 119. Cannot these men connect the concept "obedience" with anything else than legalism? Do they not know that there is an evangelical obedience which hearkens to the Word of the Lord willingly, joyfully, thankfully? We thank God that He has revealed all doctrines to us, in definite, exact terms. We say with Dr. Reu: "Wir fragen bloss, ob es nicht auch einen im Evangelium wurzelnden Gehorsam gibt, der sich an das ganze Wort seines Gottes gebunden weiss?" (*Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, March, 1939, p. 190.) —Protesting the terms "manual of tenets," "code of doctrines," these men are, in most cases, protesting against being bound by Scripture. They stand for *Lehrfreiheit*, liberty in matters of doctrine.

In its last analysis this resolves itself into a conception of the Holy Scriptures as a mechanical work of the Holy Spirit, inerrant in every word and detail in their original form."¹¹ The Modernists go a step farther, several steps farther. J. M. Haldeman presents their position thus: "The truth is (according to Modernism) man of today has altogether outgrown the Bible. It may have done for the infant state of the human mind, but to put the rising generation under its clamps and chains would be to restrict the mental growth of the human race." (*A King's Penknife*, p. 108.) But moderns and Modernists are one in their protest against ascribing so much authority to the Bible. Whether they reject the authority of the Bible altogether or reject it as lodged in "book, chapter, and verse," they are weaning men away from the authority of Scripture.

Finally, the denial of Verbal Inspiration carries with it the subversion of the authority of Scripture. And it is to be noted that the proponents of the principle "Not Scripture but Christ" invariably denounce the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. Note that G. P. Fischer, in the passage quoted above, after speaking of the tendency to subordinate Scripture to "the personal Christ," immediately adds the statement "The absolute inerrancy of Scriptural statements is no longer maintained in England and America by numerous theologians who are firmly attached to the principal doctrines of the evangelical system." The reader will not ask us to prove our "invariably." It is not possible that a theologian who insists that certain portions of the Bible must be stricken out can believe that the Bible is verbally inspired, inerrant throughout. But if the denial of Verbal Inspiration stands, the authority of Holy Scripture falls. Need we elaborate this? If the Bible, the words of the Bible, is not written by divine inspiration; if the authority of God does not inhere in every word of the Bible and in these very words, its authority is *nil*.

Some do not hesitate to say that right out. Dr. Brunner, one of those who subordinate Scripture to "Christ," declared before a gathering of alumni and students at Union Theological Seminary: "I never believe anything because Paul said it; but I don't believe anything that Paul didn't say." The *Christian Century* of Feb. 15, 1939, which reported this, added that Dr. Brunner justified the apprehensions of the few Presbyterian Fundamentalists who have not been very happy at having this neo-orthodox Continental theologian teach at Princeton. The *Christian Century* treats the matter lightly, because it takes the same position as Brunner and cannot realize what a scandal and a crime it is for a Christian

11) It was in discussing this article in the *Quarterly* that Dr. Reu made the statement quoted in Note 10.

theologian to proclaim: "I never believe anything because Paul said it." So we are told concerning Bishop Aulén, Sweden, who "holds that faith owes its existence and growth to a 'spirit-complex' controlled by the glorified Christ," that "it is no vital matter to him whether his teachings always agree with the Bible." (See *Luth. Companion*, Feb. 9, 1939.) These men will not, as a rule, speak out so plainly, but every one who believes that the writings of Paul are not inspired in the true sense of the word and do not constitute the chief, the only, authority, will have to say: "I never believe anything because Paul said it."

These men think they are losing nothing by destroying the authority of Holy Scripture; for do we not retain the essential message of the Bible? "I don't believe anything that Paul didn't say!" And speaking of Bishop Aulén, the writer in the *Lutheran Companion* says: "For the sake of fairness it should be stated that, on many points, he is in full agreement with the Bible." But if a man "never believes anything because Paul said it" and feels at liberty to cast away certain statements of Paul as chaff, he is facing a terrible danger. Dr. W. R. Inge, himself a pronounced Liberal, tells him that he is in danger of throwing away the *wheat* with the chaff. He said in a lecture: "We ought to be in a better position to understand the Bible; but it has been steadily losing ground as the center of the religious life of the English people. Among the educated the Bible is not much read. . . . We cannot go back to the old Bibliolatry, but an effort is to be made this year to revive the Bible. *It will certainly be a calamity if the wheat is thrown away with the chaff.*" So also Luthardt: "Das Dogma von der Inspiration loeste sich unter den Haenden der neueren Exegeten und Kritiker immer mehr auf. Neben der fruherer verkannten und nun geltend gemachten menschlichen Seite der Schrift *schwand immer mehr die goettliche.*" (Luthardt-Jelke, *Komp.*, p. 118.) If you once permit yourself to discard any portion of the Bible, what (but the unspeakable grace of God) will keep you from discarding all of it? And if you lower the authority of the Bible in any degree, how long will it remain an authority at all? — All is lost where men make light of the authority of Holy Scripture, Is. 8:20.

But we are not losing anything, they say. Though we do not make Paul our authority, we still believe what Paul believed and taught, and we believe and teach that on a perfectly good authority. We have a way of knowing which are the essential truths that Moses and Paul taught. Apply our criterion, and you will find the saving truth. — Let us examine this criterion, and we shall find, *in the second place, that the authority which they offer us is perfectly useless.*

This is their criterion: "From what the New Testament shows

us of the manner in which Jesus revealed God to men we may learn something about the way in which the Bible as a whole may become 'the Word of God' to us. . . . When the reader has discovered what the writer actually said and meant, he wants to ask further, Is this what I am to believe about Christ? Is it true? Probably no one who reads this book will think that this question has the self-evident answer: Of course it is true, because it is in the Bible. . . . The criterion lies within ourselves, in the response of our own spirit to the spirit that utters itself in Scripture." (C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, concluding chapter.) Our own spirit must tell us what is false and what is true. W. A. Brown describes the criterion thus: "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.) "Pillow your head on the Master's bosom," as De Witt said above; "seeing visions and dreaming dreams," as Oman said; put your confidence in "the song, the light, the life, within your own soul," as Vichert said — that is the way to arrive at the saving truth. It is "the spirit-wrought faith," Schaefer told us, which "applies a sifting process to the Bible word and thus gets the Word of God, the Word of Christ." The authority under which these men operate, the voice which tells them what parts of the Bible to reject, what parts to retain, is "Jesus," the song of Jesus in our hearts, our own faith, our own spiritual judgment about divine things.

Now, this authority, this criterion, is perfectly useless. It is based on the believer's experience and judgment, on the judgment of a fallible human being. Forsaking the *terra firma* of objective certainties, where God has revealed the truth in definite terms, where the truth of God's own word guarantees absolute certitude, this method of arriving at the truth sets the soul adrift on the sea of subjective uncertainty and unreliability. It is useless for the individual. The sinner is looking for the saving truth and is told to listen to the song in his heart. How shall he know whether it is the sweet voice of Jesus or the deceptive word of Satan? And what shall he do in the day of distress when he finds nothing in his heart but doubt and despair?

And it is useless for the Church and for theology. We need to be sure that we are teaching all things whatsoever Jesus has commanded us, Matt. 28:20. But who shall tell us which portions of Scripture bear the authority of Jesus and which portions are harmful human additions? The Bible itself has no appendix containing these two lists. So the individual believer must tell the rest of the believers which passage finds a response in his own spirit.

But other believers protest that their spirits do not respond to this passage. Shall then a majority vote decide the matter? Oh, no, says Dr. Stier, it must be a unanimous vote. Discussing our difficulty, he says: "We must here finally consider the following. It is very possible, and, indeed, it very frequently happens that, when this standard, 'What deals with Christ?' is applied to Holy Scripture, very different results are obtained. On the strength of this test a certain passage will look like God's Word to one more than to another. Indeed, this very thing may happen, that one and the same individual Christian will along these lines obtain at different times different results. . . . So it is clear that the test 'What deals with Christ?' as far as and as long as applied by an individual Christian, cannot produce an absolutely binding result as to how much of Scripture is the 'Word of God.' The results obtained on these lines can only be individualistic and subjective." Who, then, may here speak with authority? Dr. Stier solves the difficulty in this way: "The test 'What deals with Christ?' can yield objective and absolutely binding results only when applied by the entire body of the believers. Here we must leave the matter rest: whatever in Scripture has proved itself, by this test, to be God's Word and in whatever degree it has thus proved itself, that much is, in that degree, God's Word." (See *Theol. Monthly*, 9, p. 211.) We certainly cannot leave the matter rest here. We cannot wait till an ecumenical council, made up of all Christians, convenes, and we cannot wait till they have all agreed on what passages are spiritual. And if they all agreed, the Church would not accept their verdict. The subjective opinion of one Christian counts for nothing as regards the question of what our real Bible is to be, and a million subjective judgments, added together, count for just as little. The anxious Christian cannot entrust his salvation to the vote and decision of human beings.

The Church would be in a sorry plight if she would have to depend on the subjective opinions of her members to establish how much of the Bible must be accepted. H. Sasse: "The modern churches have discarded the principle of the sole authority of Scripture. What, then, will serve as the *norma normans* in place of Scripture? Christ, they tell us. But who is 'the Christ,' who is to be found 'by means of the Bible'? We know only that Christ who is found in the Bible: for there, and only there, He speaks to us. Who is the judge that will tell me in cases of doubt where Christ speaks and where only Scripture is speaking? Have I not, then, set up my reason, my spiritual and moral sense, as the *norma normans*?" (*Allg. Ev.-Luth. Kirchenz.*, Feb. 18, 1938.) Again: "Luther's celebrated dictum" (misunderstood and mis-

applied) "that the 'true test' by which all Biblical books are to be judged is to 'see whether they deal with Christ' can open the flood-gates to a false, because altogether subjective, criticism of the Bible." (*Here We Stand*, p. 117.)

Up till today "the entire body of the believers" has not spoken on this matter. To our knowledge no ecumenical council has met and drawn up the required list. Up till now the theologians have not reached a unanimous decision on this point. "Those who reject the church doctrine of inspiration in favor of some lowered form have never been able to agree among themselves as to which parts of the Bible are inspired and which are not, or as to what extent any part is inspired." (L. Boettner, *The Inspiration of the Scriptures*, p. 82.)

Do not trust those who offer to fix you up a list of passages which constitute the real Bible. Even if all theologians had agreed on such a list, Luther would say: "Sie fuehren mich auf einen Affenschwanz." He said that (III, p. 1693) with reference to the enthusiasts who denied the efficacy of the means of grace, and he will say it to the modern enthusiasts who offer to fix us up a good Bible on the authority of their spirits' response to the spirit that utters itself in Scripture. Are you going to entrust your spiritual safety to the subjective opinions of men? ¹²⁾

And then, when they offer us their list, — which we could not accept in any case, — they tell us that what they offer us is useless. The list contains John 3:16 and the related passages. But asking us to study John 3:16 and the other passages, they warn us that these *words* are not inspired. Only their spiritual sense is inspired. You cannot rely on what the bare *words* seem to say; the deep insight of the theologian and the spiritual vision of the believer must be set to work to uncover their real sense. What

12) Dr. A. J. Traver is absolutely right when he writes in *The Lutheran* of May 10: "Lutherans have not been satisfied with the statement that the Bible contains the Word of God. . . . It might mean that the Bible contained a great deal that was error. Then it would mean that we would have to select the true from the false in the Bible, a most dangerous liberty. Naturally we would be influenced by our own desires. We would accept what we wanted to accept and reject what we did not want." But this terrible situation would arise if Dr. Traver were right in what he says in the very next paragraph: "The Bible is" (italics in original) "the Word of God in the statement of our faith. It is true in all matters that pertain to religion" (our italics). "It is not a text for biology or for chemistry. It knows nothing of electricity or of airplanes. There is no reason that it should. These are matters for the investigation and discovery of the human mind. But man, by his own wisdom, cannot know God. The Bible is the revelation of God to us; the gracious gift of salvation comes to us through the Bible. The Holy Spirit Himself comes through its pages to help us to believe. The center of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Every part of the Bible is tested by its relationship to Him." Who shall make the test?

did Baumgaertel tell us? The letter, the *Wortlaut*, of Scripture is of secondary importance; what counts is the whole of Scripture. H. Wheeler Robinson tells us: "The confident appeal to the Scriptures as affording an infallible direction of faith and conduct is made impossible if that is sought in the *letter*" (italics by author) "of the Word of God to men. But that is a gain rather than a loss. . . . 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 and record" (italics ours), "is part of the unceasing providence of God over His people" (*The Chr. Experience of the Holy Spirit*, p. 175). Disabuse yourself of the idea that it is an easy matter to establish the articles of the Christian faith. John 3:16 in itself proves nothing. Somebody will first have to demonstrate what "the inner content of the revelation" here given is. The "literary expression" may be faulty, since that was formulated by the human medium John. Luthardt warns us that it is not easy to find out what God really revealed. First the theologians must construct *das Schriftganze*, and that they get by making Christ, not Scripture, the foundation of faith. And to become authoritative, "three factors must be added to 'the whole of Scripture': Scripture, the Church, and the believing subject." (See *Lehre und Wehre*, 31, p. 277.) We need Scripture; that is true. We need John 3:16. But only after the Church has spoken on this passage, and only after the believer has dug through the shell of the words of this passage and discovered its "inner content," only then can we know what God has revealed.

If this criterion, the subjective feeling of man, must decide, the Church and the individual Christian will never know the truth. There are those who tell you that they cannot feel that the imprecatory psalms reveal a spiritual truth. How many will vote their way? Others say that the doctrine of eternal damnation is not a godly doctrine. Shall their feeling decide the matter? Others tell us that they abhor the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. And when we tell them that according to God's revelation "God made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), they will tell us that that is only the literary expression of a truth which is far different from what the clumsy words of St. Paul seem to indicate. — The Church certainly would never know what things Jesus commanded her to teach if God had authorized the theologians to set up their spiritual insight as the arbiter of doctrine. Such a method is perfectly useless.

And what a wicked thing it is! How these men are puffed up with self-conceit! Going back of the letter to find the true meaning, they set themselves above the Holy Spirit, who revealed the

truth in these very words and letters. "And this is the old devil and old serpent, who also converted Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the outward Word of God to spiritualizing and self-conceit." And when Luther adds (*Smalc. Art., Trigl.*, p. 495): "Just as also our enthusiasts [at the present day] condemn the outward Word," we add: That is exactly what they are doing at this present day, setting themselves above Scripture. Luther's words apply today: "I had the last year, and have still, a sharp warfare with those fanatics who subject the Scripture to their own boasted spirit. . . . By means of this saying, 'The Scriptures are obscure,' a set of impious men have exalted themselves above the Scriptures themselves, . . . till at length we are compelled to believe and teach nothing but the dreams of men that are mad." (XVIII, p. 1741.) Again, this self-conceit is a form of idolatry, self-idolatry. They set themselves above Scripture, the Word of God! And they ask us to trust their word more than the written Word of God — to commit the sin of idolatry. "Sie suchen ihre eigene Tyrannei, dass sie uns moegen aus der Schrift fuehren, den Glauben verdunkeln, sich selbst ueber die Eier setzen und unser Abgott werden." (Luther, V, p. 336.) They are ever speaking of "Bibliolatry." What sort of idolatry are they committing and leading others to commit? And, worst of all, they rob the Church of the certainty of doctrine, and the Christian of the assurance of faith. Happy is the preacher who, preaching on any text of Scripture, can confidently say: "*Haec dixit Dominus*,"¹³ and his hearers will bless him. The anxious sinner needs the assurance which only God's own Word can give. It is making sport of him to say: *Haec dicit Thomas Muenzer*.

The men with whom we are dealing will resent the charge that they are foisting their own authority on the Church. They protest that their motto is: *Haec dicit Iesus Christus*. However, their own statements, as quoted in the preceding paragraphs, show that they are operating under their own authority, the authority of their spiritual sense and the like. And as to the claim that they make much, make everything, of the authority of Jesus, we shall show, in the third place, that they reject the authority of Jesus.

They do this first, by rejecting Scripture as the sole, the final, authority. For the authority of Jesus in the realm of grace is lodged exclusively in Scripture. What Jesus would here tell us, He tells nowhere but in Scripture. "Through their word," through the word of the apostles, written down in Scripture, men come to

13) Luther: "The preacher should boldly say with St. Paul and all apostles and prophets: *Haec dixit Dominus*, God Himself has said this. *Et iterum*: I have been an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ in this preaching. . . . For it is God's Word, not mine" (XVII, p. 1343 f.).

faith and are kept in faith, John 17:20. Study again the passages listed under I, and you will not fall prey to the delusion that Jesus speaks to men outside of Scripture. Why do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Because Jesus appeared to you somewhere, somehow, and gave you that assurance? No; only because of the words written in John 1. Sasse is absolutely right: "We know only that Christ who is found in the Bible, for there, and only there, He speaks to us." Luther is absolutely right: "Outside of His Word and without His Word we know of no Christ, much less of Christ's thoughts." (XVII, p. 2015.) "Wenn ich ohne das Wort bin, nicht daran denke, noch damit umgehe, so ist kein Christus daheim." (VIII, p. 749. See also XI, pp. 453, 455, quoted above.) Assuredly, Christ is the chief Corner-stone, Eph. 2:20. But if you would build on Him, you must build yourself "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets," Eph. 2:20. "He that shoves the word of the apostles and prophets aside does not place himself on Christ, the Corner-stone, but *setzt sich daneben*." (Pieper, I, p. 141.) *The Presbyterian* says the same. It is heartening to find that, while so many Lutherans have accepted the *extra-Enthusiasticum* of Zwingli and Calvin, this Reformed writer takes the position of Luther: "All current discussions relate more or less directly to that fundamental question: Have we an objective, authoritative norm of truth or have we not? Is there given us a revelation of truth which we can use as an infallible rule of faith and practise, or are we to grope on without such a final authority? Some will say with emphasis that we have Christ, who is the standard by which all must be measured. We accept that statement with this addendum, that except for the Bible we cannot know Christ nor understand Him, even partially, if we should get some knowledge of Him." (See *Pastor's Monthly*, 1932, p. 115.) Christ deals with us only through Scripture, and those who claim to hear His voice more distinctly and more effectively in visions or in their "experience" are dealing with a chimerical Christ. Standing for the principle "Not Scripture but Christ," they are rejecting the authority of Christ.

Furthermore, when they set up the principle that only those portions of Scripture are authoritative which "deal with Christ," that only the Gospel-truths are inspired, and that all the rest represents the judgment of fallible men, they repudiate the authority of Jesus. Jesus did not set up that principle. Jesus did not give them the right to go through the Bible and clear out what they consider to be the rubbish and noxious weeds. On the contrary, He expressly forbids this. He has solemnly warned all men against annulling, striking out, any statement, any word of Scripture, John 10:35. He has declared through His apostle that all

Scripture is given by inspiration. And when these men still insist that great portions of Scripture are made up of trifles and chaff and filth, they are flying in the face of Jesus and renouncing His authority.

Finally the principle "Not Scripture but Christ" renounces the authority of Christ because it involves the repudiation of the teaching of Christ. When men apply the sifting process to the Bible and accept as authoritative and profitable only that which appeals to their spiritual sense and Christlike mind and, in line with this, base their faith not on the written word of promise but on the impression which Christ in person makes upon them, they are founding their salvation upon something in themselves. That goes directly against the teaching of Christ, who bids us to trust solely in the Word; and it goes against the teaching of Christ in yet another way, against the very heart of the teaching of Christ. This is what happens, in the words of Dr. Pieper: "In so far as the consistent Reformed theologians speak of an *immediate* activity of the Holy Ghost, revealing the saving truth and effecting salvation outside of the means of grace, and the modern Lutherans would have faith founded on 'the person of Christ,' 'the historical reality of Christ,' instead of basing it solely on the forgiveness of sins, offered in the *word* of the Gospel, they base justification on the *gratia infusa* and find themselves, as regards the doctrine of justification, in the Romish camp" (II, p. 613). Many of them will, by the grace of God, still trust in the Gospel-promise in spite of their principle. But others are consistent, and while some of them do not come out in the open, many speak the Romish language fluently. The system drives irresistibly in the direction of salvation by the *gratia infusa*. The *opinio legis* inheres in human nature; and if a man makes his spiritual sense his guide, his choice of the Gospel-passages in Scripture and his interpretation of them will have the legalistic bias. And if he is not satisfied with the bare promise of the Gospel, he will make his experience, his spiritual impressions, his feeling of elation, and the like the basis of his hope of salvation. That is the *gratia infusa* of which Dr. Pieper speaks. And this evil leaven keeps working. Under the influence of the ingrained *opinio legis* he can in the end see nothing but ethical teachings in the Bible and cannot help putting a legalistic sense in the plainest Gospel-passages. Here are a few statements to the point—and all who say: "Not Holy Scripture but Christ!" would make similar statements if they applied their system consistently. W. Hermann: "That Jesus Christ has the power to redeem us can only mean that our present experience of the reality of his person convinces us, as nothing else does, that God will accept us. . . . The fundamental thought of Jesus' Gospel is that it is in God's rule in our

hearts that our salvation consists." (*Syst. Theol.*, p. 115.) *Gratia infusa!* Shailer Mathews, who on page 1 of his book *The Church and the Christian* rails against those who "make the Bible the sole authoritative revelation of truth" and insists on page 74 on "the centrality of Jesus," speaks up on page 73 for those "churches that seek to perform their religious function by making the example and teaching of Jesus their final moral idealism," and proclaims on page 105: "What the world requires of the churches is not a revival of fourth-century Christology but the impregnation of economic and political processes with love. Only then will Jesus have given meaning to their function. If Christians are to be interested in helping make a better world, the churches must make *theology secondary to morality embodying the spirit of Jesus.*" (Italics ours.) Miles H. Krumbine deplors the fact that in the modern world "Jesus has lost His authority. . . . Candidly, to revert to Shailer Mathews's phrase, it is the Gospel of Jesus we have wearied of." And then he states: "The one thing we know definitely about Jesus is His ethical teaching." (*Ways of Believing*, pp. 68, 71.) Ethics—that is the sum and substance of the Gospel that Jesus preached! Why does faith justify, according to R. Jelke? Not simply because the sinner appropriates the vicarious satisfaction but because "that which Christ performed is reproduced in him (the believer) potentially, ethically" ("dass sich in ihm das von Christo Geleistete potenziell, ethisch wiederholt"). (*Die Grunddogmen des Christentums*, p. 64.) J. G. Machen says on this point: "We reject as our standard what is wrongly called 'the teaching of Jesus.' . . . What is the underlying notion of those who make what they call the teaching of Jesus their authority instead of the Bible? I am afraid this question is not hard to answer. It is the notion that Jesus was primarily a teacher, that we honor Him because by His word and by His example He taught us how to practise the same type of religion as that which He practised. . . . Jesus came not just to teach us true general principles of religion and ethics but to redeem us from sin by His death upon the cross. . . . Thus we reject this notion that the teaching of Jesus as distinguished from the Bible is the seat of authority. It is profoundly dishonoring to the teaching of Jesus itself. It degrades Jesus to the level of a mere religious teacher, the founder of one of the world's religions." (*The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, p. 79 f.) Machen is speaking of extreme cases, of men who use extreme language. But all who would have Jesus take the place of Scripture and would choose out of Scripture what suits their spiritual sense, say the same in principle. Guided by their reason, they interpret what they experience or what they read in Scripture in such a way as to make Christianity a law-religion. Ostensibly

exalting the authority of Christ, they go straightly against His teaching and directly renounce His authority.

They lose everything, the Bible as the sure authority for doctrine, and Christ, as the sure foundation of faith. And as to their sneering question: Are you willing to base your faith on a mere book? we answer: We are not ashamed to go to a book, when that book brings us Christ. Luther was not ashamed of his book-religion. He thought highly of the despised "letter." "Today, too, roving spirits are clinging to the illusion and demanding that God must do something special in their case and deal with them through a special light and secret revelation in the heart and thus give the Holy Spirit, as though they needed *no letter, Scripture, or external preaching*. Therefore we must know that God has established this order: No one shall come to the knowledge of Christ nor obtain the forgiveness gained by Him or the Holy Ghost except through external means." (XI, p. 1735.) Pay no attention to their cry that this insistence on the letter and this reliance on the promise as written in Scripture can produce only a mere intellectual conviction, devoid of life, fervor, and Spirit. You know better. "When I am without the Word, do not think of it nor deal with it, no Christ is there and no zest, no spirit. But as soon as I take up a psalm or passage of Scripture, it shines and burns into the heart and puts me into a different mind and mood." (*Luther, VIII, 749.*)

TH. ENGELDER

The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions

A Translation of Dr. C. F. W. Walther's Article Entitled "Die falschen
Stuetzen der modernen Theorie von den offenen Fragen,"

Lehre und Wehre, XIV (1868)

(Continued)

The assumption of a successive origin of dogmas through so-called decisions of the Church, by which some men seek to uphold the modern theory of open questions, militates, in the second place, against the relationship existing between Scripture and Christian faith. Besides its clarity, which should enable every one to comprehend its articles of faith, and, furthermore, its power to generate faith in those articles, Scripture possesses 1) perfection or sufficiency, i. e., the attribute of containing and presenting in clear and convincing words all the dogmas which one must know and believe in order to be saved; and 2) canonical, normative authority, according to which it alone decides whether a certain dogma is truly Christian or not. Scripture, in short, is the only criterion for de-