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Missouri Said to Stand for "Bible Literalism." — Writing for the *Christian Century* (non-denominational), Dr. Charles Leslie Venable (U. L. C. A.) reports on the convention of the Missouri Synod at Fort Wayne and on the position taken there concerning union with other Lutheran bodies. Dr. Venable says: "Three of the items on which Missouri Lutherans insist in such considerations of unity are refusal of membership to members of lodges, Bible literalism, and the refusal of pulpit- and altar-fellowship with other Protestant Christians." If Dr. Venable, in describing our attitude toward the Bible, had said that we insist on obedience to everything that the Bible says, his statement would have been correct. The term Bible literalism has a different meaning. It describes a literalistic interpretation of the Bible, an interpretation which fails to take into consideration all proper hermeneutical principles of exposition and clings to the meaning of the letter, even if it can be proved that the language is figurative and the words in question must not be taken literally. Fundamentalists frequently manifest Bible literalism. When, for instance, they interpret Isaiah 2 with its prophecy "that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills" in such a way that they make the prophet here speak of a mountain of earth and stone, they become guilty of literalistic interpretation, ignoring what the Word of God in plain passages says about the nature of the Messianic kingdom. It is often said that the Lutheran Church advocates the literal interpretation of the Bible. That statement is not entirely correct. At any rate, it requires an explanation. The Lutheran Church insists that the Bible must be interpreted according to the real meaning of the author, which implies that whenever figurative language is used, it must be recognized as figurative and not be given a literal interpretation. It seems that Dr. Venable in his remarks about the Missouri Synod has become the victim of rather confused thinking. A.

Verbal Inspiration Not a Theory but a Doctrine. — The *Journal of Theology of the American Lutheran Conference* deserves unstinted praise for taking up for discussion theological subjects which at present are in controversy. As it does so, it becomes refreshingly interesting. By doing so, it also aids the cause of Lutheran church union, which is possible only if true unity in faith is achieved; for to attain such unity we must know clearly and unmistakably where we stand. Under these circumstances we commend also the frankness with which at times opinions are voiced which challenge criticism. One may regret that certain opinions prevail, but if they do prevail, it certainly is much more honest and helpful that they should be expressed than that they should be concealed. If in the following the writer amends an editorial published in a recent number of the *Journal* (June, 1941, p. 546 f.), he wishes it to be understood that what he writes he is writing merely in the interest of fostering the doctrinal rapprochement which is necessary for establishing true church union.

Discussing the difference between theory and fact, the writer in the article just referred to declares that while a *fact* in theology must invariably be accepted, the *theory* or *interpretation* of that fact may or may not be adequate, so that, "as we go deeper into God's revelation of Himself, we may find that our theories about it must be revised," the theologian realizing that "his theories may be transitional." "The facts of Christianity abide, but my interpretation of those facts may never be fully adequate. The theologian should ever be careful in making himself or any one else believe that he has the final word when it comes to interpreting God's revelation to himself." The author then illustrates what he has in mind by referring to the doctrine of Biblical inspiration. He writes:

"We might use the inspiration of the Scriptures as an example. The Christian must recognize, and does recognize, that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God and that it is therefore the very Word of God for us. That is the fact. There can be no argument among Christians on that fact. However, many theories have been advanced as to how God inspired the Bible. In the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church no theory *as to how* God inspired the Bible is advanced. The Confessions simply recognize the Bible as inspired and as the Word of God. All theories of inspiration within the Lutheran Church are the theories of individuals, some more and some less adequate. Perhaps the last word will never be said *as to how* God inspired the Bible."

The editorial closes with the words: "Facts remain, but theories may be transitional; for 'now we see in a mirror, darkly,' and we have not yet fully understood God's ways with us."

Considering the editorial in general, let us bear in mind that our Lutheran teachers, in conformity with their doctrine of the *Schriftprinzip*, have never ventured theories or interpretations of facts simply stated as such in Scripture, but have always warned against human speculations concerning theological facts stated in God's Word. The *Real Presence* thus is a fact taught in Scripture, and we accept it as a fact and do not venture any theories or interpretations beyond what Scripture teaches on this point. The same may be said of other facts taught in the Bible; we accept these facts and risk no speculation or theory in absence of any express explanation given by God Himself. Here the axiom applies *Quod non est Biblicum, non est theologicum*. On the other hand, since all theological and other facts in Scripture are given us "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16), Scripture adds to the given facts such necessary expositions as will help us sufficiently to understand them, though only so much is supplied as will aid us "for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). For example, not the mere fact of the Holy Trinity is stated in God's Word, but a complete doctrine of the Holy Trinity, complete, of course, in the sense of sufficient for salvation. This holds true of all salvation facts set forth in Holy Writ, such as the personal union of the two natures in Christ, the fall of man, the vicarious atonement, the absolving resurrection of our Lord, and the like. Scripture, then, is not a book of mere facts, concerning which we must fabricate our own

explanations, theories, or interpretations; but it is a salvation book of salvation facts, with the necessary explanations appended, so that it can "make us wise unto salvation." In fact, to propose theories or interpretations where Scripture has given none is unscriptural and therefore sinful, for it *adds* to the Word of God (Rev. 22:18), and for such "wood, hay, stubble," built upon the Scriptural foundation of "gold, silver, precious stones," the unfaithful steward of God's mysteries will be punished on Judgment Day. (1 Cor. 3:11-15.)

What has just been said is true also of the Biblical fact that the Bible is the Word of God. Scripture tells us not only that it is, wholly and in part, God's Word, but explains also *why* it is the Word of God and *how* this unique Book came to be the Word of God. In other words, also here we have both fact and explanation of fact, given by God Himself. Briefly expressed, the doctrine is: The Bible is the Word of God, because it was given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But what is inspiration?

We fully agree with the writer regarding facts and theories, so far as *human theories* are concerned. Of the "intuition theory," the "illumination theory," the "mechanical dictation theory," the "dynamical theory," the "partial-inspiration theory," the "concept theory," the "degree-inspiration theory," and the like, it must be admitted that all of them are "theories of individuals," and wrong theories at that, which contradict clear passages of God's Word. Inspiration is not what these theories claim it is; all of the theories misrepresent Scriptural inspiration and must therefore be rejected as false and pernicious. In this respect we go much farther than the writer does in his editorial. What is of men, has no place in God's teaching.

However, when we speak of "plenary inspiration" and "verbal inspiration," we are not dealing with *theories* of men, but with *doctrines of God*, lucidly set forth in His Word. Take, for example, plenary, or full, inspiration ("All Scripture is equally inspired"). This is a clear teaching of Scripture, for it is attested in unmistakable words in 2 Tim. 3:16 (not to speak of other passages), the Revised Version translation of the passage being obviously erroneous (cf. Evans *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, p. 201). So also verbal inspiration is not a theory, but a *doctrina divina*, clearly taught in God's Word. When, for example, St. Peter writes that "holy men of God *spake as they were moved* by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21), he teaches verbal inspiration; for the holy writers (*holy* in the sense of having been appointed for a sacred task) brought forth words under the influence of the Holy Spirit; in other words, they spoke those very words which the Holy Ghost moved them to speak or gave them to speak. This is no eisegesis, but the simple sense and thought which the clear text states. Or when St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Which things also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:13), he again teaches verbal inspiration, and this so clearly and definitely that really there can be no misunderstanding of his words. Or when the same apostle declares that the things which he writes are "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37), he once more teaches verbal inspiration; for God's commandments must have

been conveyed to him in words, there being no other way of communication, since God chose the way of imparting knowledge to man by words. Throughout Scripture we find that whenever God has something to make known to man, He *speaks* to him. Or when Scripture says that the "Holy Ghost spake well by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers" (Acts 28:25), it teaches verbal inspiration; for, according to these words, whatever Isaiah spoke the Holy Ghost spoke, and *vice versa*. Or when Jesus says that it is "the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:20), our Lord teaches verbal inspiration in unmistakable terms. Or when St. Paul avers that it is Christ "speaking in him" (2 Cor. 13:3), he teaches verbal inspiration. In fact, there is a whole cloud of witnessing passages in Scripture teaching, with one accord and the same emphasis, verbal inspiration, that is, the doctrine that God gave us the Bible by supplying the holy writers with the words which they were to speak or write.

We therefore affirm on the basis of these many clear and irrefutable passages that Holy Scripture came about in this way, that the Holy Ghost Himself provided its words through the chosen penmen. That is *no human theory* but a *clear doctrine* of God's Word; or, let us say, it is a Scripture teaching. However, what is an evident Scripture teaching cannot be a theory, since a theory is a "proposed explanation, designed to account for any phenomenon," and, let us not forget, a proposed explanation suggested by *men*. But if the doctrine of verbal inspiration is a manifest Scripture teaching, then it is incorrect not only to speak of it as a theory but also to declare that "the last word will never be said *as to how* God inspired the Bible." As a matter of fact, the last word has already been said on this point by God Himself. We may, of course, not understand all psychological processes involved in inspiration, just as we do not understand all psychological processes involved in conversion; but we know essentially and sufficiently how God inspired the Bible (He imparted the words), just as we know essentially how God converts sinners (He imparts faith). Articles such as "Theory and Fact" are definitely unfair, not only to Scripture but also to those who read theological journals for guidance in doctrine. They befog the issue and mislead the reader, perhaps not intentionally but beyond doubt factually. Unless the reader is well grounded in God's Word, he will put the editorial aside with the thought "Well, verbal inspiration is a theory and not a fact; so why waste time on it!" Or: "Plenary inspiration is a theory and not a fact; so why quibble!" In reality, the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration belongs to the clearest doctrines taught in Scripture, just because they are of so great importance to the believer. Without this doctrine the Christian cannot believe and confess: "The Bible *is* the Word of God." The Bible *is* the Word of God only because of the fact of verbal and plenary inspiration. That is the long and short of it.

Of course, there are other points to consider which we cannot discuss here without making this editorial endlessly long. Verbal inspiration does not mean mechanical dictation, as already our dogmaticians pointed out when they said that the holy writers wrote intelligently and volitionally. But that is quite another story. This editorial aims to show

only: (1) that verbal inspiration is not a human theory but a Scripture teaching; and (2) that verbal inspiration explains sufficiently to the believer "how God inspired the Bible." If we "now see in a mirror, darkly," it is not on the doctrine of verbal inspiration. J. T. M.

The Importance of Doctrinal Discussions. — In view of the tendency manifesting itself here and there to reduce doctrinal discussions at conventions to a minimum and to spend most of the time debating practical questions, this item from the *Presbyterian* takes on special interest.

"The Bills and Overtures Committee rewrote the Cedar Rapids Overture to the following text:

" 'The General Assembly, recognizing that the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian Church in the United States are substantially identical with our standards, expresses the hope and prayer that these two great branches of the Presbyterian Church may once again be organically united in the service of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This General Assembly reaffirms the fidelity of the Church to its doctrinal standards and declares itself convinced that its ministers and elders are loyal to their ordination vows, and we believe that the God of our fathers, who used them abundantly in winning their liberties, shaping the institutions, and laying the spiritual foundations of this nation, is calling the inheritors of their convictions in this urgent day to witness in a reunited Church to the truths of the Gospel of Christ, on which alone a just and fraternal commonwealth can be reared, and which are the only hope for a world of righteousness and peace.'

"The Cedar Rapids Overture had our editorial backing when it appeared. We would have preferred it. We like to hear a chime of Gospel bells. It embraced a statement which the Presbyterian Church, U. S., has recently seen fit to make a deliverance by its Assembly. However, instead of moving 'no action,' which happened to a similar overture last year, the committee took the greatest interest in the subject. Much time was given to the formulation of another wording. The resulting deliverance, as printed above, is an excellent statement. We do not compare it with the other. We judge it *per se*. We seconded its adoption. We did it for these reasons: First, it seemed like a thoroughly sound and important statement of our doctrinal interest and allegiance. Second, the members of the current Committee on Bills and Overtures devoted themselves most whole-heartedly to its discussion, and in this the chairman led with his interest, attention, and devotion. Third, the occasion put the Assembly forward on the way for a time when, we hope, great heartening doctrinal deliverances will once again become a common practice at the sessions of the highest court of our Church. We deplore the ignorance of Christian doctrine in our Church but forget that the old custom of the Assembly delivering, year by year, great statements on doctrine did much to cultivate the membership and the public. Recently all our interest has been to pass resolutions on social, economic, and political matters. Naturally, the theological level has deteriorated. This Assembly marked what we believe is a wholesome turn in a better direction." A.

The Assumption of Mother Mary. — In *America* (Roman Catholic) for August 9, 1941, there appeared an article with the heading, "The Virgin Mother Died, but Her Body Is in Heaven." It is of interest to see how the author proves that the assumption of Mother Mary into heaven is a historical fact. He admits: "In the Scriptures there is nothing about the death or assumption of the Mother of God." He continues: "The Church writings of the following three or four centuries are concerned with apologetic and doctrinal questions of many kinds. There is in them much direct testimony about the holiness and prerogatives of Our Lady, and some few passages concerning her assumption. It is in the fifth and sixth centuries that we begin to hear definitely and increasingly that Mary died and that shortly after her death she was taken, body and soul, into heaven. . . . Even the first notices of the assumption are earmarked with the note that the doctrine is treasured in the memories of the Church. Before the year 600 A. D. the Emperor Mauritius found the Feast of the Assumption so popular in certain parts of his empire that he extended it to all his provinces. It was celebrated on the 15th of August and was called the Dormition of Our Lady." We pause. Dormition means "sleeping" or "falling asleep." It evidently refers to the death of Mary. How one can argue from the existence of a festival with that name that there was a wide-spread belief of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven is beyond us. The writer quotes the preface of an old Gothic Mass, in which it is stated that Mary's body after her death did not see corruption. The assumption of her body into heaven is not mentioned. He continues: "This is but one of the numerous passages of the early centuries on which the Church bases her approval of the doctrine of the assumption. It is not yet a defined article of faith; yet it has been held dearly through many centuries and seems clearly included among the prerogatives which God conferred on His blessed Mother. It is very probable that our own century will see this doctrine raised to the dignity of an article of faith. If so, we shall then complete the tale of the end of Mary's days with as beautiful a doctrine as that which touches her beginnings in immaculate conception." Our only comment is, The Lord says: "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

A.

The Situation in Latin America. — The Catholic hierarchy of Latin America is suspicious of the U. S. A. That is Harold Callender's conviction, after an extensive tour of the continent in the interests of *The New York Times*. There are other reasons, economic and political, of course, to account for Uncle Sam's hard road to friendship with his southern neighbors, some of them, no doubt, justifiable at times. Nevertheless, the hierarchical suspicion may be accepted as fundamental: (1) The spirit of the Catholic Church is naturally totalitarian, in thought and system, but the South American branch is even more remote from the democratic point of view than the European branches. Moreover, the South American states have evolved largely in the atmosphere of the strife of opposing dictators. (2) The masses of the Latin Americans are more open to the influencing of their opinions by the Church because of their large ratio of illiteracy. (3) The South American Church

is naturally suspicious because the U. S. A. is usually credited with being a Protestant country; is the supposed home of the fullest freedom of speech and action, furnishes a fertile breeding-ground for a multiplicity of sects that might presumably be dangerous to the Holy Church; because of our frequently expressed sympathy for leftist movements (like the Spanish Loyalists, for instance), though Protestantism itself is also regarded as leftist in its very nature; distrust of the spread of the influence of Free Masonry in the U. S. A.; resentment of Protestant missions, which they regard as propaganda. Fortunately the Catholic Church in South America does not have the dominating power it once exercised in national affairs other than religious, and there are many other interests throughout the southern continent which favor the growth of closer relations with the U. S. A. *The Lutheran*

Brief Items. — In the *Lutheran* of July 9 a brief news item states that a Lutheran evangelist in China, Mr. Hsu, was beheaded by guerrillas. He was carrying money intended for the erection of a Christian chapel in the village where he was working. The accusation was raised that he was assisting the Communists. Apparently one is justified in placing him among modern martyrs of our faith.

In California Gov. C. B. Olson has killed by pocket veto a bill permitting released-time religious instruction in that State.

Rev. and Mrs. Charles Bishop, aged 91 and 84, respectively, missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church who came to Japan, he in 1878, she in 1879, have returned to the United States. What a record is theirs!

It is said that the First Presbyterian Church of Seattle is the largest Presbyterian Church in the world. Its late pastor, Dr. Mark Matthews, reputed to be a staunch Fundamentalist, was a national figure. Rev. F. P. McConkey of Detroit will be his successor.

From Africa comes the information that it is now possible for the Board of Foreign Missions of the United Presbyterian Church of North America to resume fully its work in Ethiopia. The difficulty of bringing new missionaries into the field still exists for this board as well as for all other boards with similar obligations.

The press reports that Senator Capper has introduced a resolution in the United States Senate seeking to amend the Constitution in such a way that Congress may pass uniform divorce laws. No one will deny that the divorce evil in America has assumed such proportions that it cries to heaven, a condition much favored by the laxity of divorce laws in a number of our States.

News dispatches carry the information that Chancellor Hitler has forbidden the preaching and practice of Christian Science in Germany. The cablegram says that allegedly the step was taken "for the protection of the public and the state."

In Meta, Osage County, Mo., a Catholic parochial school had been taken into the public-school system and was supported by the taxpayers' money. Now the Missouri Supreme Court has ruled that public tax money must not be used for the support of parochial schools. Who-

ever wishes to safeguard the principle of the separation of Church and State will applaud this decision.

In Massachusetts the Supreme Court has overruled the lower courts which had condemned three children of a Jehovah's Witnesses family to commitment to a reform school for refusing to salute the flag. The Civil Liberties Union fought the battle for the children.

A spokesman for Capital University, American Lutheran school in Columbus, O., says that refusal of United States draft boards to place in deferred classification students who plan to enter theological seminaries will "wipe out" seminary enrolments by 1942. The Roman Catholic bishop of the Columbus diocese, the Rev. James J. Hartley, makes a similar protest against the draft board attitude, saying that it will result in serious shortage of candidates for the priesthood. Eight students in St. Charles Borromeo College Seminary at Columbus, O., were recently reclassified from 4-D to 1-A. *The Lutheran*

The Icelandic Synod, whose president is the Rev. K. K. Olafson of Seattle, now is a member of the U. L. C. A., having been received into that body in Omaha, Oct., 1940. Concerning the convention of the Icelandic Synod, held in Winnipeg, Man., the report in the *Lutheran* (U. L. C. A.) states that the opening service was conducted in Icelandic, that in the business sessions this language, too, was used "although any one is privileged to speak in English if he prefers." Pastors and delegates numbered 50. The report says that in this church-body the laymen could always outvote the ministers. Evidently the number of the pastors is smaller than that of the lay delegates.

Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pa., plan to leave the United States and to emigrate to Paraguay, where they have been promised not only full religious liberty but freedom from military service. The reason for this move is the difficulty their young men are experiencing with respect to the draft.

Such Federal action as issuance of defense bonds and the recent aluminum campaign were specifically opposed by the General Conference of Mennonites of North America with the adoption of a resolution condemning these militaristic practices at its 29th triennial Conference in Souderton, Pa. More than five hundred delegates heard and adopted the report of the Peace Committee of the Conference, reaffirming the denomination's traditional stand against war. The Church went on record as approving work camps for its conscientious objector members enrolled by the Selective Service Act. By this action it did not agree with at least some factions of another "plain" sect, the Old Order Amish, who have voiced opposition to work camps and are asking agricultural deferment for their members. All military preparation, direct or indirect, was opposed by the Mennonites. They will take no part in munitions-making, purchasing of war bonds, or military training. It was announced, however, that Mennonite relief work would continue to Britain, France, and Poland, in cooperation with the Friends. Individual members of the Church were urged to devote any extra profit which may accrue to them in wartime to the relief of suffering. Nine new congregations were admitted to the Conference. — *Christian Century.* A.