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The Right and Wrong of Private Judgment

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The Right and Wrong of Private Judgment

(Continued)

Satan has brought untold woe upon the Church by inducing the Pope to deny the right of private judgment and suppress the exercise of it. And Satan brings additional woe upon the Church by inducing men to turn the God-given right of private judgment into a license to sit in judgment on Holy Scripture, to criticize and discard it. That is our second proposition: There is an exercise of private judgment which God absolutely forbids and condemns.

II

God will not be judged by men; He will not permit men to set themselves up as judges of His Word. The Word of the Lord is perfect, Ps. 19:7, and is not in need of any emendation by man. Holy Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, 2 Tim. 3:16, as it stands; it does not become profitable for doctrine only after men have put it in the right shape and form. The revelation of God's will is the foundation of the faith of the Church as God gave it through the words of the Apostles and Prophets, Eph. 2:20; it does not need any improvement by men in order to become the sure foundation. Men offer us their opinions on various subjects "subject to approval," but God will have us receive His Word not as the fallible word of men but as it is in truth, the Word of God, 1 Thess. 2:13. God will have us treat Holy Scripture as the oracles of God, 1 Pet. 4:11, not as the pronouncements of men which may or may not be true, may or may not be profitable. Men who presume to add anything to Holy Scripture because in their judgment the teachings of Scripture are incomplete or diminish from it because in their judgment these teachings are wrong, go against God's direct command, Deut. 4:2, and God pronounces a dire judgment against these presumptuous men, Rev. 22:18, 19; 1 Tim. 6:3 ff. There must be no private interpretation of Holy Scripture! 2 Pet. 1:20. Do you dare to judge God? Do you dare to subject His Word to your judgment as to what is true or false, right or wrong?

Many have arisen in the Church who do just that. Modern Protestantism claims the right to exercise authority over Scripture. While some of the moderns say that man does not really need Scripture, that he is capable of constructing a fairly good religion out of his own ideas, most of them thank God that He has revealed His will in Scripture, but feel that Scripture cannot be received as it is; it needs a lot of reconstruction. And when they add to Scripture or diminish from it, they say they do that by virtue of the right of private judgment. Here is a typical pro-

nouncement by Dr. H. L. Willett in *The Christian Century*: "The Old Testament Scriptures embody tradition, folklore, and imaginative material as well as authentic recitals of actual incidents. They even include works of fiction, such as the Book of Ruth, Jonah, and Esther. . . . One is not likely to be misled in discriminating between statements of fact and the obvious fiction of illustrative references. . . . It is evident that it is not only the privilege but the duty of the student of Scripture to exercise his right of judgment regarding the statements of the Bible, remembering the origin and character of the record and the fact that the freedom to estimate the historical and moral value of all parts of the book, the right of private judgment, is the foundation-stone of Protestantism." (See CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, 1938, p. 51.) Dr. Willett treats the New Testament in the same way. He writes in *The Christian Century*, April 27, 1938: "The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is biblical and widely held by Christians throughout the world. Its factual nature must be judged on the basis of the historical and scientific inquiry." The verdict reached by Dr. Willett's private judgment is this: "There was a background of belief in such supernatural births in the cases of notable individuals, such as Romulus, the Buddha, Alexander the Great, Zoroaster, and others in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman tradition. The fact that in neither of the other Gospels [besides Matt. 1:22, 23] is the virgin birth of Jesus mentioned, nor in any other portion of the Christian sources, would indicate that the account is one of the interesting narratives associated with the life of Jesus, but not an essential item of the Christian faith." Exercising his private judgment, the modern theologian finds that the story of the Virgin Birth cannot be accepted at its face value.

And there are hundreds, thousands of theologians who insist that the Christian has the right to apply *this* sort of private judgment to God's Word. Take the case of the Baptist Modernist Orrin G. Judd, who says: "If we concede any latitude to private interpretation of the Scripture, we should not refuse fellowship with those who give primary weight to the fact that Christ's Davidic lineage is traced through Joseph and who believe that God could beget a divine Son through a human father as well as a human mother." (See *The Watchman-Examiner*, No. 25, 1943.) Operate with "the whole of Scripture," then bring in a few rationalistic considerations, and you will no longer be bound by the Biblical statement that Jesus was born of a virgin. Read Dr. Fosdick's *The Modern Use of the Bible* and *A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, and you will see how much of the Bible is junked through the modernistic exercise of private judgment. And you will agree with the judgment of *The Watchman-Examiner*: "We are impressed

with the fact that Dr. Fosdick's understanding of the Bible is that it is a Book which stands at the bar of his own judgment. His attitude, therefore, is that of acquiescence rather than that of faith, of approval as to certain sections, but never that of humility before its authority. . . . Can there be two Bibles—the Bible that one creates by casting on the Scriptures the reflection of his own curious approval and the Bible which is the tome of God's revelation, authoritatively the guide of man? We do not believe that two such opposites can permanently occupy the same field. The first renders the Scripture ineffective as a light on the pathway of life, since it is inferior to the reader's judgment. By doing so it erases the revelation quality of God's Word, thereby getting rid of the uniqueness of the Book itself. . . . We confess we have not much faith in that mood and method, which are the tactics of the pontifical mind in the interpretation of the Scriptures. We only submit by half to that which we reserve the right to decline. Degrade, even in slight degree, the Scripture as the inspiration of God, and you will not truly worship at its shrine." (See *Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, June, 1939, p. 76.) R. H. Strachan does not agree with this; he declares that Willett and Fosdick are within their rights. In *The Authority of Christian Experience* he says, p. 16 ff.: "The main thesis of this book is that the seeds of authority and certitude are planted already in the individual experience itself, and that in such soil alone a religious authority which is really authoritative can grow. Whatever additional content religious experience may have, the exercise of private judgment is certainly an indispensable condition of its vitality. A religion of authority assumes that God must reveal Himself to us in a way which admits of no possible mistake. . . . The traditional conception of religious authority is really governed by a mode of thinking which looks upon God after the fashion of the image in the slave's mind, when he thinks of what he would do were he master. Such slave mentality is at the source of religious infallibilities: the infallible Book, the infallible Church. . . . 'The ideal organ of authority' is found in the experiencing soul of man, 'in that secret place of its life where the voice of God is heard.' (J. H. Leckie, *Authority in Religion*, p. 81.)" Leckie, finding the authority of an infallible book intolerable and finding, further, that Holy Scripture is fallible, does indeed find his authority in the soul, to whose judgment the Bible must bow.³⁰⁾

30) "In none of these religions [Hinduism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism] can the right of private judgment be said to exist. They exact at their best the obedience of a child, at their worst the submission of a slave. Nor do we find it radically otherwise when we consider the records of Christianity. . . . Among Reformed theologians, some have affirmed the literal infallibility of the Bible. . . . It is certainly true that

Theologians who in some respects are on the conservative side are one with the theologians of the extreme left in demanding that private judgment be given certain rights in dealing with Scripture. Dr. J. A. W. Haas declares: "The early Protestant doctrine put an infallible Bible over against an infallible organization. . . . No matter how perfect the Bible might be, it is subject among Protestants to the differing interpretations of Churches and individuals. The right of private judgment in matters of faith does not permit any demand of infallible interpretation. . . . The claims of a mechanically infallible Bible, verbally perfect, do not hold in the light of the facts. But facts cannot be set aside without injury to truth and damage to moral sincerity, when they are clearly recognized." (*What Ought I to Believe?* P. 29.)³¹⁾ C. H. Dodd uses very plain language. While he is "reluctant to assert full private judgment," he declares: "The authority which Jesus claimed was not of a sort to silence private judgment." And that means: "We no longer accept a saying as authoritative because it lies before us as a word of Jesus, but because we are convinced that it is worthy of Him." The answer to the question: Is it true? must not be: "Of course it is true, because it is in the Bible." No, "the criterion lies within ourselves, in the response of our own spirit to the Spirit that utters itself in Scripture." (*The Authority of the Bible*, pp. 17, 233 f., 296 f.) John Oman speaks in the same wise: "Christ's appeal was never in the last resort to Scripture, but to the hearts of living men. . . . Exclusively He addresses Himself to the primal spiritual authority in man—the spiritual vision which discerns things spiritual. He appeals to the testimony of Scripture, but never offers a word of it as a final reason for belief. His final appeal is always to the heart taught by God. He encourages his disciples to rise above the rule of authorities and to investigate till each is his own authority." (*Vision and Authority*, pp. 103, 107, 188.) And the *Anglican Theological Review*, 1920—1921, p. 272 f., declares: "The Protestant Reformation on its metaphysical side was the putting away of outward authority and the substitution there-

the doctrine of Bible Inerrancy and Plenary Inspiration, in the old sense, is among the things that have been and the powers that are dead. . . . The ideal organ of authority in religion must be found in the soul of man, in that secret place where the voice of God is heard. (Frank's *System of Christian Certainty*, pp. 6—12.) We affirm the soul in communion with God to be the Organ of Revelation." (*Authority in Religion*, pp. 5, 50, 81, 90.)

31) Examining this pronouncement, *Lehre und Wehre*, 1929, p. 99, says among other things: "Was heisst 'right of private judgment'? Wenn es heisst, dass kein Mensch mir in Glaubenssachen etwas zu gebieten hat, so ist es eine herrliche Wahrheit. Wenn es aber heissen soll, dass ich mein Urteil dem der Schrift entgegenstellen darf, so ist es etwas Gottloses. Freiheit von Menschenautoritaet schliesst nicht in sich Freiheit von der Schriftautoritaet."

fore of the inward authority of the individual conscience and each soul's immediate contact with God. . . . The Anglican Church recognizes conscience as the ultimate authority." Few Protestants today sound the cry: *Sola Scriptura!* The cry that resounds on all sides is: Give us the right of private judgment! We want the right to try Scripture, to supplement or abridge it, to make it meet the requirements of science and the dictates of our conscience!

Entire church bodies are making this demand. It is one of the fundamental teachings of the Congregationalists, the Disciples of Christ, and several other bodies. The Kansas City Platform (Congregationalist) declares: "We believe in the freedom and responsibility of the individual soul and the right of private judgment.³²) Then there is the Liberal Catholic Church. Its spokesman says: "There is this difference between the Liberal Catholic and all other Catholic and Protestant Churches: It combines the ancient sacramental worship with the widest measure of intellectual liberty and respect for the individual conscience. . . . It permits to its members freedom of interpretation of the Scriptures, the Creeds, and the Liturgy. Regarding the mind as one of the great avenues to spiritual apprehension, it encourages among its adherents the freest play of scientific or philosophic thought. It maintains that the forms of religion should keep pace with human growth and enlightenment. . . . It regards the Bible much as it does the

32) The illegitimate right of private judgment is meant. Writing in *Christendom*, 1940 (Autumn), p. 503, C. C. Morrison says: "Up to the middle of the nineteenth century Congregationalism was predominantly Calvinistic. The theology of Horace Bushnell was 'the bridge between historic Calvinism and the faith of modern Congregationalism.' The theological revolution was facilitated by 'the right of private interpretation' upon which Baptists and Disciples insist no less than Congregationalists. . . . By entrusting their common beliefs to a living communal pattern rather than crystallizing them in a verbal formula, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Disciples keep the channels of knowledge open for the Holy Spirit to guide them into ever deeper understanding of the Christian revelations." Dr. Francis J. Hall, writing in *The Living Church*, March 1, 1930, says: "The book *Catholicism and Christianity*, by Dr. Cadoux, is an elaborate and damaging attack on papal claims and at the same time a revelation of the modern Congregational mentality. . . . Private judgment, or 'the inner light,' as Dr. Cadoux prefers to call it, he defines as 'the whole of those internal powers and endowments which enable the individual to appropriate Divine reality.' . . . He insists upon its supremacy at every stage." "The Congregational Churches," says their spokesman in *Religions and Philosophies in the United States of America* (J. A. Weber), p. 36 ff., "have been a liberalizing influence in the realm of religion. . . . They present God in understandable terms, a Being wise enough to allow His children freedom to become full-grown men . . . a doctrine hospitable to new truth, honest in interpreting the facts of experience. . . ." E. H. Klotsche characterizes the "right of private judgment" of the Kansas City Platform as "opening the way for rationalism, modernism, and indifference as regards doctrine and faith." (*Christian Symbolics*, p. 273.) See also *Popular Symbolics*, pp. 2, 256, 300, 306.

Scriptures of other religions—an interesting ancient literature containing much that is of value, when properly understood, but also much that is unimportant and of no particular value to us today." (See J. A. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 71.) The bodies mentioned are comparatively small in number, but the tragedy is that their teaching on the right of private judgment predominates in the larger Reformed bodies and has found entrance in large areas of the Lutheran Church.

We are not saying too much. The moderns are empiricists, pupils of Schleiermacher. They will not deny that. They glory in the fact that with Schleiermacher they have made the Christian experience and the religious consciousness the prime authority in religion. They make this faith-consciousness the source of the Christian doctrine and the norm according to which Scripture must be judged. First, they get their theology out of their Christian experience. The liberal E. E. Aubrey declares: "Out of the stuff of human life theology is born." (*Living the Christian Faith*, p. 36.) And the conservative Hofmann: "Ich, der Christ, bin mir, dem Theologen, der Stoff meiner Wissenschaft." In the language of R. Jelke: "The personal experience by which a man becomes a Christian fixes the Christian truths." (*Die Grundwahrheiten des Christentums*, p. 2. See also CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, 1933, p. 311 f.) Second, this Christian experience determines the meaning and reliability of any Scripture statement. The liberal L. H. Hough declares: "The body of evangelical experience from the Apostolic Age until our own time is even more fundamental than the documents of the New Testament. It created these documents, and by it these documents are to be interpreted and judged." (*The Civilized Mind*, p. 40.) G. T. Ladd agrees with that. "The spiritually illumined reason and conscience is the so-called 'Christian consciousness.' . . . The illumined conscience and reason of the body of believers discerns and tests . . . the Word of God. . . . The community of believers is the ultimate authority, its moral and religious consciousness the last appeal." (*What Is the Bible*, pp. 415, 452, 465.) And Erich Schaefer agrees: "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.) That is Schleiermacher's position: every individual's religious experiences constitute the criterion of truth. (See CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, 1944, p. 248.) And *The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1939, p. 154 says: "With Schleiermacher began a new era. The great Berlin savant attempted to gather threads and to weave a new pattern for theology in which the religious consciousness might retain its autonomy while the Christian intellect should pursue friendly relations with philosophy and

cultivate a zeal for science truly so called. . . . Schleiermacher's greatest contribution was the restoration to theology of the religious consciousness as a controlling principle."³³)

But applying the religious consciousness as the criterion of truth is exercising private judgment. Ask any empiricist by what right he subjects the statements of the Bible to the judgment of his Christian experience, and he will appeal to the right of private judgment. Strachan and Leckie, who appeal to this right, have told us that "the ideal organ of authority is found in the experiencing soul of man." And when Leckie tells us that "the organ of ultimate religious authority is the soul in communion

33) A few more typical pronouncements. E.H. Delk: "The final appeal is made to the Christian consciousness. All through the medieval and modern period of theological history, though the infallibility of Bible and Church has been preached, there have always stood clear-eyed and honest champions of the necessity and right of Christian experience to interpret and enforce the truths of our holy faith. Schleiermacher stands first among our Protestant theologians in the explication of this point of view. . . . The writer or teacher who ignores this free and frank investigation of Scripture cannot be a guide in our day. . . . I have no more sympathy with those timid literalists, holding to some mechanical theory of inspiration, who will not enter into a free and frank study of the various books of the Bible themselves, and seek to prevent others from entering into the kingdoms of light. Such men are infidel to the Protestant principle." (See *Lehre und Wehre*, 1913, pp. 154, 156.) J. Oman: "On the authority of a man's own divinely instructed heart and on the authority of His divinely interpreted experience, the word spoken is found to be undeniably true." (*Op. cit.*, p. 189.) *The Living Church*, Oct. 28, 1933: "Our ultimate appeal must be to religious experience and the religious consciousness. . . . Apostolic teaching as embodied in Holy Scripture taught as a matter of grave importance the imminence of the Second Advent. The success with which the mistaken teaching was set aside depended on the fact that even Apostolic teaching was not regarded infallible." W. C. Berkemeyer: "The Scriptures are for us like a garden in which God has planted many trees and in the midst the tree of life, of the knowledge of good and evil. . . . That tree is Christ Himself. . . . Luther's principle: Does this writing preach Christ? demands that we judge Scripture by Christ. . . . Spirit and life cannot be contained or preserved or handed down in words—only in lives." (*The Lutheran Church Quarterly*, 1938, p. 67 ff.) W. A. Brown: "But if the Bible records such widely different stages of spiritual development, how are we to distinguish 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." (*Beliefs That Matter*, p. 226.) The "English Doctrinal Commission's Report states that 'the tradition of the inerrancy of the Bible cannot be maintained in the light of the knowledge now at our disposal'; that 'the authority of the Bible must not be interpreted as prejudging conclusions of historical, critical, and scientific investigation in any field'; and 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.) — Dr. Pieper describes the situation exactly: "It is characteristic of the modern experience-theology, which denies inspiration, that it makes 'the personal Christ' the foundation of the Christian faith." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1925, p. 252.)

with God . . . it has been associated with phrases like 'the inner light,' 'the religious consciousness,' 'the testimony of the Holy Spirit,' and the like" (*op. cit.*, p. 76), he assigns to this "soul in communion with God," this "religious consciousness" of the individual the right to sit in judgment on Scripture. The moderns do not always use the phrase "by right of private judgment," but as often as they tell us that any Scripture statement is reliable only because it agrees with their religious consciousness, they are operating with the fraudulent right of private judgment.

Indeed, the moderns assume the right to sit in judgment on Scripture, to correct, augment, diminish it. Bishop W. A. Candler uses strong language in dealing with these men. "If a subjective experience precedes and gives form to doctrinal truth, Jesus blundered when to the multitudes to whom He gave the parables of the Kingdom He said: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). If the theory that doctrine is born of experience be correct, He should have said, 'Let everyone think for himself, and the experience which will arise from his self-sufficient cogitation will yield sound doctrine.' If every soul's subjective experience is sufficient to discover and determine doctrine, there can be no possible necessity whatsoever for an objective revelation. Perhaps the motive of men who thus overmagnify experience is the desire to minify or to get rid of the divine revelation. The relation of personal experience to religious truth is very close and very vital; but to elevate it above the truth revealed in Christ is to enthrone it above Him and subject Him to its judgment." (*The Christ and the Creed*, p. 60.) That is strong language and covers an extreme case. However, the father of experientialism, Dr. Schleiermacher, went to the extreme of saying: "Every sacred Scripture is but a mausoleum of religion. . . . He does not have religion who believes a sacred Scripture, but rather he who does not need one and could make one if he so desired." (See H. Sasse, *Here We Stand*, p. 46.)³⁴⁾

34) The various groups that plead the false right of private judgment differ as to the basis on which this judgment is formed. The enthusiasts of Luther's day, the Heavenly Prophets, Muenzer and others, judged of religious matters by their feeling, by alleged special revelations, and the like. "They understood by the right of private judgment the right of every man to determine what he should believe from the operations of his own mind and from his own inward experience. . . . Private revelations, an inward light, the testimony of the Spirit, came to be exalted over the authority of the Bible." (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, I. P. 80.) There are, again, the Unitarians. "They are commonly regarded as carrying to the furthest point the doctrine of private judgment and the free conscience." (J. H. Leckie, *op. cit.*, p. 7.) The Unitarians make their reason the source and norm of religious teaching. And there are others. These various groups cannot be identified as to their teachings—not all empiricists are Unitarians—but they are one in placing the seat of authority in religion in man.

Do the modern Protestants set their private judgment against the declarations of Scripture? The Episcopalian B. I. Bell charges them with doing that. "It is a fundamental principle, indeed the basic principle of Protestantism, that each individual Christian's own soul is the first, last, and sufficient guide and authoritative judge about truth or falsity, wisdom or lack of wisdom, in matters of faith and morals. . . . In consequence upon this principle every true, thoroughgoing Protestant minister is at liberty to believe anything and to disbelieve anything, and teach anything, and fail to teach anything which he does not happen to like." (See *The Christian Century*, Oct. 4, 1933.) *The Presbyterian*, Oct. 11, 1928, makes the same charge. "Our modern struggle is over the Person of Christ, the inerrancy of Scripture, the origin and mission of the Church. But that does not cover the territory where the conflict is now most severe, since to these has been added the final and supreme court as extolled by Modernists, which we speak of as the Christian consciousness. By it is meant that we cannot be under obligations to accept anything in religion that is not real to this highest tribunal, before which all cases in question must be brought." And the moderns declare proudly: That is our position exactly. At a symposium conducted in St. Louis on May 16, 1930, the Catholic speaker, Dr. J. A. Lapp of Marquette University, said: "I am a Catholic because outside of the Catholic Church there is no unity, authority, consistency, or permanency in religion. Our separated brethren glory in private judgment, but private judgment has made Protestantism into 350 sects." And the spokesman for the Protestants, Dr. Ivan Lee Holt (Methodist), replied: "Within the ranks of the Protestant Church are many varieties of opinion, from Fundamentalism to Humanism. Both its strength and its weakness lie in the diversity of opinions. There is no body of doctrine that commends itself to all, and there is no authority which can compel. . . . At the same time there is a strength in the freedom of individuality within the larger group. There is today a cry for freedom, and the genius of Protestantism is the right of each individual to his own interpretation of truth." The modern Protestant does, indeed, feel free to set his own judgment against the judgment of Scripture.

And he feels free to do that because he does not believe that Scripture is the Word of God — because he permits the *dictum* of his private judgment to overrule the declaration of Scripture concerning its divine origin and nature. Note, first, that those who plead for the right of private judgment, for the right to criticize and correct Scripture, spurn the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration. Modern Protestantism, including modern Lutheranism, refuses to accept the inerrancy and inerrability of Scripture and denies

its absolute authority. It looks upon the Bible as a human product and on that basis claims the right to sit in judgment on it.

The assertion of the unrestricted right of private judgment and the denial of Verbal Inspiration go hand in hand. Willett, as we have seen, exercises his right of private judgment regarding the statements of the Bible because he "remembers the origin and character of the record," a record containing truth and fiction. And Haas exercises it because he does not hold "the early Protestant doctrine of an infallible Bible." It is not surprising that the Disciples of Christ, the followers of Alexander Campbell, stand for the right of private judgment, for, as Dr. Morrison, who has a right to speak for this group, points out, "the 'rules of interpretation' which Campbell laid down as a guide to the use of the Bible have a strangely modern sound. It was not enough to quote texts, as though every word in every part of the book came directly from the mouth of God to all men of all times." (*The Christian Century*, Sept. 21, 1938.) Leckie, who does not accept "the literal infallibility of the Bible" and condemns "the habit of resorting to texts of Scripture in their literal sense, as infallible oracles, apart from their relation to the whole of the Gospel" (*op. cit.*, p. 48), naturally feels free to subject the Bible to his criticism. Oman feels the same way; he refuses to accept "the literal infallibility of the Bible," "a merely external authority"; he refuses "to draw doctrines from Holy Writ like legal decisions from the Statute Book." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 127, 182.) And Dodd defends his attitude towards the Bible by saying: "The Bible itself does not make any claim to infallible authority for all its parts. . . . The Eternal has neither breath nor vocal cords; how should He speak words? . . . Not God but Paul is the author of the Epistle to the Romans. . . . God is the Author not of the Bible, but of the life in which the authors of the Bible partake and of which they tell in such imperfect human words as they could command." (*Op. cit.*, p. 15 f.) Find a man who like Harnack stands for the "*freie Forschung*" principle, for the view that the theologian is not bound by any *a priori* considerations, such as the authority of the Bible, and you have a man who does not believe that the Bible is the very Word of God. (See CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, 1944, p. 240 f.) Ask the man who stamps certain statements as false how he dares to do that, and he will answer: The Bible, at least this part of the Bible, is not God's Word.

And now, in the second place, ask him by what right he denies Verbal Inspiration. He answers: By the right of private judgment. Scripture may claim to be errorless and perfect, but we have found countless errors in the Bible, and so these statements of Scripture must be modified. The idea of Verbal Inspiration is repulsive to our minds; the statements of Scripture

concerning its divine origin cannot, therefore, mean what they say. The priceless gift of freedom, of free investigation, must be maintained; therefore the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration which would be a bar to free investigation must be false.³⁵

It is incredible: men dare to subject God's Word to their critical investigation, as though it were the word of fallible men. And when they resent this charge of challenging God's statements, on the plea that they have found the Bible to be a book written by fallible men, they substantiate the fearful charge! They dare to challenge God's statement that He is the real author of Holy Scripture. Their private judgment, the judgment of fallible men, counts more than God's solemn declaration.

Before we go on to discuss the wickedness of the claim that man has the right to set up his private judgment against God's Word, it might be well to investigate another claim of the moderns. They say that it was the Protestant Reformation that set up this principle! It was Luther who first dared to oppose his private judgment to Scripture! "The assertion of the right of private judgment is—we are frequently told by writers of Protestant Germany and others who have departed widely from the dogmatic principle of the fathers of the Reformation or of their Puritan followers—the most essential characteristic of the Reformation, and the special enduring heritage which it has left." (V. H. Stanton, *The Place of Authority in Matters of Religious Belief*, p. 2.) We heard Dr. Willett, who refuses to accept large portions of the Bible as the Word of God, declare: "The right of private judgment is the foundation-stone of Protestantism," and Dr. Delk looks upon the verbal-inspirationists as "infidel to the Protestant principle." Edwin Lewis is not in sympathy with the radical liberal, who "pleads in his own behalf the right of liberty of thought and speech." But he concedes much too much when he adds: "The Protestant principle itself justifies the plea." (*The Faith We Declare*, p. 179.) The modern Protestants really believe that Lu-

35) Dr. Pieper on this point: "The moderns assert: the theologian cannot allow himself to be absolutely bound by the word of Scripture; if that obligation were put upon him, Scripture would be for him a codex of laws sent down from heaven, a paper-pope, etc.: and that would mean a relapse into Catholicism. In order that the 'evangelical' spirit of Protestantism may have free and unhampered expression, the idea that Scripture is the source and norm of theology must be abandoned and the 'living,' the 'live' ego of the theologizing subject must take charge. The entire modern theology takes this position; the extreme left and the extreme right are here in substantial agreement. They say that the theology of today needs to shed the 'unwieldy armor of Saul,' particularly, the Verbal Inspiration of Holy Scripture; then it will be able, like David, 'to leap over a wall.'" (*Christliche Dogmatik I*, p. 156.) The question whether Scripture is inspired and absolutely authoritative is thus decided by man's judgment of the fitness of things; and it is answered negatively.

ther blazed the trail they are following. "The ultimate Authority," says J. H. Leckie, "to which the German Reformer appealed in the beginning was not really Scripture, but the experience of faith. It is true that he held quite firmly the infallibility of the Word; but the Word was for him not the entire letter of the Bible, but the spiritual content of it, the evangel which dwelt in it as the soul dwells in the body. And, inasmuch as this spiritual content, this infallible Word, could only be discerned by faith, it followed that faith and its testimony became the ultimate court of appeal, the final seat of Authority. The Pauline message was truth to Luther, not because he found it in the Bible, but because it found him in the secret place of his soul." (*Op. cit.*, p. 37 f.) And A. Harnack declares: "Protestantism protested against all formal, external authority in religion; against the authority, therefore, of councils, priests, and the whole tradition of the Church. . . . Thus Luther also protested against the authority of the letter of the Bible. . . . At the highest levels to which he attained in his life he was free from every sort of bondage to the letter." (*What Is Christianity?* pp. 298, 312.) The moderns refuse to submit to the judgment of Scripture—and they want to make Luther their *particeps criminis!*

Luther the leader of the rebellion against the sole authority of Scripture? Luther the father of the idea that man has a voice in deciding questions of doctrine and morals? Let us look into the matter. Luther declares: "We have taken the articles of our faith from Scripture. Stick to Scripture, and if reason wants to make some contribution, you must say: I have here the plain Word of God; I need nothing else; ich will nicht weiter denken, fragen, oder hoeren, noch kluegeln. . . ." (IX:828.) Luther declares: "Die heilige Schrift soll allein Richterin und Meisterin bleiben" (I:1290.) And the moderns, who make reason and the Christian consciousness and what not associate authorities in religion, claim Luther as their father! Luther declares: "When you have a decision of Scripture, you need not look for any further decision" (III:503), and again: "If we are to test all doctrine, what other touchstone can we apply but Scripture?" (XVIII:1294.) And these moderns, who declare: The decision of Scripture is not final; everything must be brought before the bar of private judgment; who declare: If we are to test all teaching, the teaching of Scripture included, what other touchstone can we apply but our faith-consciousness? these moderns claim to be children of Luther! The moderns cannot speak Luther's language, language such as this: "If a man would preach, let him suppress his own words. He may speak them in the family and state. But here in the Church he may say nothing but the words of the august head of

the family. Otherwise it is not the true Church. It must be thus: God speaks. . . . The preacher may say nothing but what God says and commands. . . . Und ob man gleich auch viel Geschwaetztes macht ausserhalb Gottes Wort, noch ist die Kirche in dem Plaudern nicht und sollen sie toll werden" (XII:1413 f.). The moderns are no kin to Luther, who said: "Thou hast here a plain text, like a thunderbolt, wherein Paul subjects both himself and an angel from heaven, the doctors on earth and all other teachers and masters whatsoever under the authority of Holy Scripture. This is the queen who must rule; to her all must yield instant obedience. They dare not set themselves up as masters over her, as judges, as arbiters; they may be only witnesses, pupils, confessors, whether it be the Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, or an angel from heaven. No other doctrine may be taught or heard in the Church but the pure Word of God, that is to say, Holy Scripture; otherwise accursed be both the teachers and hearers together with their doctrine" (IX:87.)

Luther disowns the moderns. He disowned them when he wrote: "'No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.' 2 Pet. 1:20. Be directed by this, and do not think that you shall explain Scripture by your own wisdom and strength. In this the private interpretation of the Scriptures by all the fathers is thrown down and rejected. . . . The true sense of Scripture cannot be obtained by private interpretation." (IX:1361 f.) He disowned them when he wrote: "I had the last year, and have still, a sharp warfare with those fanatics who subject the Scriptures to the interpretation of their own boasted spirit" (XVIII:1741); when he spoke of "rude fellows who think more of their blind and poor reason than of the statements of Scripture. For Scripture is God's own witness concerning Himself and our reason cannot know the divine nature; yet it wants to judge concerning that about which it knows nothing" (X:1018); when he wrote: "Das ist's nun, dass der Herr Christus hier spricht, er sei den Naseweisen feind, er wolle sie nicht leiden in seiner christlichen Kirche, sie heissen Kaiser, Koenige, Fuersten, Doctores, die ihm sein goettliches Wort meistern, und mit ihrer eigenen Klugheit in den hohen grossen Sachen des Glaubens und unserer Seligkeit regieren" (XII:1258). The moderns must not come to Luther and ask for his benediction. He tells them: "Holy Scripture is not the Jews' nor the heathen's nor the angels', much less the devil's chattel: Holy Scripture is God's, who alone spoke and wrote it—and He alone shall interpret and unfold it. Let the devils and men be hearers" (XX:2103).

No, no, these moderns who have little or no respect for Scripture are not kin to Luther, who was filled with such holy awe of Scripture that he said: "A single Bible passage makes the world

too narrow for me" (XX:788). "The text stands there too mightily" (XV:2050). "God's Word is not subject to argument and debate" (V:456). Luther knew whose book the Bible is and exclaimed: "O ye theologians, what are you doing? Think ye that it is a trifling matter when the sublime Majesty forbids you to teach things that do not proceed from the mouth of the Lord and are something else than God's Word? It is not a thresher or herdsman who is here speaking" (XIX:821). Luther was content to sit at Jesus' feet: "We count ourselves catechumens and pupils of the Prophets; we do nothing but repeat and preach what we have heard and learned from the Prophets and Apostles" (III:1890). In his holy fear he did not dare to suggest that their word might need improving: "God's Word will not stand trifling. If you cannot understand it, uncover your head before it." (VI:873). He heard Jesus say: "Let the wise and learned blind their eyes and silence their reason," and answered: "Schlecht die Augen zugetan, an Christi Wort uns halten . . . und sagen: Du bist allein mein lieber Herr und Meister, ich bin dein Schueler." (XII:1260, 1264. — Luther's last sermon.)³⁶⁾

36) When Dr. H. W. Snyder (U. L. C. A.) said: "Luther's attitude on this question [the supreme authority of the Bible] was one of freedom. This was the Reformer's spirit again and again, out of which grew the doctrine of the right of private interpretation and also the tendency of modern Biblical criticism," Dr. J. A. Dell replied: "Please, let's deal a little more precisely with words if we hope to understand each other. In the first place, Luther had no doctrine of 'private interpretation,' for he knew as well as anyone that 'no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation,' 2 Pet. 1:20. What is often said of Luther is that he reinstated in the Church the right of private judgment. But that does not mean that each man had the right of judging for himself what he will believe as a Christian; it means simply that each man has the right to have the Bible in his own hands, so that he may judge for himself what the Bible requires all Christians to believe, and not be dependent on the Church for that knowledge." (*Journal of the American Lutheran Conference*, March, 1938, pp. 12, 29.) Dr. J. T. Mueller quotes from the *Calvin Forum* (February, 1944): "The Reformation championed the rights of the individual as over against the group in submission to the Word of God. Every Reformer knew himself to be *minister verbi divini*. The authority of the Word of God was to him absolute. The 'revolt' of the Reformation was a revolt in submission to the authority of the Word of God. . . . The truth of the revealed Word of God was the standard and norm. No radicalism or rationalism or naturalism can claim to stand in the line of the spiritual tradition of the Protestant Reformation," and adds: "Even the frequently presented view of the Reformation as being an appeal from the judgment of the Church to the right of private judgment is historically incorrect. Luther, for example, in his Reformation did not appeal from the doctrine or judgment of the Church to his own private doctrine or judgment. His appeal was from the erroneous, antichristian doctrine of the Papacy to the true and Christian doctrine of Holy Scripture. Nor did he presume to interpret Scripture by his own reason or intelligence; but, in expounding Scripture, he applied the age-old maxim: *Scriptura Scripturam interpretatur*." (*CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, 1944, p. 277 f.) We might call Arthur E. McGiffert a hostile witness; his testi-

The moderns cannot appeal to Luther as sanctioning their licentious use of private judgment. Here the Romanists break into the discussion and assert that Luther is indeed responsible for this lawlessness. J. Clayton uses up one half of his book in elaborating the thesis that Luther instigated it. Luther "inaugurated the new theology" which placed "man's private judgment in the seat of authority." "Feeling usurped the place of thought." "No longer is a thing judged to be right because of divine command and so requiring consent of will and conscience because of its rightness. It is judged right if and when it is agreeable to personal taste. Protestant ethics go the way of Protestant faith." "Even the rationalism of nineteenth-century German Biblical criticism, repugnant as much of it would have been to Luther, has the characteristics of the Wittenberg method." "What had resulted in Germany and Switzerland through promiscuous Bible reading and private interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures was all too plain: the division of Christian men into all sorts of new churches." "The name of Luther and the work of the founder of Protestantism must needs be honored where it is counted a gain to the world that mankind in general, and Christian men and women in particular . . . display a freedom of private judgment that results in the present variety of creeds." Di Bruno: "This principle of private interpretation of Holy Scripture, during the three centuries since Luther's time, has given rise to hundreds of sects among Protestants" (*Catholic Belief*, p. 42), "to 350," says Father Lapp. H. P. Scratchley writes in *The Living Church*, May 5, 1934: "John Fisher, martyred Bishop of Rochester, in his book *Confutatio Assertionis Lutheranae*, laid down this proposition: 'The greatest part of those who have relied on the guidance of their private spirit for the sense of the Scriptures have failed in their interpretations and miscarried into error and heresy.' With nearly two hundred Protestant bodies owing their origin to the interpretations of individual men and

mony will therefore carry the more weight. "McGiffert has this to say: 'The most notable example of Luther's intolerance was his attitude toward the famous Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli. . . . In reading the reports of the Marburg Colloquy, we are inevitably reminded of the great Leipzig debate of eleven years before. As Eck then insisted upon blind and unquestioning submission to the authority of the Church, Luther now insisted upon the same kind of submission to the authority of the Bible.' True, at Marburg Luther once more 'insisted upon blind and unquestioning submission to the Bible.' At Marburg Luther once more applied the formal principle of the Reformation—*Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone." (*Four Hundred Years*, p. 74.) Yes, Luther said: "Die Augen zugetan!"—Let C. P. Krauth pronounce the verdict. "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 Conservative Reformation*, p. 17.) The moderns are enjoined from labeling their wares "Lutheran." See also W. Betcke, *Luthers Sozialethik*, p. 168 f.)

the acquiescence of their followers, can anyone deny the truth of the Bishop's statement?" A number of similar statements have been set down above. The Catholics father the idea that men may interpret Scripture as they please and judge religious things according to their own notions on Luther.

That calls for three remarks. (1) The Catholics are guilty of an historical untruth. They ought to know that Luther denounced those who set their private judgment against Scripture as guilty of extreme wickedness and disowned them in unmistakable terms. Let them study the pertinent statements we have quoted to them. They are not excused by the fact that the moderns claim Luther as their father. They should be impressed by the fact that Luther disowns and denounces the moderns, not to speak of the fact that there is no family resemblance and blood relationship between the errorists, who make little of Scripture, and Luther, to whom Scripture meant everything. They should know that Luther had as little use for the moderns as they have. They insist that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation"; Luther, too, stressed that. J. Clayton and the Catholics denounce those who make their feeling, etc., their guide in religion; Luther denounced that spirit as strongly as the Catholics and more strongly, with a deeper hatred, with a divine hatred. The Catholics may not understand what caused this intense hatred in Luther; but honesty should compel them to admit that there was in him such a hatred.³⁷⁾

37. There is a right and a wrong exercise of private judgment. See footnotes 4, 31, and 36. That is why Luther, who stood for the right of private judgment, had to denounce the Reformed in Switzerland and later errorists: they set their private judgment against Scripture. If the Catholics knew and observed this distinction, they would not blame the rise of the sects on Luther. These "350 sects of Protestantism" arose because they abused the principle of the right of private judgment. It is illogical to assume that because somebody exercises his right of private judgment against the Pope, he grants people the right to exercise their private judgment against God and His Word. And here lies the seat of the trouble. The only reason why the Catholics denounced the exercise of private judgment is that it interferes with the authority of the Pope, the Church. Clayton condemns Luther because he set out to "destroy the notion that the Pope has the right to interpret Scripture" and "raised private judgment above all decisions of pope and council." The Romanizing Protestants follow a similar line. In the same article, for instance, in which the Anglo-Catholic Scratchley attacks Luther for his teaching on private judgment, the statement is made "that the Bible is the Church's book, to be interpreted by its teaching, rather than the teachings of the Church by the Bible." (Our italics.) The Catholic view is that private judgment is wrong because the Pope or the Church is not to be judged. Luther's teaching is that that private judgment is wrong which judges Scripture. For this reason we said above that while both the Catholics and Luther abhor the rise of sects, Luther's hatred of false teaching is a divine hatred, springing from his loyalty to God's Word; that of the Catholics springs from a different source — their fealty to the Pope.

(2) The purpose of saddling all aberrations, doctrinal and otherwise, that sprang up since the Reformation, on Luther is to discredit Luther's teaching on the right of private judgment. J. Clayton's book contains these statements: "Luther's doctrine of private judgment was interpreted in even more drastic fashion by the Anabaptists. . . . The vital and distinctive doctrine of the Anabaptists was obedience to the inner light. Inevitably this doctrine, extending the Lutheran private judgment to very far lengths, brought startling developments and unexpected diversities. . . . In the crime and lunacy of Munster's Fifth Monarchy could be discerned what lurked in Luther's doctrine of private judgment; the seed of the Anabaptist harvest at Munster was the Lutheran teaching, that what a man must believe was revealed to him personally, that what he felt to be true was true." "Active resistance, that included civil war and the assassination of tyrants, was assumed to be fulfillment of the will of God, when private judgment was convinced of the propriety of violent measures." "The exuberance of private judgment has produced such strange and fantastic exhibits of human credulity as to make the old Protestant standard of faith and morals no longer recognizable." "The path from Catholicism to private judgment in religion . . . led on to skepticism and thence to the ultimate atheism so widespread and active in our day." The purpose of such a presentation of the matter is to fill men with abhorrence of Luther's teaching on the right of private judgment.

It succeeds in many cases. There are many who cannot see that the instances mentioned by Clayton are due to the *abuse* of the right of private judgment; they believe that the principle itself produced this wickedness. The good principle is discredited. And Satan, who stirred up those disorders, is pleased to have men utilize them in an evil cause.³⁸⁾

(3) It was not Luther who taught the liberals, the Anabaptists, and the sects the evil art of setting man's judgment over Scripture. They learned it, if they needed a teacher in this field, from the Pope. The Pope had been making a specialty of it from the beginning of Papacy. The basic rule of his theology is that Scripture must submit to his interpretation. He has been issuing decretals and bulls against the exercise of private judgment — and has been

38) For what purpose did J. Clayton make the following statements? "Private judgment was right enough when it coincided with Luther's judgment. It was nothing but an imposition of the devil when it was contrary to the Lutheran program." "The only test of true doctrine was the New Testament as interpreted by Martin Luther." "When private judgment failed to lead men to conformity, private judgment must be discarded, shunned as a device of the devil for the ruin of mankind."

himself practicing it right along, deriving his theology out of his own fancies and changing Scripture according to his own pleasure. But that is exactly what the moderns are doing and what all errorists have been doing. And Luther tells them where they belong when he says: "Do not frame articles of faith out of your own thoughts—leave that to the Abomination which is Rome" (XV:1565). The spiritual father of all those who claim the right to fit Scripture to their own ideas is the Pope, who "claims to be above Scripture and has the right to change it at will. . . . Item, dass auch die heilige Schrift und Gottes Wort muesse von ihm Leben empfaehen. . . . Solch greulichen Bruellens ist viel in seinen geistlichen Rechten und Bullen." (Luther, XIX:913, 933.) And the moderns have been issuing the same kind of bulls. They speak the same language as the Pope, who "vociferates in his decree *Cuncta per mundum* that Holy Scripture must submit to his judgment, not he to Scripture." (XVI:1973.) Clayton is in error when he says that the fanatics and enthusiasts who placed their "feeling" in the seat of authority learned that from Luther; no, the Pope is their spiritual father. Read the passage in the Smalcald Articles concerning "the enthusiasts, i. e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure as Muenzer did. . . . For [indeed] the Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his Church is spirit and life, even though it is above and contrary to Scripture and the spoken Word." (*Triglotta*, p. 495.) Can the Pope disown the modern theologian who says with him that the true theology is to be found "*in scrinio sui pectoris*," in his "pious self-consciousness," etc., and that what his "experience" and "faith-consciousness," etc., dictates goes, even though it be contrary to Scripture? Have done with this talk that the moderns are pupils of Luther. The wickedness of subjecting Scripture to man's judgment goes back to the Pope.³⁹⁾

No, Luther did not uphold the spurious right of private judgment. He denounced it as great wickedness. And is it such a wicked thing? Let us see.

TH. ENGELDER

(To be concluded)

39) Dr. Pieper: "Die moderne Theologie wandelt in diesem Stueck wesentlich in den Wegen des Papsttums, wenn und insofern sie behauptet, dass die Glaubensartikel nicht unmittelbar aus der Schrift selbst, sondern aus dem sogenannten Glaubensbewusstsein zu schoepfen seien. Nach dieser Weise kommt alles auf die menschliche Auslegung der Schrift zu stehen." (*Vortraege*, p. 49.) B. Manly: "The Rationalists claim that reason is the rule or standard of belief, either alone or superior to, or conjointly with, the Bible; while Romanists and other Traditionalists affirm that the Church is inspired as well as the Bible,