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The Word of God in the Theology of Lutheran Orthodoxy

By ROBERT D. PREUS

(This is the third in a series of study documents to be published on the theme "The Theology of the Word," originally prepared and presented for discussion to the faculty of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. Previous articles on this topic appeared in this journal in December 1960 and May 1961.)

THE intention of this paper is not to offer a complete delineation of the doctrine of the Word of God in the theology of Lutheran orthodoxy, a project entirely too vast to be undertaken within our limited space. Our interest is to learn what the orthodox Lutheran teachers say to us on the specific issues now under debate. I have therefore restricted this study to a simple twofold purpose: (1) to present and analyze what Lutheran orthodoxy has said on the chief problems concerning the doctrine of the Word and (2) to offer significant observations regarding the real concerns and emphases of the old Lutheran teachers in all their discussions *de Scriptura* and *de Evangelio*—for we must understand their interests and concerns if we are to appreciate their theological contributions. With this double purpose always in mind I shall submit the conclusions of Lutheran orthodoxy on the following three issues:

- I. Theology in General and Revelation
- II. The Meaning of the Phrase "Scripture Is the Word of God"
- III. Inerrancy

The following are the more important orthodox theologians whom I have studied

in making my observations: Martin Chemnitz (1522—86), Jacob Heerbrand (1522 to 1600), Aegidius Hunnius (1550 to 1603), Matthias Haffenreffer (1561 to 1619), Friedrich Balduin (1575—1627), Leonard Hutter (1563—1616), John Gerhard (1582—1637), Caspar Brochmand (1585—1652), John Dorsch (1597 to 1659), John Huelsemann (1602—61), John Dannhauer (1603—66), Michael Walther (1593—1662), Solomon Glassius (1593—1656), Abraham Calov (1612 to 86), John Quenstedt (1617—88), August Pfeiffer (1640—98), John Baier (1647 to 95), and David Hollaz (1648—1713). This line, extending over a century and a half, represents men who are agreed doctrinally, although there is a noticeable development of terminology and of areas of interest in their theology. On the points herein considered they are essentially agreed.

I. THEOLOGY IN GENERAL AND REVELATION

(presuppositions and background to the doctrine of the Word)

A. The orthodox Lutherans speak at great length on the subjects of theology and revelation. I mention briefly only what seems significant to their subsequent discussion of Scripture as the Word of God and of inerrancy. In contrast to the Socinians and Arminians of their day they assume that theology does not change and that the way of salvation has always been

the same.¹ This is not meant to obscure the differences between the Old and New Testaments, differences in circumstances (type as opposed to antitype), time (before and after), and clarity (prophecy as contrasted to fulfillment). But the basic fact always obtains that God, His truth, His way of salvation, His theology (considered *originaliter* as coming from God), do not change. Christian theology is the only true theology, and there is no salvation outside the Christian religion. Against the opinion of the syncretistic Helmstedt theologian Calixtus, it was held that Mohammedans and Jews must be considered idolaters. We notice here the sharp antithesis among Lutherans of that day.

Supernatural or revealed theology comes to men (1) by immediate inspiration (*afflatus*) or illumination (*irradiatio*) and (2) by the Word already set down in the writings of the prophets and apostles.² The former is called *theologia infusa*, the latter *theologia acquisita*. The *principium* or source of the former is the Word of God (considered as action or revelation).

B. The term "revelation" is often used loosely as an equivalent for theology or the Word of God. The efficient cause of revelation is, of course, God. The *causa efficiens minus principalis seu organica* is God's Word (cf. AC, V). Only through the Word may we become theologians. Revelation is defined as "an external action of God whereby he discloses Himself (*sese patefecit*) to human beings through His Word and makes known to them His salvation." Supernatural revelation, in other

words, is taken in general as any divine self-disclosure (*patefactio*), whether *viva voce*, whether by divine inspiration, whether by dreams or visions or divine rapture (2 Cor. 12:1 ff.), or by any other means. God's revelation κατ' ἐξοχήν occurred when He made Himself known hypostatically (αὐτοπροσώπως) in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. (Heb. 1:1; John 1:18)

Specifically the term "revelation" is used for God's self-disclosure made to the prophets and apostles by the immediate afflatus of the Spirit. In this case we are speaking of the revelation which is today the source of theology (for the orthodox Lutherans often call revelation as well as Scripture the source of theology). Revelation is made to man, but man is not in any way responsible for it. It illumines and informs man. The revelations of God are therefore not *dona Dei sanctificantia* but *dona ministrantia*, for revelation has also been vouchsafed to those who have not had the Spirit—Caiaphas, Saul, Balaam—and they prophesied.

The nature of revelation may vary. For instance, to the authors of Scripture the Word was given by an inner afflatus (*beneficio interioris afflatus*). Today revelation is made to us through the external Word, whether preached or read or contemplated. In the former case the self-disclosure is immediate; in the latter mediate. The object (*obiectum*) of revelation is God (note: not doctrine). By His revelation God makes known to us His essence and will, He shows us what we are to believe and do (Law and Gospel). The recipient (*subiectum*) of revelation is mankind. Whether the revelation be immediate or mediate through the words of the prophets and

¹ A. Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum*, (Wittebergae, 1655—77), I, 160 ff.

² A. Calov, *Isagoge ad ss. theologiam* (Wittebergae, 1556), pp. 92 f.

apostles, the author of this self-disclosure is always God, and that not merely in the sense that He is the *prima veritas* and that everything ultimately has its origin in Him. The men of God through whom revelation takes place may only be considered instruments of God revealing. (Acts 11:28; 21:10; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14)

The form or essence of revelation is inspiration. *Forma revelationis est θεοπνευστία per quod revelatio divina est quod est.*³ Calov says:

Divine inspiration is considered either as the source and efficient cause of revelation in the sense that it is the act of God revealing or as the form of revelation, of the words revealed. For θεοπνευστία establishes the Word of God formally as being the Word of God, and this distinguishes it specifically, I might add, from any other word, say, of angels or of men. Thus the Word of God derives its authority, its majesty and all its power from its inspiration. For whatever constitutes a thing formally and distinguishes it specifically is also the cause of its attributes and excellences.

Calov is, of course, still speaking specifically, referring to the written Word of God, the Scriptures, when he says that inspiration is the form of revelation. For this is the revelation we have to do with today. God does not reveal Himself to us today except through this Word; what does not come to us through this Word is not revelation but false enthusiasm.

May we, then, call the Holy Scriptures revelation? The orthodox Lutherans answer yes. Revelation is ordinarily antecedent to the writing of Scriptures, and Scriptures are the account of revelation.

³ Calov, *Systema*, p. 162.

But how to describe God's revelation and the significance of it was also a revelation. The very *suggestio verborum* was a revelation. The dogmaticians distinguish, but do not separate, revelation and inspiration. Quenstedt speaks of revelation concurring and coinciding with divine inspiration in the making of Scripture "when divine mysteries are revealed by inspiration and inspired by revelation in the same writing."⁴ And so Scripture is not only an account of revelation, but it is itself a revelation. Gerhard says:

Scripture is nothing else than divine revelation embodied in sacred writings. For the revealed Word of God and Sacred Scripture do not differ in reality, inasmuch as holy men of God embodied these same divine revelations in the Scriptures.⁵

It should also be noted at this point that the orthodox Lutherans would call Scripture revelation because they believed it always to be revelatory. God speaks to us and reveals Himself to us in Scripture today as truly as He made Himself known of old *viva voce* and in His great acts. For Scripture is God's Word *vere et proprie*. Scripture is God speaking. This Word is the power of very God, and in this sense not to be distinguished from God's acts. Modern theologians have represented the doctrine of later Protestants as a "simple identification of divine revelation with Holy Scripture."⁶ If this judgment intends to include Lutherans it is simply perpetuating a myth. God's un-

⁴ *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum* (Wittebergae, 1702), Pars I, Caput IV, Sectio 2, Quaestio 3, p. 68.

⁵ *Loci theologici* Locus I, cap. II, par. 12, Cotta ed., II, 17—18 (Tubingae, 1762).

⁶ J. Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (London, 1956), p. 31.

veiling acts were always considered revelation by the old Lutherans, but they also considered Scripture to be more than only a human and therefore errant account of revelation. They would not find fault with William Temple, for instance, for saying that the principle of revelation is "the coincidence of event and appreciation."⁷ But, unlike Temple, they would insist that the "appreciation" is infallible, because holy men of God were moved by the Spirit in what they said and wrote in response and in appreciation of God's revelatory acts.

II. SCRIPTURE AS THE WORD OF GOD

It is unnecessary to give evidence for the fact that to Lutheran orthodoxy Scripture was the Word of God. The theologians of the orthodox era regularly call Scripture the voice of God, the very Word of God, and they employ many similar expressions. The important question for our present discussion is what they meant when they identified Scripture as the Word of God. This question can be answered by first exploring their reasons for calling Scripture the Word of God. Their reasons appear to be two in number.

A. Scripture is called the Word of God by virtue of its divine origin. Scripture is God's Word because God is its Author. The human authors of Scripture themselves claim God as the Author of their writings. At this point orthodoxy's monergistic doctrine of inspiration becomes apparent. God is the *autor primarius* of Scripture; the human authors are His penmen, His amanuenses, who write by His *suggestio*, His *influxus*, His *afflatus*, His *mandatum*, His *impulsus*, His *inspiratio*, His *dictamen*,

yet without being deprived of their individuality, their consciousness or natural endowments. The common view that Scripture is the Word of God because of its divine origin is expressed succinctly in a statement of Gerhard's already alluded to:

God is the highest Author of His Word. . . . It is God alone who has come forth from the hidden abode of His majesty and has revealed Himself, His essence and His will, not only in the work of His creation but in express words also, words to our first parents before the Fall as well as to the patriarchs and prophets during the Old Testament. Thus it is that the prophets so often repeat the words **אמר יהוה**, "The Lord has spoken," "The Word of Jahve," "The Word of the Lord came (*factum est*)," "The mouth of the Lord has spoken," "Hear the Word of God," etc. And in the New Testament God has spoken to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1). The Son of God in turn sent forth His apostles into all the world and said (Luke 10:16), "Who hears you hears Me." Through these same apostles as also through the evangelists He willed to have put into writing the necessary elements of His divine revelation. Thus God is the Author of Scripture, or to say the same thing, God is the Author of the divine revelation which has been incorporated into the Sacred Scriptures.⁸

This idea of the old Lutheran teachers that Scripture is the Word of God by virtue of its inspiration, its *terminus a quo*, is opposed to what might be called the pragmatic view of neo-orthodoxy today that Scripture is the Word of God only by virtue of its *terminus ad quem*, its effects, or rather, the effects of God in making

⁷ *Nature, Man and God* (London, 1934), p. 315.

⁸ *Loci theologici*, Locus I, cap. II, par. 12, II, 17—18.

the Bible the Word of God in an event.⁹ To orthodoxy *Paulus dixit* is *Deus dixit*. To Barth the *Paulus dixit* and the *Deus dixit* are two different things and become one only when the event of the Word of God takes place.

B. Thus far orthodoxy has called Scripture the Word of God because of a past action. But Scripture is called the Word of God also because of a present action—this, that God today and always speaks through Scripture. "The Holy Spirit speaks to us in and through Scripture, and so we must look for the Word and will of the Spirit in these words of Scripture."¹⁰ The point is that Scripture is *Deus loquens*. It is the Word of God today. Precisely this is Calov's point of departure when he argues in his *Systema*¹¹ that the Scriptures are *vere et proprie* the Word of God. His insistence in this matter is in antithesis to the view of the Romanists and enthusiasts of all kinds who taught that there was a qualitative difference between the Word of God and Scripture, thus denying to Scripture the power that a Word of God would have. A distinction was made between the inner and outer Word, some saying that Christ was the inner Word, others simply that there was an inner Word which was not Scripture. At any rate, Scripture in itself was a dead letter. Calov counters that Old Testament Scripture is expressly called the words of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ, Rom. 3:2). It is said to be breathed forth by very God (2 Tim. 3:16), the prophets who wrote

were borne along by the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1:21), and Peter says that the Word proclaimed in the New Testament will remain forever (1 Peter 1:25). The conclusion on which such evidence converges is that Scripture is today truly the Word of God and carries with it the power and authority of very God.

A brief excursus on the common distinction between *materia* and *forma* will be useful in bringing out more precisely what orthodoxy meant by the expression, "Scripture is the Word of God." The *materia* of Scripture is the letters and words and phrases which constitute Scripture. In this sense Scripture is no different from any other book. The *forma* of Scripture is the inspired meaning, the divine sense of Scripture, what Quenstedt calls the *sapientia Dei*, the *mens Dei*, the *consilium Dei*, etc.¹² Considered according to its material principle, Scripture is God's Word only in a secondary and significative sense (*improprie et σηματικῶς*) inasmuch as it is only the vehicle (ὄχημα) which brings the divine mind, the thoughts of God, to us. The *forma* of Scripture is what makes Scripture what it is—the Word of God; and it is the *forma*, the inspired meaning, which is properly (*proprie et κυρίως*) called the Word of God. One statement of Gerhard's at this juncture will perhaps serve to make this important distinction clear:

By the term "Scripture" we do not mean the outer form or signs, that is, the particular letters, the act of writing and the words with which the divine revelation has been written down, so much as the matter itself, and the thing signified, as

⁹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh, 1936), I, 1, 123 ff.

¹⁰ Gerhard, *Disputationes theologicae* (Jenae, 1625), p. 1, 116.

¹¹ I, 576 ff.

¹² *Op. cit.*, Pars I, caput IV, Sectio 2, Quaestio 16, pp. 169 ff.

that which is meant and designated by the writing, viz., the Word of God, which teaches us of His nature and will. Some people have expressed it this way: The Word of God may be viewed essentially as the very thoughts which God expresses, or nonessentially and accidentally as preaching and writing. In other words, as in every writing done by an intelligent and rational agent, so also in the prophetic and apostolic Scripture two things should be borne in mind: (1) the letters, syllables, and words which are written and are outer symbols indicating and expressing the ideas of the mind, and (2) the thoughts themselves, which are the things signified, expressed with the symbols of letters, syllables, and words. Accordingly, in the term "Scripture" we include both of these, but especially the latter.¹³

It is important to bear in mind that the dogmaticians are thinking primarily of the inspired content when they call Scripture the Word of God.

Another related observation might be made at this point. When the orthodox theologians speak of the various properties of Scripture, it is essential that we understand always whether they are speaking of the *forma* of Scripture or the *materia* or both. The so-called normative authority of Scripture refers primarily to the *materia* of Scripture; so also do the clarity of Scripture and the inerrancy of Scripture. The so-called causative authority of Scripture, its power, is due entirely to its *forma*. In other words, the Word of God, whether read from a book, preached from a pulpit, or treasured in our hearts, is always the power of God, whatever the outer form it may take.

¹³ *Loci theologici*, Locus I, cap. I, par. 5, II, 14.

We have now arrived at the final consideration in coming to an understanding of Lutheran orthodoxy's doctrine of the Word. To Lutheran orthodoxy the Word of God is one. Whatever *materia*, or outer mode of expression, the Word of God may take, it is always the same Word of God. We may conceive of the Word as it is in God originally, or as it was held in the minds of prophets and apostles before the act of writing. We may think of it as cherished in a believer's heart, we may speak the Word or read it, but this Word, the divine *forma*, remains the same. It remains a unity. The things of God do not change when they are contemplated or spoken of or put into writing. It was the same Word which the apostles preached and wrote. (Phil. 3:1)

The so-called prophetic Word (*verbum προφητικόν*) and the Word which is in God (*verbum ἐνδιάθετον*) which we have been speaking of thus far are never dissociated or separated from the personal Word (*λόγος ὑποστατικός*), through whom God speaks and works. There can be no prophetic Word apart from the personal Word. Calov, commenting on the "God said" of Gen. 1:3 makes this especially clear:

The word "God said" does not merely mean a Word of command; but inasmuch as God does not command anything or do anything except through His hypostatic Word, "through whom all things were made" (John 1:3), the term "God said" must in this instance where the creation of things is spoken of be taken, on the one hand, as the Word by whom God the Father spoke, the hypostatic Word, through whom the Father speaks and works and without whom He neither speaks nor works, and, on the other hand, as the

Word which He spoke or uttered, the prophetic Word, the Word of command, as a divine impulse (*motus divinus*).¹⁴

In this connection it is only proper to say that the words of God are more than mere words, they are deeds (*res*). And the personal Word is not merely the Logos through whom God speaks to man, but He is the Heart and Center of all the prophetic Word (*scopus ac centrum ad quod referuntur omnia in Scripturis . . . immo epitome & summa universae Scripturae*).¹⁵

Now all this is the background to the language of orthodoxy in calling Scripture the Word of God. The position of orthodoxy might be termed the older *vere et proprie* view in contrast to what I might call the modern equivocal view. As an example of this modern view allow me for purposes of comparison to quote something written by C. H. Dodd:

It is often claimed that the Bible must be an infallible external authority, because it is "the Word of God." God certainly is the author of truth; if He has spoken, His Word must possess absolute authority. Let us hold to that maxim: authority belongs to God, and what He says, and that alone, infallibly compels assent. But in the expression "the Word of God" lurks an equivocation. A word is properly a means of communicating thought, through vibrations of the vocal cords, peculiar to the human species. The Eternal has neither breath nor vocal cords; how should He speak words? Clearly enough the term "Word of God" is a metaphorical expression. We mean by it, a means whereby the "thought" of God, which is the truth,

is mediated to the human mind. That the Bible as a whole is such a means will be maintained throughout this book. But in the literal sense the Bible consists of the "words" of men—or rather of their visible symbols in writing. It is not the utterance of God in the same sense in which it is the utterance of men. Not God but Paul is the author of the Epistle to the Romans, though in a transferred sense we may describe the Epistle to the Romans as a "Word of God," meaning that in some way it mediates to the reader the truth which is the thought of God. 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. The importance of this fairly obvious and elementary distinction is that it exposes the fallacy of arguing from an admission that the Bible is "the Word of God" to the conclusion that it must possess God's own infallibility. The words of a man, assuming that they are the deliberate expression of his meaning, command just that measure of authority which we recognize in the man himself.¹⁶

Compare now this statement of Dodd's with the following words of John Gerhard, and you will discern the diversity between the two views. Gerhard says:

If you read the letter of a friend, you are persuaded that you are hearing there the voice and sentiment of that friend. If you hear the judgment of a ruler repeated from a document, you conclude that you are hearing the decision of that same ruler. Now the Word of God is set forth for us in the canonical Scriptures. Hence in those writings and through the Scriptures God speaks to us. Thus this Scripture is called

¹⁴ A. Calov, *Commentarius in Genesis* (Wittebergae, 1671), I, 148.

¹⁵ Calov, *Systema*, I, 457.

¹⁶ *The Authority of the Bible* (London, 1958), p. 16.

the oracle of God; because indeed it is the voice of God.¹⁷

A word must now be said regarding the doctrine of the efficacy of Scripture in the theology of orthodoxy, for this bears on our previous discussion. What orthodox Lutherans taught on the power of the Word of God follows directly from their concept of the Word of God. When they speak of the efficacy of the Word they are not thinking of Scripture specifically, but of the divine Word in general, whatever mode of expression it may assume. It is not my present concern to trace their proofs for their position. Suffice it to say that Quenstedt, for instance, devotes about 75 percent of his entire dogmatics to the exegesis of pertinent passages. I merely want to point up very briefly the connection between what they say on this point with what they have previously taught on the Word of God in general.

The Word of God, the *verbum προφορικόν*, has the intrinsic power to convert men. It is the means of grace (*vehiculum*) through which the Holy Spirit works conversion and faith and other spiritual effects. It is not a passive instrument, as a stone is passive which a man throws against a window. It is an *instrumentum cooperativum* (Baier). This may recall what Calov said above, that the Word of God is action, *res, motus*. The power of the written and preached Word resides only in the *forma*. It is a power which resides in the Word, not a power which sporadically enters the Word from without, where and when it pleases God. The Word is never *otiosum* but always *operosum*. And although the power of the Word can be resisted, it is

never separated from the Word. That is to say, whenever and wherever the Word is preached or read or pondered it is God's power. The Word is powerful even *ante et extra usum*, for *actus secundus praesupponit primum*: i.e., if the Word is powerful in action it is powerful before action. The Word is God's power because it is God's Word. God's Word, simply because it is God's Word, has the same attributes as God Himself. Here we see the implications of the old Lutheran doctrine of the Word of God. Naturally such a teaching would be quite unsatisfactory to Calvinists and enthusiasts of every kind who held that the Word of God, written or preached, viewed formally or materially, was dead and powerless until the Spirit of God entered the scene. Today we are faced with an exact repristination of this attitude in the theology of Barth, who says, "The Bible is God's Word so far as God lets it be His Word," according to "God's free act in which and through which here and now He lets it be true in us and for us, that man's words in the Bible is His own Word, etc., etc."¹⁸

To all the objections and pleadings of the Reformed and the enthusiasts the orthodox Lutherans reply that the power of God and the power of His Word are the same. The work of the Spirit of God and the work of the Word are not two works, nor are they the union of two distinct operations, but they are one work, a unity of result (*unitas αποτελέσματος seu effectus*) and a unity of operation (*unitas ενεργείας & operationes*). God cannot be separated from His Word. Any Word which proceeds from God brings God

¹⁷ *Loci theologici*, Locus I, cap. VII, par. 455, II, 360.

¹⁸ *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1, 123.

with it. We note here the Christological emphasis in this doctrine of the Word: the Word brings Christ, He is in the Word, He confronts us in the Word.¹⁹ Here we see also the soteriological orientation so fundamental in Lutheranism's doctrine of the Word. And we see finally the active and dynamic nature of Lutheranism's doctrine of the Word.²⁰ To all this the Reformed could only complain that the Lutherans had deified Scripture. The reply was that it is not wrong to deify what is already divine. The Scriptures considered formally as the *mens Dei* and *consilium Dei* are not to be thought of as a creature of God which could be deified. It is not correct to say that what is not Creator is creature. The Word of God must be considered a *creatio* which is certainly not *Creator*, but at the same time is not *creatura*. The Word is what Paul speaks of in 1 Cor. 2 when he refers to τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ. Therefore certain Lutheran theologians call the Word something of God (*aliquid Dei*), a sort of divine effluence

¹⁹ Calov, *Systema*, IX, 1 ff.

²⁰ Cf. Calov, *Systema*, IX, 3: The Word of God is that which proceeds from the mouth of God through the mouth of a minister. It is animated by virtue of divine ordination with the divine power to work faith in us who hear it and do not resist the Holy Spirit, thus bringing us to eternal salvation.

The Word does not proceed from the mouth of God in such a way that it is separated from God; for then it would not possess that divine power which is in reality identical with the very nature of God. Rather the Word makes its outward impact not only by striking man's ears but by carrying with it that outreaching power, by bringing that power into our hearts and engrafting it there, provided we receive the Word with meekness. For it is the ἔμψυτος λόγος, the engrafted Word, δυνάμενος σώσαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:21)

(ἀπόρροια *quaedam divina*). What is meant here is that the Word of God can never be separated from God, just as my word can never be separated from me. On this view I can hear a sermon drawn from Scripture or read the words of Scripture and say, "That is God's Word; that is God speaking," in much the same way as I can sit in my living room listening to my hi-fi and say, "That is Maria Callas singing," although I have never met or seen the woman directly. Her singing is a part of her. In a more meaningful sense God's Word is a part, an ἀπόρροια, of God. For what is God to me apart from His Word? This, I believe, represents the thinking of our Lutheran Fathers on the doctrine of the Word.

III. INERRANCY

The position of Lutheran orthodoxy on the question of the inerrancy of Scripture is well known and clear. I shall quote several short and concise statements which illustrate the orthodox position and the reasons of the orthodox for taking such a stand. It will be remembered that in speaking of Scripture as the Word of God the old Lutheran teachers were always thinking primarily of the divine *forma*. Inerrancy, however, like inspiration, must be identified with both *forma* and *materia*. First a brief statement from Quenstedt:

The prophets and apostles spoke and wrote not from the decision and impulse of their own free will, or as Scripture says, ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν, of themselves (John 11:51; 16:13) but ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι, that is, led and moved by the Holy Spirit, or as Θεοφόρητοι. If this is true, then it follows that they could in no manner make mistakes in their writing, and no falsification, no error, no danger of error,

no untruth existed or could exist in their preaching or writing because the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth and the Fountain of all wisdom and who had as His hand and pen the holy writers, cannot deceive or be deceived, neither can He err or have a lapse of memory.²¹

Next a quote from Calov:

Because Scripture is God's Word, which is absolutely true, Scripture is itself truth (Ps. 119:43, 86, 142, 160; John 17:17, 19; cf. 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 33:4; Gal. 3:1; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:1 and James 1:18). Thus whatever the Sacred Scriptures contain is fully true and to be accepted with utmost certainty. Not only must we hold that to be true which is set forth in Scripture concerning faith and mores, but we must hold to everything that happens to be included therein. Inasmuch as Scripture has been written by an immediate and divine impulse and all the Scriptures recognize Him for their Author who cannot err or be mistaken in any way (Heb. 6:18), no untruth or error or lapse can be ascribed to the God-breathed Scripture, lest God Himself be accused.²²

From both of these passages it is apparent that inerrancy derives from the divine origin of Scripture. Because Scripture comes to us from God it can contain no contradiction or error of fact. Ultimately all the arguments for inerrancy are reduced to this one proof. Therefore I need not belabor this point any further.

To appreciate the position of orthodoxy on this matter, however, we must understand why they took the stand they did

²¹ *Systema*, Pars I, Caput IV, Sectio 2, Quaestio 5, p. 79.

²² *Systema*, I, 462.

and precisely what they meant by inerrancy.

A. We find our orthodox Lutheran theologians attacking a great number of other teachers who took a more liberal view on the question of inerrancy, Romanists, Socinians, Arminians, and Reformed. It should not surprise us that so many were thinking along freer lines. Empiricism and the scientific method were coming into their own in the 17th century and were gaining ascendancy over men's minds, especially the minds of men of letters—including theologians. It was a growing opinion among learned men that Scripture must be read and understood in the light of empirical evidence. August Pfeiffer speaks against the "Cartesians" of his time who said that Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the philosophy and science of the day, and if there is no agreement we must be content that the writers of Scripture wrote according to common contemporary opinions, and therefore could not speak the truth in all matters.²³ Pfeiffer answers: "We grant that when Scripture speaks of divine and profound matters it speaks to the understanding of its day, limited as it was (*loqui ad captum hominis, etiam plebii*)." But he would not take the next step: "But we deny that Scripture speaks according to common errors in things of nature." The point I wish to make is this: Even though it be granted that the apparent conflict between conclusions drawn from empirical data and statements of Scripture was not so intense as today, the orthodox theologians of the 17th century were very alive

²³ *Theaurus Hermeneuticus* (Lipsiae et Francofurti, 1704), p. 25.

to the issue and faced it squarely. Their statements on the inerrancy of Scripture were not made in a vacuum. The teachers of the previous century had not made such full statements on the subject. It was after struggle and study that they said what they felt had to be said on this matter.

B. There are two kinds of error with which Scripture can be charged and which concerned the later orthodox Lutherans: (1) Cases in which one section of Scripture does not cohere or harmonize with another section in which Scripture seemingly contradicts itself. Here is a conflict which is analytic. (2) Cases in which statements of Scripture do not seem to correspond to the apparent data in the external world (astronomy, geography, topography, etc.) or to the accepted facts of history. Here is a conflict which is synthetic. It is perhaps with the first problem that the Lutheran theologians are most concerned. However, as we shall see, they are also alive to the second problem. How they meet each problem I shall now trace in some detail.

1. The first problem is faced by all the theologians of orthodoxy. This was an old question which plagued every serious theologian who read his Bible and found apparent discrepancies there. The tendency of many of the orthodox Lutherans, at least in their systematic works, is at first to dismiss the problem by asserting *a priori* that contradictions in Scripture are only apparent, inasmuch as God, the Author of Scripture, cannot lie or contradict Himself. Thus we find Gerhard saying, "All Scripture is inspired and accordingly all the things in Scripture are in some agreement and are not contrary or opposed to each

other."²⁴ However, in their exegetical works the theologians of the era take great pains to explain and clear up the difficulties and apparent discrepancies in Scripture. Notable but not unique in this connection is a book by Michael Walther which we might consider briefly. The book is entitled *Harmonia biblica, sive brevis et plana conciliatio locorum Veteris et Novi Testamenti apparenter sibi contradicentium* (Noribergae, 1654).²⁵ The book is over 1000 pages long. Walther insists at the start that there can be no contraries, or contradictions, in Scripture. If contradictions seem to occur, it must be remembered what makes two statements contradictory: (a) they do not speak to the same termini in number and order, (b) they do not refer to the same part of the subject, (c) at the same time, and (d) in the same sense, (e) the one statement affirms and the other denies. Walther argues deductively from the divine origin of Scripture, from the fact that Scripture is God's Word; and what God speaks, though it may not be clear to us, is clear in itself. Otherwise we could not pray with the psalmist that we might learn the will of God (Ps. 143:10). Contradictions in Scripture would be due to God, to the penmen, or to the interference of the later church. One can only answer that God cannot lie, the penmen were moved by the Spirit and protected from error, and the providence of God does not allow the church to defile His holy Word.

Walther lists many reasons for apparent

²⁴ *Tractatus de legitima Scripturae Sacrae interpretatione* (Jenae, 1663), p. 25.

²⁵ Cf. S. Glassius, *Philologia sacra*, editio nova (Lipsiae, 1713). A Pfeiffer, *Dubia vexata Scripturae Sacrae* (Dresdae, 1678)

contradictions in Scripture and for the fact that no immediate solution is found to these problems. (a) Ignorance of the original languages, its peculiarities, figures of speech, etc. (b) Equivocation and ambiguity of language, cf. Mark 12:43, where Christ uses the term "more" equivocally, in the sense that one gives "more" according to his ability. (c) Neglect of context. (d) Hasty consideration of the attendant circumstances of the text, e.g., ignoring the person speaking or spoken to, or the time, place, mode, scope, of the statement. (e) Overhasty linking and relating of Bible passages. Statements which speak of diverse things cannot be contradictory. (f) Misuse of our reason, which does not understand the things of God. To attempt to understand and then to harmonize the things of God is Sadduceism. (g) Failure to pray over our difficulties. Walther next offers general rules of hermeneutics which sometimes help to solve our difficulties, and finally he takes up book by book, and very meticulously, the specific discrepancies which seem to occur in Scripture.

2. The second problem, pertaining to the possibility of errors of fact in Scripture, was fully as troublesome as the first. But the problem was not dodged by the orthodox theologians. It must be repeated that these men were not living in a pre-scientific age. They were aware of the issues that faced them in this matter and of the implications of affirming a doctrine of inerrancy of Scripture. They were in fact better equipped to meet the onslaught of empiricism in their day than we are today, first because they had fewer problems of this nature to cope with, and second because they were more broadly educated than we in our specialized age.

(Calov, for instance, was an authority on law and philosophy, a first-rate mathematician and logician, and he wrote books on all these subjects. His outlines in philosophy contained sections on every branch of learning.)

In his *Systema* Calov (so also Dannhauer, Hollaz, Quenstedt) devotes special attention to the following question:

Whether faith should be extended to those matters in Scripture which do not pertain expressly to religion, such as refer to the physical sciences, mathematics, etc., or whether these things are spoken of only in a rough manner (παχυλῶς)?²⁶

Calov answers the question, "In the whole Scripture there can be no error, not even in minor matters, no memory failures, no untruth."²⁷ Quenstedt proffers a more elaborate answer to the question:

The holy canonical Scriptures in their original text are the infallible truth and are free from every error, that is to say, in the sacred canonical Scriptures there is no untruth, no falsehood, no error, not even a minor one, either in content or words, but each and everything which is presented to us in Scripture is most true, whether it pertains to doctrine, ethics, history, chronology, topography, or onomastics, and no ignorance or lapse of memory can or should be ascribed to the amanuenses of the Holy Spirit in their writing of holy Scriptures.²⁸

It is of interest to trace how Calov attacks this question. He begins with a reference to several prevalent opinions of his day. First, it was quite commonly held among certain philosophers and others that Scrip-

²⁶ I, 606 ff.

²⁷ *Systema*, I, 551.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, Pars I, caput IV, sectio II, Quaestio 5, p. 77.

ture spoke in a careless fashion when mentioning matters not pertaining to the real purpose of Scripture. Accordingly, no apodictic certainty can be derived from anything Scripture says on such matters (e.g., it would be improper to seek proofs from Scripture for a theory on the movement of the earth). Second, Socinians and certain Arminians taught that Christ in His conversations accommodated Himself to errors and to the ordinary misconceptions of the day. The apostles did the same, and they did so purposely. It was therefore not necessary to accept the events recounted in Scripture as true or to believe the sermons offered therein, unless a chief article of faith was involved. Calov, of course, did not wholly reject such a theory of accommodation. He taught a doctrine of condescension (*συνκατάβασις*) according to which the Spirit of God caused Scripture to be recorded not only in the accustomed speech and style of the holy writers but also in a style which was clear and well suited to the hearers and readers.²⁹ This was the general persuasion of all the orthodox Lutherans. Dannhauer, for instance, says:

The Holy Scripture often adjusts its language not so much to the actual existence of a thing as to the common opinion of men, as when it calls Joseph the father of Christ because this was what was thought by the common people, or when it says that stars fall from heaven, because uninformed people think comets are stars.³⁰

We learned above that August Pfeiffer held the same view. But with one voice the orthodox Lutherans insist that the Scrip-

tures do not accommodate themselves to error.

We now continue our sketch of Calov's discussion on inerrancy. He is speaking against the Socinian position that what does not refer directly to matters of faith in Scripture is not necessarily true. He argues that should Scripture say anything clearly false in matters not pertaining to salvation, it will not be free of error. Either it will have to be considered no longer the Word of God in all things which it touches, or God speaking in this Word makes Himself liable for error. "Such thinking is irreverent." God will not sponsor error in order to avoid a possible greater danger of misunderstanding (Rom. 3:8). What God says in His Word is never only probable, but always infallible, and this in whatever area it may touch. It is as absurd as it is irreverent to suppose that a divine testimony does not in all points require of us *fides divina* in God, who is speaking. If there be errors in Scripture, then Pyrrhonism inevitably results. All Scripture becomes suspect, and we have only academic probability also in those matters which pertain to our salvation. After contending for the inerrancy of Scripture by appealing to its divine origin and its nature as God's Word, Calov offers this final summary statement, which I think is worth quoting:

If the source of theology (divine revelation) is not entirely infallible, sure, and certain, but is only probable and limited to its day (*topicum*), then no theological conclusions are infallible and sure, for a conclusion cannot be more certain than its own proper and legitimate basis. If this axiom, "Whatever God has spoken is infallibly true and to be believed with complete assurance," is not categorically

²⁹ *Systema*, I, 575.

³⁰ *Hermeneutica sacra* (Argentorati, 1654), p. 409.

binding, but is made relative and doubtful, then some things have been spoken and promulgated by God that are only probable and not to be held with certainty as being absolutely necessary (*apodicticam*). In that case, who could make any definite affirmation or conclusion in theology about anything that is set forth in God's Word and say that it is certainly true and worthy of all acceptance?

Calov concludes his testimony with the well-known words of St. Augustine, "Admisso in tantum autoritatis fastigium aliquo mendacio nulla particula horum librorum manebit."

One final contribution of Calov to the whole question of inerrancy must be noted. Like many of the other orthodox theologians he lists in his discussion of inerrancy a number of general rules of interpretation which might serve to reveal what at first sight appears to be an error or contradiction in Scripture is no such thing. He recognizes, of course, that many problems will not be solved and many solutions will be only tentative and perhaps hazardous. It is in his exegetical works that he tackles these problems with vigor. The following are some of the rules which he presents. It will be noticed that Calov here combines the question of errors of fact and the question of contradictions in Scripture; his suggested helps apply to both questions.

a. Statements which are simply repeated or which portray a common opinion of the day are not to be taken as stating the truth expressly (*Locutiones Spiritus S. κατὰ μίμησιν non accipiendae, quasi κατ' ἀλήθειαν dicantur*).

b. That which is spoken to a relative situation must not be taken as though it

were set forth as an absolute assertion (*Quae relative dicuntur, non accipiendae, q. assertive prolata*).

c. Things are often described in Scripture in a phenomenal manner, not as they really are (*In Scriptura nonnunquam res describitur ut est φαινομένως et κατὰ δόξαν, non κατὰ τὸ εἶναι*). This observation (pre-Kantian) is quite significant. We can see how such a rule could be helpful in solving certain apparent discrepancies between the statements of Scripture and the conclusions of science.

d. Holy writers, inspired as they were, sometimes preach and urge things as spokesmen of God, sometimes as private individuals.

e. When two authors do not offer the same arrangement or chronology in presenting material, this does not in any way imply a contradiction. August Pfeiffer and others also dealt with this matter. Pfeiffer³¹ says that we must accord the Holy Spirit freedom in such matters. Discrepancies of chronology and numbering, etc., must be ascribed to the different circumstances in which the authors lived, and naturally we do not know these circumstances as well as they.

f. Specific statements sometimes modify general statements.

g. Certain historical occurrences are spoken of in Scripture according to a *hysteron proteron*.

h. Different names for the same object often make Scripture appear to contradict itself.

i. Scripture sometimes spreads out time for the sake of harmony and consistency.

j. Scripture often speaks in round num-

³¹ *Critica sacra*, p. 94.

bers (*nonnulla dicuntur per rotundationem numerorum*).

k. Sometimes occurrences which have only begun are spoken of in Scripture as though they were already completed.

l. Future events are sometimes presented in Scripture as having already happened.

m. Scripture employs the words of the world and of ordinary language to speak of things which concern God and eternity.

n. Sometimes precepts are set down in Scripture by example, not in so many words (*non κατὰ γράμμα sed κατὰ πρᾶγμα*).

o. Often the so-called mystical sense must be preferred to the literal sense of Scripture.

With these simple and helpful rules of Calov I conclude the discussion of inerrancy in the theology of orthodoxy. A few closing remarks might be made.

As I stated in my introduction I have tried to find the thoughts of Lutheran orthodoxy on specific points of concern. I have not presented a complete or balanced summary of orthodoxy's doctrine of the Word. If it is true that a person's theology is always governed somewhat by concerns of his times, then we can safely say that Lutheran orthodoxy in its treatment of the Word of God (whether considered in the section *de Scriptura* or the section *de Evangelio*) is interested in maintaining two points: (1) the principle of *sola Scriptura*, that Scripture is the only *principium cognoscendi*. Verbal inspiration, inerrancy, perfection all serve to bolster this principle. (2) The power of the Word of God (of which I have said rather little). These were Luther's concerns also, and I believe that they should be ours today.

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