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# Notes on the Inerrancy of Scripture<sup>1</sup>

ROBERT PREUS

This study is offered as an approach to the problem of the inerrancy of Scripture as it concerns the Lutheran Church today. The attempt is to present a position that agrees with Scripture's testimony concerning itself and with the historic position of the Christian church. At the same time the attempt is made to be timely and to take into account contemporary issues raised by modern Biblical theology.

Here we shall try to delineate and clarify what is meant by the inerrancy of Scripture, what is the basis of this doctrine, and what are its implications. It is not our purpose to become involved in the technicalities that have often obscured the doctrine or to traverse the labyrinth of intricate discussion that frequently belabors studies of this basic theological truth.

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: This essay was originally given in oral presentation to several study groups and conferences. It is offered here as a part of the ongoing discussion on Scriptural inerrancy within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. For an earlier article on this topic in this journal see Arthur Carl Piepkorn, *What Does "Inerrancy" Mean?* in Vol. 36, No. 8 (Sept. 1965), pp. 577—593. See also *A Statement on the Form and Function of the Holy Scriptures*, Vol. 31, No. 10 (Oct. 1960), pp. 626 f.

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Indeed, a brief treatment such as we are about to give cannot possibly solve the many hermeneutical and isagogical problems that touch upon the inerrancy of Scripture. Yet hermeneutical and isagogical concerns cannot be avoided in a study of this nature. Therefore we have endeavored to lay down general principles concerning these matters which will comport with the inerrancy and sole authority of Scripture. Our procedure will be as follows: we shall begin with a very general definition (thesis) of inerrancy, a definition that will express the conviction of the orthodox church from her beginning to the present time. We shall next explain and justify our definition with a series of subtheses or corollaries. Finally we shall with a series of adjunct comments attempt to relate the inerrancy of Scripture to hermeneutical principles and other concerns so as to clarify just what is included in this inerrancy of Scripture and what is not.

## THESIS

In calling the sacred Scriptures inerrant we recognize in them (A), as words taught by the Holy Spirit (B), that quality which makes them overwhelmingly (C) reliable witnesses (D—E) to the words and deeds of the God who has in His inspired spokesmen and in His incarnate Son disclosed Himself to men for their salvation (F).<sup>2</sup>

This definition is very general, seeking

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<sup>2</sup> Majuscule letters A-F refer to the six corollaries which will shortly be given in support and clarification of the major thesis.

as it does to fit all the Biblical data (for example, the bold language of prophecy and of adoration, the promises concerning the world to come for which human experience offers only imperfect and insufficient analogies, the expressive and indispensable anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms used of God, the symbolic use of numbers and other referents in books like Daniel and Revelation, etc.). The definition also agrees, however, with what the church catholic has believed and confessed through her entire history. We offer a few typical examples to bring out this fact.

Augustine, *Epist.* 82, to Jerome: "Only to those books which are called canonical have I learned to give honor so that I believe most firmly that no author in these books made any error in writing . . . I read other authors not with the thought that what they have thought and written is true just because they have manifested holiness and learning!"

Thomas Aquinas, *In Iob. 13, lect. 1*: "It is heretical to say that any falsehood whatsoever is contained either in the gospels or in any canonical Scripture."

Luther (*W*<sup>2</sup> 15, 1481): "The Scriptures have never erred." (*W*<sup>2</sup> 9, 356): "It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself; it only appears so to senseless and obstinate hypocrites."

*Preface to the Book of Concord* (Tappert, p. 8): "We have in what follows purposed to commit ourselves exclusively and only, in accordance with the pure, infallible, and unalterable Word of God, to that Augsburg Confession which was submitted to Emperor Charles V at the great imperial assembly in Augsburg in the year 1530." *Large Catechism* (Baptism 57 [Tappert, p. 444]): "My neighbor and I—

in short, all men—may err and deceive, but God's Word cannot err." *Formula of Concord* (Ep VII, 13 [Tappert, p. 483]): "God's Word is not false nor does it lie."

Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum* (Wittenberg, 1655—1657), I, 462: "Because Scripture is God's Word which is absolutely true, Scripture is itself truth (Ps. 119:43, 86, 142, 160; John 17:17, 19; 2 Sam. 7:28; Ps. 33:4; Gal. 3:1; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:18; 3:8; Titus 1:1; and James 1:8). 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 presented in Scripture relative to faith and morals, 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 as 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 Scriptures, lest God Himself be accused."

Turretin, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Genevae, 1688), I, 79: "We deny that there are any true and real contradictions in Scripture. Our reasons are as follows: namely, that Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), that the Word of God cannot lie or be ignorant of what has happened (Ps. 19:8-9; Heb. 6:18) and cannot be set aside (Matt. 5:18), that it shall remain forever (1 Peter 1:25), and that it is the Word of truth (John 17:17). Now how could such things be predicated of Scripture if it were not free of contradictions, or if God were to allow the holy writers to err and lose their memory or were to allow hopeless blunders to enter into the Scriptures?"

C. F. W. Walther (*Lehre und Wehre*, 21, 35): "Whoever believes with all his heart that the Bible is the Word of God cannot believe anything else than that it is inerrant."

C. F. W. Walther (*Lehre und Wehre*, 14, 4): "Whoever thinks that he can find one error in holy Scripture does not believe in holy Scripture but in himself; for if he accepted everything else as true, he would believe it not because Scripture says so but because it agrees with his reason or his sentiments." (Translation in CTM, 10, 4, p. 255).

*Brief Statement:* "Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters. (John 10:35)"

Tromp, *De Sacrae Scripturae Inspiratione* (Rome, 1953), p. 121: "Everything which is contained in sacred Scripture, as attested by the author and in the sense intended by him, is infallibly true."

*Dei Verbum* of Vatican II (See *Verbum Domini*, 44, 1 [1966], p. 8; also *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, S. J. [New York, 1966], p. 119): "Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully and without error {*firmiter, fideliter et sine errore*} the truth which God wanted put into the Sacred Writings for the sake of our salvation."

Such statements written under different circumstances and at different times evince

the remarkable unanimity on this matter which obtained in the church throughout her history. The statements also indicate or infer the following six corollaries which will serve to delineate and further explain our definition.

#### *Corollary A*

This "recognition" of the truthfulness of the written Word of God is not primarily intellectual: it takes place in the obedience of faith. The truthfulness and reliability of the Scriptures is an article of faith.

#### *Corollary B*

The basis of inerrancy rests on the nature of Scripture as God's Word. Inerrancy is an inextricable concomitant of inspiration. Our conviction is that since Scripture is truly and properly speaking God's Word, it will not deceive nor err.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly this is an inference (as in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity or the two natures of Christ), but it is a necessary inference, because God is faithful and His Word (Scripture) is truth—and no Christian theologian until the period of Rationalism ever shrank from this inference. It is to be noted that both Christ and the apostles drew the same inference. (See not only John 10:34; Mark 12:24; Matt. 5:18-19

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Nicolau et I. Salaverri, S. J., *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (Madrid, 1958), I, 1095: "Inerrantiam Scripturae non derivari praecise ex fine scriptoris, ad illa tantum quae ipse docere intendit, sed derivari ex natura inspirationis, ad illa omnia quae vi huius influxus asseruntur." The alluding to many contemporary Roman Catholic sources in notes does not necessarily imply full agreement with these statements or that we should use these statements in any final study on inerrancy. The statements are, for the most part, quite sound and useful. The fact is that Roman Catholics are the majority of those who write on inerrancy today from a point of view similar to ours.

but also Christ's and the apostles' use of the Old Testament; they simply cite it as unconditionally true and unassailable.)

#### Corollary C

Our recognition of the reliability of the witness of Scripture is graciously *imposed* on us by the Spirit of God and this through the power of Scripture itself.

#### Corollary D

The nature of inerrancy is essentially twofold: Scripture does not lie or deceive, and Scripture does not err or make mistakes in any affirmation it makes (*falsum formale* and *falsum materiale*). In other words, the holy writers, moved by the Spirit of God, infallibly achieve the intent of their writing (see the statement of Tromp above). This is what is meant when we say that Scripture is a *reliable witness* to the words and deeds of God. Of His people God demands in the second and eighth commandments that they tell the truth; of His prophets and apostles, that they do not lie. God will not countenance lying and prevarication (Prov. 14:5; 19:22; Ps. 63:11; Jer. 23:25 ff.; Zeph. 3:13; Acts 5:3; 1 John 2:21, 27). And God Himself will not lie or deceive (Prov. 30:6-7; Num. 23:19; Ps. 89:35; Heb. 6:18). In His written Word He will not break or suspend that standard of truth which He demands of His children. Thus we hear frequently from God's inspired witnesses the claim that they do not deceive, that they are not mistaken, that they tell the truth (Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Gal. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:7). The whole impact of entire books of the Bible depends on the authoritative and truthful witness of the writer. (John 21:24; 1 John 1:1-5a; 2 Peter 1:15-18)

Pertinent to what was just said is the following. The truth of the sacred Scriptures must be determined from the sense which is intended (in verse, pericope, book) by the author. This sense in turn must be determined according to sound hermeneutical rules.

It is obvious that such a position on the nature of Biblical inerrancy is predicated on a correspondence idea of truth which in part means this: declarative statements (at least in those Biblical genres, or literary forms, which purport to be dealing with fact or history) of Scripture are, according to their intention, true in that they correspond to what has taken place (for example, historical statements), to what obtains (for example, theological affirmations and other affirmations concerning fact), or to what will take place (for example, predictive prophecy). It really ought to go without saying that with all its different genres and figures of speech, Scripture, like all cognitive discourse, operates under the rubrics of a correspondence idea of truth. (See John 8:46; Eph. 4:25; 1 Kings 8:26; 22:16, 22 ff.; Gen. 42:16, 20; Deut. 18:22; Ps. 119:163; Dan. 2:9; Prov. 14:25; Zech. 8:16; John 5:21-32 ff.; Acts 24:8, 11; 1 Tim. 1:15; note, too, the forensic picture which haunts all of Scripture—for example, such concepts as witness, testimony, judge, the Eighth Commandment, etc.; John 21:24.)

To speak of inerrancy of purpose (that God achieves His purpose in Scripture) or of Christological inerrancy of Scripture is indeed relevant to the general question of inerrancy, but may at the same time be misleading if such a construct is understood as constituting the nature of inerrancy—for then we might speak of the

inerrancy of Luther's Small Catechism or of a hymn by Paul Gerhardt, since they successfully achieve their purpose.

The first purpose of Scripture is to bring us to faith in Christ (John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:15). Involved with this prime purpose of Scripture is Luther's doctrine of the Christocentricity of Scripture (Old Testament as well as New Testament). Such Christocentricity has a soteriological purpose. Only when I understand that Scripture and Christ are *pro me* will I understand the Scriptures (or the inerrancy thereof). But to say that Scripture is inerrant only to the extent that it achieves its soteriological purpose is a misleading position if it is made to be identical with inerrancy or confused with it. How does Scripture achieve this soteriological purpose? By cognitive language, among other things. By presenting *facts*, by telling a history (Old Testament as well as New Testament). To say that there is a purpose in Scripture but no intentionality (that is, intent to give meaning) in the individual books or sections or verses, or to maintain that Scripture is inerrant in its eschatological purpose but not in the intentionality of its individual parts and pericopes would not only be nonsense, reducing all Scripture to the level of some sort of mystical utterances, but would be quite un-Scriptural (Luke 1:1-4, etc.). The eschatological purpose of Scripture does not cancel or vitiate or render trivial and unimportant the cognitive and factual content of assertions (and the truth of assertions) throughout the Scripture, but requires all this (Rom. 15:4). And on the other hand, formal and material inerrancy does not threaten or eclipse the Christological purpose of Scripture but supports it. Nor does

such a position (formal and material inerrancy) become tantamount to reading Scripture atomistically. Language is a primary structure of lived experience and cannot be studied in isolation from it. Because the language of imagery in Scripture may not always be adequately analyzed or ever completely exhausted implies neither that it is meaningless (positivism) nor that it is errant ("Christian" positivism). Not orthodoxy but neoorthodoxy has a positivistic, wooden theory of language.<sup>4</sup>

#### Corollary E

Inerrancy is plenary or absolute. 1) It pertains not only to the substance of the doctrines and narratives in Scripture, but also to those things which are nonessential, adjunct, *obiter dicta*, or things clearly assumed by the author. (Quenstedt, *Systema*, I, 77: "Doctrine, ethics, history, chronology, topography, or onomastics." *Brief Statement*: "historical, geographical, and other secular matters"). 2) It covers not only the primary intent of the various pericopes and verses but also the secondary intent (for example, a passing historical reference within the framework of narrative, such as that Christ was crucified between two thieves, that wise men visited Him at His birth, that Joshua led the Children of Israel into Canaan, that Ruth was a Moabitess, Nimrod a hunter, etc.), not only soteriological, eschatological, and religious intent and content of Scripture

<sup>4</sup> Hoepfl insists that inerrancy is made irrelevant when it is said that historical errors do not affect the intent of Scripture. Cf. *Introductio Generalis in Sacram Scripturam* (Rome, 1958), p. 123: "Pro ipsis Protestantibus liberalibus magis 'conservatoribus,' qui inspirationis notionem saltem valde deprimunt, quaestio inerrantiae omnino non existit, cum errores historici fini S. Scripturae non nocent."

but also all declarative statements touching history and the realm of nature.

There are various reasons for this strict position. 1) The New Testament cites what might often be considered to be passing statements or negligible items from the Old Testament, accepting them as true and authoritative (Matt. 6:29; Matt. 12:42; John 10:35). Jesus accepts the basic framework of the Old Testament history, even those aspects of that history which seem unimportant to many today, for example, Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:27), Lot's wife turning to salt, the murder of Abel (Luke 11:51), Naaman (Luke 4:27). The New Testament does not recognize *levicula* in the Old Testament (Rom. 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). 2) The primary intent of a passage or pericope is often dependent on the secondary intent(s). This is so in the nature of the case. For instance, the Exodus as a deliverance of God depends on the miraculous events connected with it. 3) The most common argument for the full inerrancy of Scripture as advanced by the older theologians was as follows: if errors of fact or contradictions are admitted in minor matters recorded in Scripture (matters that do not matter [?]), by what right may one then assume that there is no error in important or doctrinal concerns? How does one determine what matters are important? And does not, after all, everything pertain at least indirectly to doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16)? In other words, to maintain that "things which do matter" in Scripture (doctrinal matters) are inerrant and "things which do not matter" (nondoctrinal matters) are errant is both arbitrary and impossible to apply. (See Calov, *Systema*, I, 606 ff.; also FC SD XI, 12)

### Corollary F

The practical importance of the doctrine must always be recognized; it consists in this, that, as God is true and faithful, the reader of Scripture can have the assurance that he will not be deceived or led astray by anything he reads in God's Word, Holy Scripture. In no discussion of inerrancy do we find merely an academic interest in maintaining purely a traditional position or in hewing to a party line. Such a practical concern must also be emphasized in our day. Any approach to Scripture or method of interpretation which would make of Scripture something less than trustworthy is sub-Christian and does not take Scripture at its own terms. It must also be borne in mind that the truthfulness of Scripture is never an end in itself, but serves the soteriological purpose of Scripture.

### ADJUNCTS TO THE DOCTRINE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

1. Inerrancy does not imply verbal exactness of quotations (for example, the words of institution, the words on Jesus' cross). The New Testament ordinarily quotes the Old Testament according to its sense only, sometimes it only alludes to a pericope or verse in the Old Testament, sometimes there are conflation, and so forth. In the case of extra-Biblical citations we ought to assume that the holy writer stands behind and accepts the truth of his quotation unless the context would indicate otherwise (see 2 Chron. 5:9; 8:8 where there are citations from documents which say that a situation obtains "to this day," that is, when the original document was written). It is helpful to distinguish between the *veritas citationis* (lies, statements of evil men, or the quotation of the

statements of Job's friends, etc.) and the *veritas rei citatae*. (Acts 17:28; Num. 21:14 and possibly 2 Kings 1:18)

2. Inerrancy does not imply verbal or intentional agreement in parallel accounts of the same event. For instance, the portrayal of creation in Gen. 1 and in Job 38 are radically different because of a radical difference in the aim of the author. Again, the different evangelists write about our Lord from different vantage points and out of different concerns: therefore their accounts will differ not only in details (as in the case of any two or three witnesses of the same event) but in aim. We must exercise caution here, however, lest we impose a point of view on an author which cannot be drawn inductively from the Scripture itself. For instance, there is no certain evidence that Matthew is writing for Jews, tying up Christ's life with Old Testament prophecy (John also cites the Old Testament often: 22 times); this is merely a rather safe conjecture. The same may be said concerning John writing on Christ's divinity against Cerinthus. We have no right or good reason to assume that the holy writer tampers with or distorts the facts to maintain a point of view; the evangelists claim to be faithful and careful witnesses (John 21:24; Luke 1:1 ff.). However, it must be clearly recognized that incomplete history or an incomplete presentation of doctrine in a given pericope is not false history or a false presentation.

3. Scripture is replete with figures of speech, for example, metonymy (Luke 16:29), metaphor (Ps. 18:20), personification (Matt. 6:4), synecdoche (Luke 2:1), apostrophe, hyperbole (Matt. 2:3). It should go without saying that figurative

language is not errant language. To assert that Scripture, by rounding numbers and employing hyperbole, metaphors, and so forth, is not concerned about precision of fact (and is therefore subject to error) is to misunderstand the intention of Biblical language. Figurative language (and not modern scientifically "precise" language) is precisely the mode of expression which the sacred writers' purposes demand. To imply that figurative language is *ex hypothesi* meaningless or that it cannot convey information — truthful and, from its own point of view, precise information — is the position of positivism, not the result of sensitive exegesis (for example, "Yanks slaughter Indians" is a meaningful and precise statement). How else does one speak of a transcendent God, of His epiphanies and revelations, than in metaphors and figures of speech? Demetaphorize, deanthropomorphize, and you are often not getting closer to the meaning of such expressions, but losing their meaning. Figurative language, then, meets all the canons necessary for inerrancy: (1) that statements perfectly represent the author's meaning; (2) that statements do not mislead the reader or lead him into error of any kind; and (3) that statements correspond to fact when they purport to deal with fact, and this in the case of poetry as well as in the case of straight narrative.

It must be added at this point that when we interpret or read Scripture we identify ourselves with the writers, not only with their *Sitz im Leben* and their use of language but with their entire spirit and their faith (which is more important, 1 Cor. 2:14-16). We not only understand them but feel and live and experience with them; we become totally involved. To



stand back dispassionately and assess and criticize as a modern man would Shelley or Shakespeare or Homer is to fail to interpret Scripture.

4. Scripture uses popular phrases and expressions of its day, for example, bowels of mercy; four corners of the earth; Joseph is called the father of Christ. No error is involved in the use of such popular expressions. See Ps. 7:9; 22:10.

5. In describing the things of nature Scripture does not employ scientifically precise language, but describes and alludes to things phenomenally as they appear to our senses: for example, the fixity of stellar constellations and the magnitude of the stars (Is. 13:10; Judg. 5:20; Job 38:31; Amos 5:8; Job 9:9); the sun and moon as lights and the implication that the moon is larger than the stars (Gen. 1:16) [it is larger from our vantage point]; the earth as motionless in a fixed position (Eccl. 1:4; Ps. 93:1); the sun as going around the fixed earth (Eccl. 1:5; Matt. 13:6; Eph. 4:26; note that in the Hebrew Bible there is even a phrase for the rising of the sun: *mizrach sbemesb*, which means "east," Ps. 50:1). Phenomenal language also explains why the bat is classified with birds (Lev. 11:19; see Lev. 11:6; Ps. 135:6). Such a classification offers no attempt to be scientific.

Many things in the realm of nature are spoken of in poetic language: the spreading out of the heavens (Is. 40:22; Job 9:8), the foundations of the earth (Job 38:6), the pillars of the earth (Job 9:6) and of heaven (Job 26:11), the ends of the earth (Ps. 67:7; 72:8). Note that there is much apostrophe and hyperbole (Mark 4:31) when Scripture speaks of the things of nature.

In none of the above instances is inerrancy threatened or vitiated. The intention of the passages cited above is not to establish or vouch for a particular world view or scientific explanation of things. Because the language is not scientific does not imply that it is not true descriptively.

6. The various literary forms used by Scripture.

a. Certain alleged forms are not compatible either with the purpose of Scripture or with its inerrancy. For instance, in principle, purely scientific, purely historical, or purely salacious literary forms cannot be reconciled with the serious, practical, theological purpose of Scripture. Specifically, any literary genre that would in itself be immoral or involve deceit or error is not compatible with Biblical inerrancy and is not to be found in Scripture, for example, myth, etiological tale, midrash, legend or saga according to the usual designation of these forms. None of these genres fits the serious theological purpose of Scripture. Thus we do not find Scripture presenting material as factual or historical when in truth it is only mythical. (2 Peter 1:16 ff.; 1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:4)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. Bea, *De Inspiratione et Inerrantia Sacrae Scripturae* (Rome, 1954), p. 44: "Myth is the expression of some religious or cultic idea through personifications which are regarded as divine entities (e.g., the fertility of the earth and of animals—Astarte). Such myths must be distinguished from mythic literary elements (metaphors, personifications) employed from selected mythology for illustrative purposes. Cf. Is. 27:1 (= Ugarit A+I, 1-2?); Ps. 74:12-17; 89:10-14; 48:3; Job 26:7; Is. 32:20. Myth, properly so-called, cannot be found in the sacred Scriptures (cf. EB n. 60-333); however, that literary elements could be used to adorn or illustrate was already granted

b. Apart from the above strictures any form of ancient literature is hypothetically compatible with Biblical inerrancy, for example, allegory (Gal. 4) and fable (Judg. 9:8-15), provided the genre is indicated directly or indirectly. At the same time it does no violence to inerrancy if the language of folklore or mythical elements serves as a means to clothe a Biblical author's presentation of doctrine (for example, "helpers of Rahab" in Job 9:13; "Leviathan" in Job 3:8 and in Ps. 74:12-15; Idumea as inhabited by centaurs, satyrs, and other strange creatures [Is. 34:14], meaning that Idumea will be devastated so that only such animals can live there). We do the same today if in a sermon a pastor refers to a "dog in a manger." As for the midrash, there is no reason to maintain that Scripture cannot employ midrashim any more than other literary forms. In many cases midrash approaches parable in form and purpose. However, the fanciful examples of midrash with the indiscriminate admixture of truth and error and the production of pure fiction to stress a certain lesson is not compatible with the

by the holy Fathers; cf. S. Greg. Nyss, PG 44, 973. On individual passages, see *Biblica* 19 (1938), 444-448; F. Porporato, *Miti e ispirazione biblica*, 1944; id. in *Civ. Catt.* 94 (1943/1), 329-340.

"Midrashim technically speaking are rabbinic literary efforts—writings from that era—which are not strictly exegetical but composed for establishing rules for living (*halachab*). 2 Chron. 13:22 and 24:27 do not use the term in this technical sense, but signify merely 'study' or 'work' (cf. Eissfeldt, *Einl.*, p. 605). Since it arbitrarily confused true and false things, midrash *per se* is excluded by the holy Scriptures (cf. EB n. 474). It can be admitted only if the holy writer clearly indicated that he is writing only for the sake of edification and not for setting forth properly history (cf. EB n. 154)."

historical character and the inerrancy of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

#### 7. Biblical historiography.

a. Some Biblical writers use and cite sources for their history. We must assume that the Biblical author by the way in which he cites sources believes that these sources speak the truth, that they are reliable sources; and therefore he follows them. The contrary contention is certainly possible, but it must be proved in individual cases (implicit citations, see 2 Sam.). In the case of explicit citations (the words of a character in a history) we assume the truth of the matter cited, but this again depends on the intention of the hagiographer. We can assume the truth of the matter cited only if the holy writer formally or implicitly asserts that he approved it and judges to be true what he asserts in the citation. (See Acts 17:29)

<sup>6</sup> See J. M. Lehrmann, *The World of the Midrash* (London, 1961); see also *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, I, 1097: "All literary genres are quite compatible with inspiration, if they are not by their very nature immoral (as in the case of certain classical poetry) or if they do not tend to lead into error. Thus myths considered as false religious fables (e.g., the personification of natural things such as the fertility of the earth as divine beings) is a literary form not consonant with inspiration. But a myth merely cited in Scripture or used as a mere literary adornment may be admitted, but as something merely cited, or as something purely metaphorical. . . . We can even allow that fictitious narratives (are present) in the Scriptures, provided that they are recognized as such and that of necessity the truth related by the words of the story is in the proper sense not historical. Thus there is the allegorical mode of speaking in Scripture, such as we find in the Song of Songs, which is an allegorical song describing the love and mystical union between Jahveh and His people. And it is true that in the different literary forms of Scripture, whether poetical or doctrinal or narrative, (fables) are interspersed."

b. Historical events are not described phenomenally as are the data of nature.<sup>7</sup>

c. The historical genre employed by Scripture is apparently a unique form. As it cannot be judged according to the canons (whatever they may be) of modern scientific historiography, it cannot be judged by the mythological and legendary or even historical forms of ancient contemporary civilizations; for example, we take the ancient Babylonian and Ugaritic accounts of creation as pure myth, but quite clearly the Biblical cannot be taken as such.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bea, p. 45: "History according to appearance' is based upon a false foundation, namely this, that principles which obtain relative to matters of nature can be transferred to historical concerns. Historical sources or general opinion are not 'appearances of happenings'; the telling of a certain happening *per se* does not amount to announcing that something appeared to the senses, as in the realm of nature, nor is it tantamount to say what the common people think about a happening; rather it is the announcing of the happening itself." Cf. also *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, I, 1097: "On the other hand, history is not concerned with phenomena which are continuously apparent and with things which men describe according to appearance, but history concerns itself with things that have happened, just as they have happened" (italics theirs).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Bea, pp. 46—48: "In its own characteristics Israelite writing of history far surpasses all other Semitic historiography. . . . G. Albright, *The Archaeology of Pal.* (1932), 128. . . . In a certain sense Hebrew historiography can be compared with the Hittite (cf. *Annales Mursilis II*, ca. 1353—1325; *Apologia Hattusil.*, ca. 1295—1260), but the Israelitish writing of history surpasses this in liveliness, in its simple manner, and sincere way of narrating, in psychological depth and breadth; in particular it is not a 'courtly' or 'official' manner of narrating. . . .

"The manner of writing among the ancients definitely differs from the modern. Firstly, the ancients considered the writing of history to be an art (cf. Cicero). Thus it was adorned

d. Chronology and genealogies are not presented in Scripture in the full and orderly manner in which we might present a chronicle or family tree today. Scripture often spreads out time for the sake of sym-

greatly, for instance, with fictitious speeches to express certain ideas. Such historiography pays more attention to giving the sense of a speech than to bringing out the exact words; it employs numerical schemata (30, 40, 70); it uses mnemonic techniques (such as etymologies); it is careless concerning exact chronology; it uses genealogies as shortcuts to history; it narrates in 'concentric circles' rather than in straight continuous exposition, etc. Now all of these devices, provided that they are properly considered, in no way conflict with the integrity of the narratives. . . .

"Ancient history is not a genre of its own peculiar type which is less interested in telling the truth than modern history. Rather it has different aims, different ways of exposition from modern history. Therefore it is necessary in the case of all the individual authors to investigate accurately what sources they use, how they make judgments from these sources, what style they employ, what purpose they intend. Only then are we able to assess rightly and judiciously concerning their historical merit. . . .

"The intention of the inspired historiographers is to write *true* history. When they made use of the narrative genre, this presupposes *per se* that they desire to tell of things that *have happened*. . . .

"That these stories have a religious aim does not imply that the *facts* which they refer to are any less true. 'Religious history' is not necessarily fictional narrative. Thus, for instance, the evangelists, although they write with a religious aim in mind, are very careful about the truth of the facts (cf. Lk. 1:1; Jn. 19:35; 1 Jn. 1:1). . . .

"That the facts connected with revelation are sometimes (e. g., in the first eleven chapters of Genesis) presented in a simple manner, a manner accommodated to the comprehension of less cultured men, that they are presented figuratively and anthropomorphically, does not imply that we can call these narratives any less truly historical although they are not history in our modern technical meaning of the term; cf. EB 581, and *Verb. Dom.* 25 (1946), 354—56.

"The Judaic as well as the Christian tradition understood the Biblical narratives in the strictly historical sense; cf. the sayings of Christ

metry or harmony, *hysteron proteron* is often employed, and also prolepsis (John 17:4; 13:31). Again, genealogies often omit many generations. (See 1 Chron. 26:24, where Moses, Gershom, Shebuel are given, covering a period of perhaps more than 400 years; or Heb. 7:9-10, where Levi is said to be in the loins of Abraham, his father, when Melchisedec met him; thus any ancestor is the father of all his descendants.)

8. We must grant that there is often a *sensus plenior* in Scripture pericopes in the sense of 1 Peter 1:10-12. That is to say, the writer of Scripture is not in every respect a child of his time, conditioned by his own cultural milieu, but he often writes for a later age. However, we cannot countenance a *sensus diversus et desperatus relate ad sensus litteralem obviu bagigraphi*, which would conflict with Biblical inerrancy and turn Scripture into a waxen nose. We hold only to a profounder and sometimes more distinct sense than the writer may have perceived as he expressed himself. This has serious implications relative to the New Testament use and interpretation of the Old Testament; the New Testament does not misinterpret or do violence to the Old Testament when it interprets. *Sensus literalis Scripturae unicus est* does not imply that the sacred writer understands the full divine implication of all his words.

(1k. 4:25; 6:3 ff.; 17:32; Matt. 12:40) and the sayings of the apostles (Heb. 11:17-40; 2 Pet. 2:5-8), in which facts of minor or secondary importance are set forth as history. . . . That Christ and the apostles simply 'accommodated' themselves to their own contemporaries cannot be asserted a priori, but must be proved in each individual case where there might seem to be some special reason for granting this."

9. Pseudepigrapha. Pseudonymity in the sense of one writer pretending to be another in order to secure acceptance of his own work is illicit and not compatible with inerrancy. That the motives for such action may be construed as good does not alter the fact that fraud or forgery has been perpetrated. The fact that such a practice was carried on in ancient times does not justify it nor indicate that the practice was considered moral. When in ancient times a pious fraud was found out and the authenticity of a work disproved, the work itself was suspect. (See *Fragmentum Muratorianum*, 5, where the *finctae* letters of Paul to the Laodiceans and the Alexandrians were not accepted by the church for that very reason.)

Pseudonymity must be carefully delimited. Pseudonymity is deliberate fraud (for any reason whatsoever). It has nothing to do with anonymity. Nor would it be pseudonymity if a later writer culled under inspiration all the wisdom sayings of Solomon, gathering them into a volume and presenting them for what they are, Solomon's wisdom. His contemporaries know that Solomon has not written the book, but understand the sayings and the wisdom to be Solomon's (similar to this, that we have the words of Christ in the Gospels). In such a case no deception is involved. In the case of the pastoral epistles such a conclusion could not be assumed by any stretch of the imagination. The letters are written to give the impression that they come directly from Paul, claiming his authority. If they were not in fact Pauline, a deception has taken place, a successful deception until lately.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. I. Packer, "Fundamentalism" and the Word of God (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1958),

10. Etymologies in Scripture are often according to sound and not (obviously) according to modern linguistic analysis. This fact does not affect inerrancy. The ancients are not thinking of etymologies in the modern sense.<sup>10</sup>

pp. 182 ff.; D. Guthrie, *The Pauline Epistles, New Testament Introduction* (London, 1961), pp. 282—294. Cf. also the chapter by Guthrie, "The Development of the Idea of Canonical Pseudepigrapha in New Testament Criticism," in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament* (Theological Collections, No. 4), London, 1965. In another chapter of the same book entitled "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries" Kurt Aland takes the contrary position, that there are pseudepigrapha in the New Testament. Aland insists that psychological considerations and ethical viewpoints cannot be considered in any discussion of the problem of pseudepigrapha; but such a move is, among other things, clearly a proposal to turn the idea of inerrancy out of court and permit no inquiry into its applicability at this point.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Levic, *The Bible, Word of God in Words of Men* (New York, 1962), pp. 220 to 221: "We know that in all countries the common people very often invent as an afterthought etymological explanations for the name of a given place or given tribe on the basis of quite arbitrary associations of ideas or words. Is it legitimate to admit that here too the sacred writer is content to hand down to us the popular derivations customary in his environment, or should we be obliged to believe that, by virtue of inspiration, these derivations are the true linguistic explanations of the words in question, and should therefore be accepted by present-day scholars?"

"It is now generally recognized that the inspired writer is only reporting these attempted etymologies as he found them in the folklore of his country. The literary form he adopts, which is that of popular history, clearly shows that he has no intention of offering us scientific derivations of the modern kind, but popular derivations in the style of his own times.

"Here are a few examples taken from ten chapters of Genesis, 16 to 26: — 16.13 (Atta el Roi); 16.14 (Lackai Roi); 17.17; 18.12-15; 21.6 which give three derivations of the name

11. The inerrancy and the authority of Scripture are inseparably related. This fact has been consistently recognized by Lutheran theologians, who have often included inerrancy and authority under the rubric of infallibility. What is meant is that without inerrancy the *sola scriptura* principle cannot be maintained or practiced. An erring authority for all Christian doctrine (like an erring Word of God) is an impossible and impracticable *contra-dictio in adjecto*.

12. In approaching the Scripture as children of God who are under the Scriptures, we shall do well to recall and observe two basic principles of our Lutheran Fathers: (1) Scripture is *autopistos*, that is to say, we are to believe its utterances simply because Scripture, the Word of God, makes these utterances (inerrancy is always to be accepted on faith!), and we are to believe without the need of any corroborating evidence. This would apply to statements about God but also to statements about events in history. (2) Scripture is *anapodeiktos*, that is, self-authenticating. It brings its own demonstration, the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Again no corroborating evidence is necessary or sought for. Now *sola scriptura* means all this; and it means as well that there are no outside criteria for judging the truthfulness or factual content of Scriptural assertions (for example, neither a modern scientific world view nor modern "scientific historiography"). We ac-

Isaac (these clearly show by their differences that the writer intended to give a simple report and to make no attempt at criticism); 19.22 (Segor); 21.31 (Bersabee); 22.14 (Yahweh Yireh); 25.25 (Jacob); 25.30-1 (Edom); 26.20 (Eseq); 26.21 (Sitna); 26.22 (Rechoboth); 26.33 (Schibea)."

cept the assertions of the Scripture on faith. For instance, the fact that the creation story or the flood or the story of Babel has some parallels in other Semitic and ancient lore gives no right to conclude that these accounts in Scripture are mythical (any more than we have the right to conclude that Christ's resurrection is not historical because there are mythical resurrections recorded in history). Such an interpretation would involve a violation of the *sola scriptura* principle. At the same time it is possible that a changed world

view (for example, our modern view as opposed to the Newtonian view of absolute space and time) will open for consideration a new interpretation of a Biblical pericope, although it can never determine our interpretation of Scripture.

It is particularly important to maintain the above principles in our day in view of the tendency to allow extra-Biblical data (particularly historical and archaeological data) to encroach on the absolute authority of Scripture.

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