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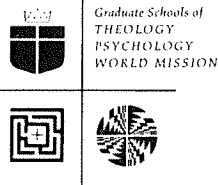
Martin Luther's Concept of Biblical Interpretation in Historical Perspective

Raymond Larry Shelton

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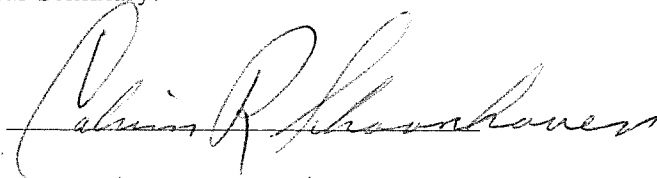
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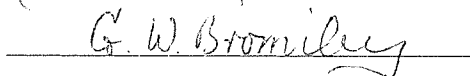
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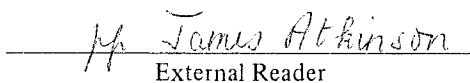
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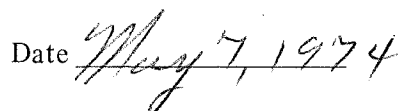
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MARTIN LUTHER'S CONCEPT
OF
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION
IN
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by
Raymond Larry Shelton

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is two-fold: to study the general hermeneutical principles and procedures of Martin Luther, and to develop an understanding of the major hermeneutical influences both upon him and by him. Luther certainly did not precipitate the Reformation in a vacuum, but his revolutionary ideas developed as a result of many historical and theological influences upon his intellectual and spiritual development. Furthermore, Luther provided a hermeneutical watershed from which the other Reformers, as well as many contemporary scholars, drank. His influence upon the hermeneutical development since the sixteenth century has been immeasurable. Thinkers ranging from the positions of classical Orthodoxy to the New Hermeneutic have claimed him as their hermeneutical progenitor.

The Problem

The statement of the problem

The task to be performed by this study is to delineate the main hermeneutical tendencies which developed in the Church from the era of Irenaeus to the era of Humanism. These tendencies are to be analyzed and evaluated, and their

influence upon the development of Luther's Biblical hermeneutic is to be demonstrated. In short, the rise of the authority of the Church as a means of controlling Biblical interpretation is surveyed historically, and the development of Luther's grammatico-philological hermeneutical method is surveyed in the light of this milieu of authoritative interpretation.

Although Luther did not develop his hermeneutic in a vacuum, neither was his development merely a reaction to objectionable interpretative methods. He creatively articulated several concepts which had not been developed fully. An example of this leadership is seen in his emphasis on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter of Scripture. Furthermore, he creatively developed the emphasis on the historical-literal sense of Scripture in place of the bankruptcy of the multiplex intelligentia of the Schoolmen. Finally, his uniqueness was expressed in his making the Bible the central point of authority for faith and life, and in placing Christ at the center of the Bible.

Another aspect of this study is to survey and evaluate some of Luther's influence upon contemporary Biblical scholarship. Specifically, an attempt is made to view Karl Barth's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture and to see the relevance

for Barth of Luther's emphasis on this issue. Furthermore, in view of the fact that Rudolf Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic movement profess to be heirs of Luther's Reformation hermeneutic, a survey will be made of this theological school for the purpose of comparing their major hermeneutical emphases with those of Luther.

Finally, we intend as a result of this study to delineate important hermeneutical principles which should be applied to the study of Scripture in the contemporary historical situation.

The importance of this study

There is a continual need to review theology in the light of the historical development of doctrine. A failure to understand in historical perspective the theological and interpretative trends in contemporary scholarship may invite a myopic subjectivism or a provincial dogmatism into theological and Biblical thought. Furthermore, there is always the tendency for men to read their own biases back into the basic conclusions of their theological predecessors. Therefore, a basic, objectively historical attempt to understand these men clearly needs constantly to be made. In view of the great influence which Luther has upon the history of modern Biblical interpretation, it is important that we have a basic historical appreciation of his work and heritage in order to build adequately upon the Reformation

tradition in theology and hermeneutics, and not to be distracted by neo-Reformation tendencies.

The Approach

The method of procedure

The procedure for this study will be a historical examination of the topic at hand. It will be developed in three phases. In Section I, a historical study of representative scholars in the Patristic and Scholastic periods will be made with particular reference to issues in their work which relate to the historical development of Biblical interpretation. From the findings of this historical survey and analysis, in Section II, an attempt will be made to observe the influence of these hermeneutical issues upon the development of Luther's approach to the Bible. Next, a historical study of Luther's hermeneutical principles and procedures will be made, and these findings will be viewed in comparison with the hermeneutical work of other major Continental Reformers.

In Section III, the contemporary hermeneutical work of Barth, Bultmann, and the New Hermeneutics will be surveyed and analyzed for the purpose of observing how they are influenced by Luther, or in what ways they profess to gain direction by him. Finally, specific hermeneutical guidelines will be brought together from the historical

survey for the purpose of providing a basis for a sound Biblical theology.

The limitation of the subject

This study is not meant to be an encyclopedic or final treatment of Luther's hermeneutics and his influence. Such a treatment would call for far more time and space than is available here. Instead, the study is limited to scholars who represent traditions and themes influential upon Luther, to a historical survey of Luther's hermeneutical work, and to the selection of certain contemporary theologians who reflect Luther's influence outside of orthodox Lutheranism.

In terms of content, the specific issues to be dealt with are only those which are related to the concept of Biblical interpretation. Thus, the major concern is not doctrinal, but hermeneutical and historical.

The sources of research

The research materials used in this study will be basically the primary sources of the work of each scholar to be studied. Both the original language sources and competent translations will be used. In addition, relevant and competent secondary sources will be used to supplement the primary works. The bibliography will represent both sources which will be used extensively and those which will be examined less extensively or referred to in the course of the investigation of the respective issues to be handled.

SECTION I

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUTHORITATIVE APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION

Irenaeus

In the patristic period, an era full of controversy and serious attacks upon Scripture and the Church, the apostolic testimony came to hold a position of supreme authority in the minds of Christians. Although the Old Testament still retained its importance, the New Testament was recognized as fully canonical and of equal inspiration with the Old. As a result of the struggle between the Church and the Gnostic sects who wished to distort Scripture to their own ends, while claiming for themselves a secret apostolic tradition, the relationship between Scripture and the Church's tradition as channels of the apostolic testimony became more clear.¹ In this crucial time, Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (A.D. 177-190), gave towering theological leadership as he spoke against the heretical rationalistic speculations of

¹J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1960), pp. 35f.

the Gnostics who threatened the Church from within. His chief work, Adversus Haereses, has been widely recognized as one of the most important theological treatises of the first Christian centuries.² Philip Schaff calls it "the polemic theological masterpiece of the ante-Nicene age."³ Louis Berkhof regards it as "a work marked by ability, moderation, and purity in its representation of Christianity."⁴ Theodor Zahn is even more lavish in his praise of Irenaeus himself, as he credits him with "soundness of judgment, acuteness of perception, and clearness of exposition. In fact, he is the first writer of the post-apostolic period who deserved the title of a theologian."⁵ Indeed, it was Irenaeus who made the first concerted apologetic attempts to deal with men such as Marcion and Valentinus.⁶

²J. Barton Payne, "The Biblical Interpretation of Irenaeus," Inspiration and Interpretation, John F. Walvoord, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1957), p. 11.

³Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, II (New York: Scribner's, 1912), p. 753.

⁴Louis Berkhof, The History of Christian Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 66.

⁵Theodor Zahn, "Irenaeus," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, VI (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, c. 1910), p. 30.

⁶Robert M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 129.

Hermeneutical issues in the attack upon the heretics

The problem of the hermeneutics of the heretics.

Although Irenaeus feels that a very basic reason for the corrupt interpretations of the heretics is to be found in their morality and their evil intent toward Scripture,⁷ their errors stem from incorrect hermeneutical methods. These men deceive themselves by endeavoring to support their own systems by the Scriptures. They bring their own meanings to them and thus defile the purity of them.⁸ Others, such as the Ebionites and the Marcionites repudiate parts of the Gospels and Epistles, or even the entire Old Testament, thus leaving only fragments which they pervert to their own devious ends.⁹

The clear interpreted by the dark and obscure. One of their most glaring errors is the attempt to explain ambiguous passages of Scripture by inventing other gods and attempting to solve enigmas by using other enigmas. Irenaeus says thus:

...quemadmodum praediximus, de arena resticulas nectentes, et quaestioni minori quaestionem majorem adgenerantes. Omnis autem quaestio non per aliud, quod quaeritur, habebit resolutionem, nec ambiguitas

⁷ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, I, A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1953), Book I, 11, 1; and 13, 1-6 (hereafter, AH); Contra Haereses, Patrologiae, vol. 7, J. P. Migne, ed. (Montrouge: Migne, 1857).

⁸ AH-I, 9, 1; I, 18, 1-2.

⁹ AH-I, 26, 1-2; I, 27, 1-2.

per aliam ambiguitatem solvetur apud eos, qui sensum habent, aut aenigmata per aliud majus aenigma, sed ea quae sunt talia, ex manifestis, et consonantibus, et claris accipiunt absolutiones.¹⁰

By thus attempting to interpret the obscure by the more obscure, these heretics devise difficulties incapable of solution. They reveal their infidelity in this, and fall away into beliefs which have no existence.¹¹ They therefore interpret the clear by the dark and obscure, and the result is irrational confusion.

Order and context neglected. Furthermore, the heretics ignore the proper context of many passages. The Valentinians in particular forsake the true order and context of the Scriptures and bring their own system to the text.

Irenaeus says:

Cum sit igitur tale illorum argumentum, quod neque prophetae praedicaverunt, neque Dominus docuit, neque apostoli tradiderunt, quod abundantius gloriantur plus quam caeteri cognivisse, de iis quae non sunt scripta legentes, et, quod solet dici, de arena resticulas nectere affectantes, fide digne aptare conantur iis dicta sunt, vel parabolas Dominicas, vel dictiones propheticas aut sermones apostolicos,

¹⁰AH II, 10, 1: "...weaving, as I said before, ropes of sand, and affixing a more important to a less important question. For no question can be solved by means of another which itself awaits solution; nor, in the opinion of those possessed of sense, can an ambiguity be explained by means of another ambiguity, or enigmas by means of another greater enigma, but things of such character receive their solution from those which are manifest, and consistent, and clear."

¹¹AH II, 10, 2.

ut figmentum illorum non sine teste esse videatur;
ordinem quidem et textum Scripturarum supergred-
ientes, et, quantum in ipsis est, solventes membra
veritatis.¹²

They thus transfer passages and dress them up anew, and change their meanings so as to delude many by ignoring the true contextual sense and adapting the oracles of God to their own opinions. The result is rather like one's taking the beautiful image of a king constructed out of precious jewels by a great artist, and re-arranging the gems into the rough form of a dog or a fox, and then maintaining that this corruption is the king. In doing so, one could deceive the ignorant, who have no concept of what the king's form is like, and persuade them that this miserable likeness of the fox is indeed the beautiful image of the king. In the same way these persons patch together old wives' tales, and by using words, expressions, and parables out of context, they adapt the oracles of God to their baseless fictions.¹³

¹²AH I, 8, 1: "Such, then, is their system, which neither the prophets announced, nor the Lord taught, nor the apostles delivered, but of which they boast that beyond all others they have a perfect knowledge. They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures; and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, which they endeavor to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth."

¹³Ibid.

Basic principles of correct interpretation

In the course of his refutation of the heretics, Irenaeus utilizes several basic hermeneutical principles. His purpose is to point out that although the heretics pretend to use Scripture to prove their doctrines, they have no conception of correct interpretative procedure. Therefore, he expounds these principles to form a foundation for his Scriptural refutation of their doctrines. J. Barton Payne sees seven basic principles which Irenaeus develops. These are as follows: the redemptive message of Scripture, progressive revelation, the unity of Scripture, historicity, textual study, literary interpretation, and perspicuity.¹⁴ While Payne's approach is commendably documented, and each of these principles is clearly evident in Irenaeus' writings, the last five have particular relevance to this study, since the first two principles deal primarily with the content and methodology of revelation, rather than with interpretative principles per se.

Unity of Scripture. Since salvation came through Christ, as was prophesied by the prophets and righteous men of old who earnestly desired to see Him, and since the self-same person is present who was announced by the prophets, and since His advent has brought in a fuller measure of grace to those who received Him, it is clear that the Father is the same as

¹⁴Payne, op.cit., pp. 29-47.

He who was proclaimed by the prophets.¹⁵ It seems that Irenaeus thus reasons that since God is One, the word which He has proclaimed is also one. He says, "How do the Scriptures testify of Him, unless all things had ever been revealed and shown to believers by one and the same God through the Word?"¹⁶ The same God was author of both testaments, as he says:

Apostoli enim omnes duo quidem testamenta in duobus populis fuisse docuerunt: unum autem et eundem esse Deum, qui disposuerit utraque ad utilitatem hominum qui incipiebant credere Deo.¹⁷

And again he says:

Hujusmodi quoque de duobus testamentis senior apostolorum discipulus disputabat, ab uno quidem et eodem Deo utraque ostendens....¹⁸

Since the same God gave both testaments and it is not reasonable to assume that He contradicted Himself, he concludes that Scripture is essentially harmonious. He affirms this thus:

Omnis Scriptura a Deo nobis data consonans nobis invenietur, et parabolae his, quae manifeste dicta

¹⁵AH IV, 11, 1 and 4.

¹⁶AH IV, 11, 1.

¹⁷AH IV, 32, 2: "For all the apostles taught that there were indeed two testaments among the two peoples; but that it was one and the same God who appointed both for the advantage of those men...who were to believe in God."

¹⁸AH IV, 32, 1: "After this fashion also did a presbyter, a disciple of the apostles, reason with respect to the two testaments, proving that both were truly from one and the same God."

sunt, consonabunt, et manifeste dicta absolvent
parabolas; et per dictionum multas voces unam
consonantem melodiam in nobis sentiet laudanqui
fecit omnia.¹⁹

It follows, therefore, that Christ "dedit nobis quadriforme
Evangelium, quod uno spiritu continetur."²⁰ The Gospels, and
the rest of the Scriptures are a unity.

Literary method of interpretation. We have already
noted the tendency of the heretics to allow their own con-
cepts to intrude upon Scripture. They twist names and ideas
from a natural to a non-natural sense and remove them from
their context.²¹ Although Irenaeus himself has been suspected
of being more subjective in some of his interpretations than
a scientific and historical method would allow,²² he did see
the dangers of adapting the oracles of God to his own opin-
ions, as the Valentinians were wont to do.²³ Furthermore, he
saw the need for interpreting Scripture according to objective
literary standards. He recognized that various forms of
expression were natural to various writers, and that this
variety in no way contradicted the unity of Scripture. He
says:

¹⁹AH II, 28, 3: "All Scripture which has been given
us by God shall be found to be perfectly consistent...and
through the many diversified utterances, there shall be heard
one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns that God who
created all things."

²⁰AH III, 11, 8: "...has given us the Gospel under
four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit."

²¹AH I, 9, 4.

²²John Lawson, The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus
(London: Epworth Press, 1948), p. 61.

²³AH I, 8, 1.

Oportebat enim quaedam quidem praenuntiari paternaliter a patribus, quaedam autem praefigurari legaliter a prophetis, quaedam vero deformari secundum formationem Christi, ab his qui adoptionem perceperunt: omnia vero in uno Dei ostenduntur.²⁴

Parables, for example, are not to be adapted to ambiguous expressions and fantastic meanings. A sound mind will eagerly meditate upon those things which God has placed within the power of mankind and subjected to our knowledge. These things fall clearly and plainly under our observation and are clearly and unambiguously set forth in the sacred Scriptures. If parables, therefore, are kept free from this obscurity in interpretation, they will receive a clear interpretation, as he says:

et a veritate corpus integrum, et simili aptatione membrorum, et sine concussione perseverat. Sed quae non aperte dicta sunt, neque ante oculos posita, copulare absolutionibus parabolarum, quas unusquisque prout vult adinvenit. Sic enim apud nullum erit regula veritatis....²⁵

There must be a criterion, then, for testing the truthfulness

²⁴AH IV, 25, 3; Payne, op.cit., p. 39: "It was requisite that certain facts be announced beforehand by the fathers in a paternal manner, and others prefigured by the prophets in a legal one, but others, described after the form of Christ, by those who have received the adoption; while in one God are all things shown forth."

²⁵AH II, 27, 1: "and the body of truth (veritate corpus) remains entire with a harmonious adaptation of its members, and without any collision. But to apply expressions which are not clear or evident to interpretations of the parables, such as every one discovers for himself as inclination leads him [is absurd]. For in this way no one will possess the rule of truth...."

of any interpretation, and Irenaeus refers to such a canon as the veritatis corpus. We note here the beginning of a tendency toward an authoritative Biblical interpretation, a norm of truth. This trend will develop and reach its fullest expression, as we shall show, in the fifth century with the work of Vincent of Lérins.

Irenaeus continues his stress upon a sound literary method by urging caution in the interpretation of symbolic or parabolic language,²⁶ opposing the principle of Biblical numerical typology,²⁷ and promoting an accurate handling of prophecy by using the concept of redemptive history with Christ as its central theme and hermeneutical key.²⁸

Historical approach. The concepts of the harmony and analogy of Scripture lead Irenaeus to affirm the historicity of it as well. The revelations of God in the New Testament serve to guarantee the authenticity of the Old. A faith in Christ seems to authenticate faith in the ancient miracles.²⁹ Irenaeus affirms the historicity of God's words to Cain and Noah,³⁰ the call of Abraham,³¹ Davidic authorship of certain

²⁶Payne, op.cit., p. 39.

²⁷Ibid., p. 40; AH II, 24, 1; cf. II, 24, 2-6.

²⁸Ibid., p. 42; AH V, 35, 1; II, 28; IV, 19, 1; IV, 33, 1; IV, 2, 7.

²⁹Payne, Ibid., p. 34f.

³⁰AH V, 14, 1.

³¹AH IV, 7, 3.

Psalms,³² and New Testament emphases such as the activity of Gabriel in Luke 1,³³ and the virgin birth.³⁴ Payne calls his position at this point a "consistent supernaturalism."³⁵ The God who took away sins could and did take away Elijah. The one cannot be historically real without the other. The key illustration of the necessity of historicity in interpretation is the resurrection of Christ. He writes:

If he rose not from the dead, neither did He
vanquish death and bring its reign to naught;
and if death be not vanquished, how can we ascend
to life, who from the beginning have fallen under
death?³⁶

Textual study. This historical emphasis leads Irenaeus to an awareness, though incomplete, of the need for sound grammatical exegesis and textual criticism in interpreting Scripture.³⁷ Although ignorant of scientific grammar, and the occasional victim of atrocious exegesis, he will sometimes base his arguments on the meaning and usage of a single word or a New Testament punctuation.³⁸

He is concerned with the problem of textual criticism, and concludes that the biblical text had been transmitted

³²AH IV, 11, 3.

³³AH III, 11, 4.

³⁴AH III, 19.

³⁵ Payne, op.cit., p. 36.

³⁶Ibid., Irenaeus, Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching, p. 9 (Latin text not available).

³⁷Ibid., p. 36.

³⁸Ibid.; III, 11, 1 and III, 7, 1.

"without falsification."³⁹ He cautions against textual corruption,⁴⁰ and as a principle, adopts those readings found "in all the more approved and ancient copies."⁴¹ It is indeed commendable and indicative of Irenaeus' great wisdom that he perceived the need for dealing with issues such as these in the early times in which he lived.

Perspicuity. Irenaeus certainly was not so extreme as to assert that Scripture could be understood at all points, but he did teach that insofar as essential matters of faith are concerned, the "entire Scriptures" can be understood "In aperto, et sine ambiguitate, et similiter ab omnibus."⁴² He who is pious will eagerly meditate upon the Scriptures.

Irenaeus says:

Sensus autem sanus, et qui sine periculo est, et religiosus, et amans verum, quae quidem dedit in hominum potestatem Deus, et subdidit nostrae scientiae, haec prompte meditabitur, et in ipsis proficiet, diuturno studio facilem scientiam eorum efficiens. Sunt autem haec, quae ante oculos nostros occurrunt, et quaecunque aperte et sine ambiguo ipsis dictionibus posita sunt in Scripturis.⁴³

³⁹Ibid., p. 37; IV, 33, 8.

⁴⁰Ibid..

⁴¹AH V, 30, 1.

⁴²Payne, op.cit., pp. 45f.; II, 27, 2.

⁴³AH II, 27, 1: "A sound mind, and one which does not expose its possessor to danger, and is devoted to piety and the love of truth, will eagerly meditate upon those things which God has placed within the power of mankind, and has subjected to our knowledge, and will make advancement in them, rendering the knowledge of them easy to him by means of daily study. These things are such as fall [plainly] under our observation, and are clearly and unambiguously in express terms set forth in the Sacred Scriptures."

The perspicuity of Scripture is not without qualification, however. "First, it was understood," says Payne, "that the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit was necessary within the hearts of sinful men before the truth could assume its natural clarity."⁴⁴ A true spiritual disciple will rightly interpret and understand Scripture. He says:

Talis discipulus vere spiritualis recipiens Spiritum Dei, qui ab initio in universis dispositionibus Dei adfuit hominibus, et futura annuntiavit, et praesentia ostendit, et praeterita enerrat; judicat quidem omnes, ipse autem a nemine judicatur. Nam judicat gentes, creaturae magisquam Creatori servientes, et reprobabili mente universam suam operationem in vanum consumentes. Judicat autem etiam Judaeos, non percipientes Verbum libertatis....⁴⁵

As opposed to the heretics who cannot agree among themselves as to the proper meaning of Scripture, the spiritual man is guided by the Holy Spirit to discern the unity of the Scripture, and "He therefore, sifts and tries them all, but he himself is tried by no man...." (Hic igitur examinatur omnes...).⁴⁶

Futhermore, the clarity of Scripture is appreciated only by those who diligently study it. He says:

⁴⁴Payne, op.cit., p. 46.

⁴⁵AH IV, 33, 1: "A spiritual disciple of this sort truly receiving the Spirit of God, who was from the beginning does indeed 'judge all men, but is himself judged by no man.' For he judges the Gentiles...and he also judges the Jews, who do not accept the word of liberty..."

⁴⁶AH IV, 33, 15.

Dicemus autem adversus omnes haereticos, et primo quidem adversus eos qui sunt a Marcione, et adversus eas qui similes illis, ab altero Deo dicentes esse prophetas: Legite diligentius id quod ab apostolis est Evangelium nobis datum, et legite diligentius prophetas, et invenietis universam actionem, et omnem doctrinam, et omnem passionem Domini nostri praedictam in ipsis.⁴⁷

When he says, "Then shall every word also seem consistent to him, if he for his part diligently read the Scriptures in company with those who are the presbyters of the Church, among whom is the apostolic doctrine,"⁴⁸ he is not advocating absolute reliance upon the authoritative interpretation of the Church, but is emphasizing the concept of the analogy of Scripture and its own inherent meaning which is based in the very nature of the revelation itself, not human tradition.⁴⁹ It is because the presbyters themselves are spiritual men that their interpretations have merit. The true value of the "succession of bishops" lay in the fact that they transmitted a "lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures"⁵⁰ (Secundum Scripturas expositio legitima et diligens).

⁴⁷AH IV, 34, 1: "Now I shall simply say, in opposition to all the heretics, and principally against the followers of Marcion, and against those who are like to these, in maintaining that the prophets were from another God [than He who is announced in the Gospel], read with earnest care the Gospel which has been conveyed to us by the apostles, and read with earnest care the prophets, and you will find that the whole conduct, and all the doctrine, and all the sufferings of our Lord, were predicted through them."

⁴⁸AH IV, 32, 1.

⁴⁹Payne, op.cit., p. 47.

⁵⁰Ibid., AH IV, 33, 8.

The relationship of Scripture and
the tradition of the Church

Irenaeus emphasizes that the truth of God forms the basis for the Christian faith. Jesus Christ Himself is ultimately the truth, "Dominus noster Jesus Christus veritas est,"⁵¹ and His teaching is the truth. This truth was taught through the apostles, and is today known only through them.⁵² It is only by way of the apostles that we know the Gospel.⁵³ Thus, the Christian truth proclaimed by the Church is identical with the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.⁵⁴ The apostles, then, either delivered this truth to the Church orally, or they or their disciples wrote it down, and it is in one of these two ways that their message is known.⁵⁵ The problem thus presented is the relationship between the truth as orally transmitted (traditio), and the written truth of the Scriptures.

The role of tradition. By tradition, when used in the context of Christian truth rather than Gnostic heresy, Irenaeus means the oral testimony publicly delivered to the churches by the apostles and handed down to the successive

⁵¹AH III, 5, 1; Ellen Flesseman-van Leer, Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1954), p. 100.

⁵²AH III, praef.; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid.

⁵³AH III, 1, 1; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid.

⁵⁴AH I, 2 (10, 1); I, 3(10, 2); V, praef; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 101.

⁵⁵AH III, 1, 1; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 101.

bishops. This is the traditio apostolorum or ab apostolis, which is preached by the Church, as distinct from the written Scriptures.⁵⁶ In Book I, Irenaeus uses traditio to denote the message preached in the Church by all Christians. It is the same, whatever may be the languages or mental differences of those who proclaim it.⁵⁷ Flesseman-van Leer summarizes by stating, "we can say that tradition is the living kerygma of the church in its full identity with the revelation of Jesus Christ given to his apostles."⁵⁸ This apostolic tradition, then, has authority because the apostles were direct eye-witnesses and followers of Christ, and were sent out by Him.⁵⁹

The place of Scripture. Not only has the revelation of God reached us by the living preaching and teaching of the Church through tradition faithfully preserved and transmitted by the succession of bishops; this same message has been preserved in writing. True apostolic teaching is also to be learned from Scripture, the Old and New Testaments.⁶⁰ What the apostles originally preached orally, they later transmitted in the Scriptures as the foundation of our faith. Irenaeus thus says:

⁵⁶AH III, 3, 1; Flesseman-van Leer, 102.

⁵⁷AH I, 3(10, 2); Flesseman-van Leer, 103.

⁵⁸Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 103.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 128

quod quidem tunc praeconaverunt, postea vero per Dei voluntatem in Scripturis nobis tradiderunt, fundamentum et columnam fidei nostrae futurum.⁶¹

Irenaeus emphasizes that Scripture is the written deposit of the revelation and is given by God, πᾶσα γραφή διδομένη ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ.⁶² The Spirit of God speaks through the prophets and the writers of the New Testament books.⁶³ It is because of this spiritual origin that the Scripture is trustworthy. Just as the apostolic tradition of the Church is trustworthy because it goes back to the apostles, so the Scriptures are trustworthy because they were written by the apostles themselves or their immediate successors.⁶⁴

The Scriptures and tradition. In expressing the relationship between Scripture and tradition, Irenaeus emphasizes that the tradition of the Church is not a separate entity from the Scriptures, for it serves to confirm the witness of the Bible.⁶⁵ Tradition safeguards Scripture from corruption and interprets it in the apostolic sense. In the authentic apostolic Church, the Holy Spirit, as the vicar

⁶¹AH III, 1, 1: The Gospel..."which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith."

⁶²AH II, 41, 4(28, 3); Flesseman-van Leer, p. 130.

⁶³AH IV, 34, 8(20,8); III, 17, 1(16,2).

⁶⁴Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 131.

⁶⁵Hans von Campenhausen, The Fathers of the Greek Church (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1955), p. 26.

of Christ, would not permit Christians to hold a different faith from that preached by the apostles.⁶⁶

The apostolic tradition is the key to correct exegesis of Scripture,⁶⁷ as Irenaeus says:

Hi enim et eam quae est in unum Deum, qui omnia fecit, fidem nostram custodiunt: et eam quae est in Filium Dei, dilectionem adaugent, qui tantas dispositiones propter nos fecit, et Scripturas sine periculo nobis exponunt, neque Deum blasphemantes, neque patriarchas exhonorantes, neque prophetas contemnentes.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the Scriptures provide an indispensable attestation of the validity of tradition. In this regard, Irenaeus writes:

Et si de aliqua modica quaestione disceptatio esset, nonne oporteret in antiquissimas recurrere Ecclesias, in quibus apostoli conversati sunt, et ab eis de praesenti quaestione sumere quod certum et re liquidum est? Quid autem si neque apostoli quidem Scripturas reliquissent nobis....⁶⁹

"Irenaeus took it for granted that the apostolic tradition

⁶⁶G. W. H. Lampe, "Scripture and Tradition in the Early Church," Scripture and Tradition, F. W. Dillistone, ed. (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1955), p. 45.

⁶⁷Kelly, op.cit., p. 38.

⁶⁸AH IV, 26, 5: "For these [presbyters] also preserve this faith of ours...and they expound the Scriptures to us without danger, neither blaspheming God, nor dishonouring the patriarchs, nor despising the prophets."

⁶⁹AH III, 4, 2: "Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings?"

had also been deposited in written documents," says Kelly.⁷⁰ Thus, the Scriptures validate the fact that the tradition of the Church is the correct one.⁷¹ Flesseman-van Leer notes the close interaction of Scripture and tradition by showing that Scripture is used by Irenaeus to prove the validity of the tradition of the Church as opposed to the heretical traditions of the Gnostics. She states thus:

That is to say, scripture is the instrument with which to refute the heretics, and what is even more important, the tradition of the church (fides quae creditur) should be defended and proved through Scripture ... This doctrine of the church, Irenaeus continues, is trustworthy, for it descends from the apostles. But these apostles have written down their doctrine; and these writings we now shall use as proof....⁷²

We see, therefore, that Irenaeus does not subordinate Scripture to tradition, or vice-versa.⁷³ Scripture is a means by which tradition reaches us,⁷⁴ and a source, with tradition, from which we can know revelation.⁷⁵ Scripture is not merely an example of tradition,⁷⁶ but it is a concomitant

⁷⁰Kelly, op.cit., p. 38.

⁷¹AH III, 5, 1.

⁷²Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., pp. 142f; cf. AH III, 1, 2(1,1), Greek text, ὁ μὲν δὲ ματθαῖος ἐν τοῖς ἑβραίοις τῇ ὁρίᾳ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν, καὶ γραφὴν ἐξήνεγκεν εὐαγγελίου.

⁷³Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 143.

⁷⁴AH III, 1, 2.

⁷⁵Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p.143.

⁷⁶Ibid.

channel with tradition for transmitting revelation. "The whole point of his teaching," says Kelly, "was, in fact, that Scripture and the Church's unwritten tradition are identical in content, both being vehicles of the revelation."⁷⁷ Indeed, says Lawson, "to inquire whether tradition or Scripture is the primary authority is to obscure the mind of S. Irenaeus by asking the wrong question. To him both are manifestations of one and the same thing, the Apostolic truth by which the Christian lives."⁷⁸ Any view, therefore, which states that Irenaeus places tradition above Scripture is erroneous.⁷⁹

The bases for authority and truth. The authority and truth of any teaching in Christianity must be based upon sound principles. Irenaeus emphasizes three basic authenticating principles: the regula veritatis, the apostolic succession, and the Holy Spirit.

Although Irenaeus sees the importance of sound exegesis of Scripture and due respect for the tradition of the Church, he sees the ultimate standard for the interpretation of revelation to be the regula veritatis.⁸⁰ He does not see the Church alone as the infallible interpreter of

⁷⁷Kelly, op.cit., p. 39.

⁷⁸Lawson, op.cit., p. 103.

⁷⁹Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 141.

⁸⁰R. M. Grant, The Letter and the Spirit (London: SPCK, 1957), p. 82.

Scripture, but holds to the regula,⁸¹ which is ultimately the truth itself. He says:

Habentes itaque regulam ipsam veritatem, et in aperto positum de Deo testimonium, non debemus per quaestionum declinantes in alias atque alias absolutiones ejicere firmam et veram de Deo scientiam.⁸²

This rule of truth Irenaeus later defines as the words of God, as he says, "Nos autem unum et solum verum Deum doctorem sequentes, et regulam veritatis habentes ejus sermones, de iisdem semper eadem dicimus omnes."⁸³ The genitive usage here is the explicative genitive: the truth which is the rule.⁸⁴ The truth which is the authoritative rule of interpretation, then, is the revelation of God, Jesus Christ and His teaching.⁸⁵ Those who hear the doctrine of God only as their subjective opinions allow them to hear it do not have the rule of truth.⁸⁶

The regula veritatis, then, encompasses both the Bible and traditon. "It is not a formal principle for exegesis," says Flesseman-van Leer, "brought to the Bible from

⁸¹Payne, op.cit., p. 47.

⁸²AH, II, 28, 1(41,1-Engl.); Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 126: "Having therefore the truth itself as our rule, and the testimony concerning God set clearly before us, we ought not, by running after numerous and diverse answers to questions, to cast away the firm and true knowledge of God."

⁸³AH IV, 57, 4(35,4); Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 126.

⁸⁴Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 126.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 127.

⁸⁶AH, III, 12,7(12,6).

outside, but the real teaching of the Bible, that is, the revelation as embedded in scripture."⁸⁷ It is identical in content with revelation, although in form it is revelation as mediated through the apostolic tradition,⁸⁸ whether oral or written. The regula veritatis is, then, the standard by which sound views of doctrine are distinguished from unsound. The regula is the truth behind both Scripture and tradition, although both of these are modes of its expression. Truly interpreted, Scripture adheres to the rule of truth because it is apostolic in its origin, and tradition adheres to the rule of truth because the succession of bishops hands down a "lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures" (Secundum Scripturas expositio legitima et diligens). Irenaeus states this clearly in the whole of this passage:

Agnitio vera est apostolorum doctrina et antiquus Ecclesiae status, in universo mundo, et character corporis Christi secundum successiones episcoporum, quibus illi eam, quae in unoquoque loco est, Ecclesiam tradiderunt: quae pervenit usque ad nos custodione sine fictione Scripturarum tractatio plenissima, neque additamentum neque ablationem recipiens; et lectio sine falsatione, et secundum Scripturas expositio legitima, et diligens, et sine periculo, et sine blasphemia....⁸⁹

⁸⁷Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 127.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹AH IV, 33,8: "True knowledge is the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which

Irenaeus sees two major ways by which it can be substantiated that the teaching which conforms to the regula veritatis is identical with God's revelation through Jesus Christ. First, this revelation was made known through the apostles. Flesseman-Van Leer calls it the "historical guaranty of the uninterrupted succession of bishops in the church."⁹⁰ This succession goes back lineally to the apostles and thus guarantees the identity of oral tradition with the original revelation.⁹¹ Secondly, the Holy Spirit is a further safeguard, and Flesseman-van Leer refers to Him as the "divine guaranty" of authenticity.⁹²

In the emphasis on apostolic succession as the "historical guaranty," Irenaeus points out that the apostles entrusted their teaching to the Church, or those who represent the Church, the bishops. These are the "successiones Presbyterorum," or "eos qui ab apostolis instituti sunt episcopi in Ecclesia."⁹⁴ These are Spirit-endowed men who

exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved, without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor curtailment[in the truths which she believes;] and [it consists in] reading [the word of God] without falsification, and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy...."

⁹⁰Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 108.

⁹¹Kelly, op.cit., p. 37.

⁹²Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 108; Kelly, Ibid.

⁹³AH III, 2, 20.

⁹⁴AH III, 3, 1.

have been given a "charisma veritatis certum."⁹⁵ By illustrating the order and completeness of the succession of bishops from those appointed by the apostles down to those presently in office, Irenaeus asserts that the same faith as that of the apostles has been preserved in the Church until now. By this means, he affirms historically the original message of the apostles.⁹⁶

Irenaeus sees the bishops as guardians of the Christian faith, the ecclesia docens. They are "guarantors and bearers of revelation."⁹⁷ The testimony of those who conversed with the apostles bears great weight.⁹⁸ Therefore, in the bishops lies a trustworthy interpretative authority. These devout men have been taught directly the pure teaching of the apostles, and their interpretations must be very seriously considered.

Irenaeus has made it clear up to this point that the revelation of God comes through the bishops, who actually are the Church. This Church, however, is formed by the Holy Spirit,⁹⁹ and it is the home of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰ It is to

⁹⁵AH IV, 26, 2-5; Kelly, op.cit., p. 37.

⁹⁶AH III, 3, 3; Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 109.

⁹⁷Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., pp. 112, 113.

⁹⁸AH V, 5, 1; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 114.

⁹⁹Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁰⁰Kelly, op.cit., p. 37.

this Church, formed by the Holy Spirit, that the message of divine revelation has been committed by this same Spirit. "The communion with Jesus Christ, i.e. the Holy Spirit, is actually present and works in the preaching of the church, in the tradition," says Flesseman-van Leer.¹⁰¹

Furthermore, the Spirit of God renews the faith of the Church, giving it life. He guards the faith from corruption and confirms it, and He works through the means of the apostles, prophets, and teachers.¹⁰² Thus, while the revelation is communicated by the oral and written testimony of the apostles, the Holy Spirit works within these channels to create understanding and acceptance of Scripture, as well as tradition. This "internal testimony of the Holy Spirit," says Mayer, "is a key authoritative factor in the Church's life," for it creates "acceptance of and understanding of religious truth."¹⁰³

Not only does the Holy Spirit vivify the faith of the Church, but He constitutes the bishops, bestowing upon them the charisma veritatis. He makes bishops those whom He chooses to proclaim the message of God. They are His appointed instruments in the Church, and it is through them that He

¹⁰¹Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 119.

¹⁰²AH III, 38, 1(24,1).

¹⁰³Herbert T. Mayer, "Scripture, Tradition, and Authority in the Life of the Early Church," Concordia Theological Monthly, 38 (1967), p. 22.

works (operatio Spiritus).¹⁰⁴ Thus, Irenaeus says:

(In Ecclesia enim, inquit, posuit Deus apostolos, prophetas, doctores,) et universam reliquam operationem Spiritus: cujus non sunt participes omnes, qui non currant ad Ecclesiam, sed semetipsos fraudant a vita, per sententiam malam et operationem pessimam. Ubi enim Ecclesia, ibi et Spiritus Dei; et ubi Spiritus Dei, illic Ecclesia, et omnis gratia: Spiritus autem veritas.¹⁰⁵

The Spirit, then, is the truth, the revelation. He is the key to God's message. He works through the historical guaranty of the apostolic succession. Thus, Irenaeus concludes that God's revelation is found exclusively in the bishops, tradition, and Scripture of the Church. The Holy Spirit works only through these channels.¹⁰⁶ So it is ultimately the Holy Spirit who communicates and interprets Scripture, though He does this through the means noted above. Since the Holy Spirit functions through tradition, Church, and Scripture, it is impossible for the heretics outside the Church to have access to the truth through Him. The authority for interpretation of God's revelation, then, is within

¹⁰⁴ Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ AH III, 38, 1(24, 1): "'For in the Church,' it is said, 'God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,' and all the other means by which the Spirit works; of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behavior. For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth."

¹⁰⁶ Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 121.

the Church through the Holy Spirit. This preserves Irenaeus from mere institutionalizing.

Tertullian

Even though Irenaeus did have difficulty in carrying out his exegetical theories and sometimes fell into the hermeneutical fallacies he condemned,¹⁰⁷ he left a great legacy for his successors. At a time when orthodox interpreters were largely united against the heretics, the concept of the external authority of the Church in interpretation seemed to have merit, and the regula veritatis had an "attractive simplicity."¹⁰⁸ At the turn of the 2nd century, Tertullian of Carthage further developed the authoritative principle of interpretation by emphasizing that the Church alone had true authority to interpret the Scripture, because the Bible is the property of the Church. He asserts the principle of the actuality of possession of the Scriptures by the Church in his De praescriptio haereticorum.

De praescriptione

Tertullian expected heresies to arise in the Church, for it is through heresy that truth is manifest (I Cor.11:19).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷Farrar, op.cit., pp. 175f.

¹⁰⁸Grant, A Short History..., op.cit., p. 103.

¹⁰⁹Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, III, A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), Chapter 6 (hereafter, Prescrip.); cf. Robert L. Wilken, "Tertullian and the Early Christian View of Tradition," Conc. Theol. M., 38(1967), p. 228. Latin text from Corpus Christianorum, Tertulliani Opera (Turnholti: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1954).

The heretics attempt to use Scripture to validate their own arguments.¹¹⁰ We would expect him, like Irenaeus, to set forth key principles by which Scripture may be correctly interpreted, but he does not discuss this issue, moving directly to the issue of "to whom do the Scriptures belong?"¹¹¹ He deals with this question of ownership by using a Roman legal device called a "praescriptio." With this device one may invalidate an original suit by proving its claims to be out of order. Tertullian thus forces the heretics away from debating specific matters of faith and denies them the right to speak on these issues at all. Wilken says, "The conclusion is apparent; if his opponents cannot give evidence of apostolic origins, then they have no claim on apostolic doctrine."¹¹² Tertullian thus sets the stage for refuting the heretics as he writes in De praescriptione 21:

Hinc igitur dirigimus praescriptionem: si Dominus Christus Jesus apostolos misit ad praedicandum, alios non esse recipiendos praedicatores quam Christus instituit, quia nec alius patrem novit nisi filius et cui filius revelavit, nec aliis videtur revelasse filius quam apostolis quos misit ad praedicandum utique quod illis revelavit...si haec ita sunt, constat perinde omnem doctrinam, quae cum illis ecclesiis apostolicis matricibus et originalibus fidei conspiret, veritati deputandum, id sine dubio tenentem, quod ecclesiae ab apostolis, apostoli a Christo, Christus a Deo accepit; omnem vero doctrinam

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹² Wilken, op.cit., p. 230.

de mendacio praeiudicandum quae sapiat contra
veritatem ecclesiarum et apostolorum Christi et
Dei.¹¹³

The basis of his argument, then, moves from the question of interpretation to the question of credentials. The apostolic faith cannot be separated from the apostolic tradition within the Church. The heretics have only their opinions, therefore only the Church has a right to interpret Scripture.¹¹⁴ Tertullian builds his case upon three basic premises. First, there is the praescriptio veritatis, which shows that there is a unity of doctrine between the apostolic churches and the apostles, which proves that they possess the truth, while the heretics disagree among themselves.¹¹⁵ Secondly, there is the praescriptio principalitatis, which shows that truth is prior to variations from it. The pure wheat, original truth, is preserved only in the Church.¹¹⁶

¹¹³Prescrip., p. 21: "From this, therefore, do we draw up our rule. Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for 'no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.' Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach--that, of course, which He revealed to them... If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the apostolic churches--those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God."

¹¹⁴Wilken, op.cit., pp. 230-231.

¹¹⁵Prescrip., pp. 20-30; Grant, SH, op.cit., p. 105.

¹¹⁶Prescrip., pp. 31-35; Grant, Ibid, p. 106.

Finally, there is the praescriptio proprietatis, which asserts that the Scriptures belonged to the Church before the heretics considered using them, and therefore it possesses them by inheritance from the apostles. He says, "Quo denique, Marcion, iure siluam meam caedis? Qua licentia, Valentine, fontes meos transuertis? Qua potestate, Apelles, limites meos commoues?"¹¹⁷

It seems, then, that Tertullian thinks it useless to confute heretics with Scriptural arguments, for apostolic tradition is the only defense.¹¹⁸ If heretics are allowed to use the Bible, they will interpret it in various ways, just as the poets in his day constructed new poems with new meanings from excerpts of the verses of Homer or Virgil.¹¹⁹ Because of these incurably corrupt hermeneutical practices, Tertullian thinks it best to deal with the heretics on the basis of tradition, not Scripture, for apostolic faith may not be available simply through a study of Scripture, but must be seen in the apostolic tradition of the Church.¹²⁰

Traditio and Apostolic faith

Apostolic faith is the criterion by which doctrine is judged, and what is believed and preached in the Church

¹¹⁷Prescrip. 35-40, quote, 37; Grant, Ibid., 100.

¹¹⁸Farrar, op.cit., pp. 177f.

¹¹⁹Prescrip.; Wilken, op.cit., p. 231.

¹²⁰Wilken, Ibid., p. 230.

reflects the original revelation from God. The apostles are the link between the present day Church and Jesus Christ, and we can believe only that which is based on their authority.¹²¹ As Tertullian says:

Nobis vero nihil ex nostro arbitrio inducere licet, sed nec eligere quod aliquis de arbitrio suo induxerit. Apostolos domini habemus auctores, qui nec ipsi quicquam ex suo arbitrio quod inducerunt elegerunt, sed acceptam a Christo disciplinam fideliter nationibus assignaverunt.¹²²

One disproves an heretical teaching and proves the rightness of a Church doctrine by ascertaining which coincides with the doctrine taught by the apostles as traditio.¹²³ "This tradition of the apostles is not contrasted with written teaching," says Flesseman-van Leer, "on the contrary, Tertullian says explicitly that the apostles delivered their teaching both orally and later on through epistles, and the whole body of this teaching he designates with the word traditio."¹²⁴ Thus, he sees tradition as the original message of the apostles and the message proclaimed by the Church as it has been received from the apostles. At times, however,

¹²¹Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 145.

¹²²Prescrip., 6: "We, however, are not permitted to cherish any doctrine after our own will, nor yet to make choice of that which another has introduced of his private fancy. In the Lord's apostles we possess our authority; for even they did not of themselves choose to introduce anything, but faithfully delivered to the nations the doctrine which they had received from Christ."

¹²³Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 146.

¹²⁴Ibid., Prescrip., 21-22.

Tertullian does use traditio to refer to customs and practices of the Church which have only human authority. The interpreter must be careful to distinguish between these usages.¹²⁵

Tertullian is careful not to contrast tradition with Scripture, for the entire apostolic doctrine is traditio, whether delivered orally or in epistles, apostolorum traditio or apostolica traditio.¹²⁶ The apostolic tradition was, in fact, enshrined in Scripture, for the apostles wrote down their preaching in epistles.¹²⁷ No secret tradition could exist, for the apostles had transmitted the revelation in its entirety, omnia omnibus tradisse.¹²⁸ This revelation, then, could be adequately understood and interpreted only within the Church and according to the standard of the Church, the regula fidei.

Regula fidei

The meaning of the tradition, both written and oral, was to be found within the authority of the Church where the Scriptures had been preserved by those within the apostolic succession. Here it could be properly interpreted according to the oral tradition which had been received from the

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 147; see Flesseman-van Leer's section on "tradition" for a thorough exposition on the various uses of traditio in Tertullian's work.

¹²⁶Kelly, op.cit., p. 36.

¹²⁷Prescrip. 21; Kelly, op.cit., 39.

¹²⁸Prescrip., 22&27; Kelly, Ibid., p. 40; cf. Irenaeus, Adv. Haer., 3, 2-5.

apostles and formulated into the regula fidei.¹²⁹

Generally, by regula, Tertullian means the basic Christian doctrine. He uses the word seventy-eight times, according to Flesseman-van Leer. However, many of its usages refer to other concepts, such as a moral precept, or a logical law, or the doctrine of the heretics and philosophers.¹³⁰ Tertullian expresses the regula in De Praescriptione 13 in terms of a summary of Christian doctrine or a profession of faith. The regula is not, however, simply a symbolum. Instead, Flesseman-van Leer asserts, he means by regula the "real purport of revelation...something so closely linked up with revelation that it can never be separated from it. This however, does not mean that it is fully the same as revelation; it is rather the implicit, essential meaning of revelation."¹³¹ Regula is, thus, the "innermost intention" of revelation, not simply a fixed, doctrinal formulation of the faith.¹³² Tertullian says that Christ gave the gospel and the doctrine of the said regula to his apostles.¹³³ He says further, Haec regula a Christo, ut probabitur, instituta nummas habet apud nos quaestiones nisi quas

¹²⁹Grant, SH, op.cit., p. 103.

¹³⁰Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., pp. 161-163.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 166.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Prescrip., 44; regula here seems to indicate the general tenor of Christ's gospel (cf. Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 166).

haereses inferunt et quae haereticos faciunt."¹³⁴ The regula, then, summarizes the Christian faith, and faith consists in this rule, "Fides in regula posita est."¹³⁵ As a synonym of faith, the regula becomes fides quo creditur.¹³⁶ Thus, the regula is the key to dealing with the heretics, for it alone points the way to correct exegesis of Scripture, and it can test one's faith, for "it is not from Christ that they (heretics) get that which they pursue of their own mere choice...which each individual of his own mere will has either advanced or received in opposition to the apostles."¹³⁷

For Tertullian, then, the regula fidei is the "intrinsic shape and pattern of revelation itself," as Kelly describes it.¹³⁸ The regula is for him the same standard for correct exegesis of Scripture that the regula veritatis was for Irenaeus. In no way does Tertullian, then, make tradition a more ultimate norm than the Scriptures, for God's revelation is contained fully in both the Bible and the apostolic tradition (though not in the human aspect of mere church customs). He does, however, see tradition as

¹³⁴Prescrip., 13.

¹³⁵Prescrip., 14.

¹³⁶Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., pp. 167-168.

¹³⁷Prescrip., 37: "Mon a Christo habendo quod de sua electione sectati haereticorum nomine admittunt."

¹³⁸Kelly, op.cit., p. 40.

functionally interpreting Scripture. He, like Irenaeus, wished to preserve the apostles' testimony from the schemes and perversions of the heretics.¹³⁹ The regula is, in the words of Flesseman-van Leer, "a condensation and formulation of the apostolic tradition, or even, it is this tradition, with special emphasis upon its normative function."¹⁴⁰

The Spirit and the Church

Although Tertullian does not deal systematically with Biblical interpretation or the function of the Holy Spirit in interpretation, he does emphasize His work in the Church. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the transmission of revelation through the succession of churches. When the heretics claim that no church has kept the true apostolic tradition, Tertullian responds that the Holy Spirit was sent to be the teacher of truth and He would have neglected His task if He had permitted the churches to understand and believe in a way different from what the Spirit Himself had preached to the apostles. Thus, the Spirit guides the churches to understand and transmit rightly the apostolic tradition.¹⁴¹ Tertullian asks if it is likely that those erred who handled the tradition:

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴⁰Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 170.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 155.

...nullam respexerit spiritus sanctus, ut eam in veritatem deduceret, ad hoc missus a Christo, ad hoc postulatus de patre, ut esset doctor veritatis; neglexerit, ut aiunt, officium dei vilicus, Christi vicarius, sinens ecclesia aliter interim intelligere, aliter credere quod ipse per apostolos praedicabat....¹⁴²

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit not only guides the transmission and understanding of apostolic tradition, but He preserves intact this tradition,¹⁴³ and He explains the Scriptures, dispersing their perplexities and provides an "open and perspicuous explanation" of their mysteries. He states in full:

It was fit and proper, therefore, that the Holy Ghost should no longer withhold the effusions of His gracious light upon these inspired writings, in order that they might be able to disseminate the seeds of truth with no admixture of heretical subtleties, and pluck out from it their tares. He has accordingly now dispersed all the perplexities of the past, and their self-chosen allegories and parables, by the open and perspicuous explanation of the entire mystery, through the new prophecy, which descends in copious streams from the Paraclete. If you will only draw water from His fountains, you will never thirst for other doctrine: no feverish craving after subtle questions will again consume you....¹⁴⁴

A problematic issue, however, in the work of the

¹⁴²Prescrip., 28: "Grant that..."the Holy Spirit had no such respect to any one (church) as to lead it into truth, although sent with this view by Christ, and for this asked of the Father that He might be the teacher of truth; grant, also, that He, the Steward of God, the Vicar of Christ, neglected His office, permitting the churches for a time to understand differently, (and) to believe differently, what He Himself was preaching by the apostles...."

¹⁴³Tertullian, Against Praxeus, Ibid., Chap. 30.

¹⁴⁴Tertullian, On the Resurrection, Ibid., Chap. 63.

Holy Spirit, as Tertullian understands it, is His authority in relationship to that of tradition. As Flesseman-van Leer points out, the Spirit not only preserves and explains past revelation, according to Tertullian, but He even supplements it on points about which it had been silent. The Paraclete thus directs and carries to perfection the revelation of God,¹⁴⁵ the "new prophecy." Tertullian is here in danger of contradicting his own principle that the Holy Spirit could preach nothing different from what He had preached to the apostles (footnote 141). He attempts to safeguard his statements from this implication by showing that the contemporary directions of the Holy Spirit are already implied in the former revelation, as in his statements regarding the prohibition of a second marriage:

neque novam neque extraneam esse monogamic disciplinam, immo et antiquam et propriam Christianorum, ut paracletum restitutorem potius sentias eius quam institutorem.¹⁴⁶

In addition, the Holy Spirit does not seem to need the Scriptural authority behind His teaching, as Tertullian says, "Quid recolam de scripturis? Quasi aut sufficiat vox spiritus sancti."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., p. 156.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.; De monog. 4.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 157; De idol. 4.

The only authority Tertullian recognizes, as Flesseman-van Leer points out, is God's revelation, whether it reaches man through Scripture, tradition, or the mediation of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸ He has drawn a close relationship between Scripture and tradition, but does seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit can speak apart from either of them (footnote 147). This tendency weakens the basis for an objective criterion of truth in the Scriptures, and damages his appeal to traditio and the regula as authoritative bases for apprehending and evaluating truth. Although he can scarcely be faulted for discerning that the Holy Spirit and the historical Church do not always coincide,¹⁴⁹ he does not satisfactorily solve the problem as to how the Holy Spirit can speak apart from Scripture. At this point he tends toward a subjectivism which is quite possibly the very weakness which leads him into Montanism, or vice-versa. If the Holy Spirit does not always coincide with the customs of the Church, which reflect the faulty reasoning of man, how can we be assured that the doctrinal traditions of the Church, which also pass through the crucible of men's minds, will always faithfully reflect the original revelation of God apart from the objective record of Scripture? If a low standard of discipline among the heretics reflects the low

¹⁴⁸Ibid.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

standard of reliability of their doctrine, why should not a low standard of discipline, if found in the Church, not also effect an erroneous tradition? If such a low standard of tradition were to develop, would it not also affect the content of the regula, and thus the interpretation of Scripture?¹⁵⁰ If the regula were affected, and the interpretation of Scripture thus distorted, how could the Holy Spirit work to correct such an erroneous development? The problem can be stated thus: whenever an element other than Scripture, such as tradition, intrudes upon the interpretation of Scripture, a vicious cycle of human opinion begins, and the meaning of Scripture becomes distorted by such eisegesis. This distorted interpretation leads to further distortion in doctrine or conduct, and can be broken only by the intrusion of another hermeneutic than the regula. In the case of the Reformers, this principle was sola scriptura, and the interpretation of Scripture was based upon inductive principles found within the Bible itself and the execution of these principles under the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit. As he began to lean toward the excesses of Montanism, Tertullian allowed the Holy Spirit to be an independently functioning entity, and He therefore became only a mere subjective voice interpreted only by the

¹⁵⁰Prescrip., 26 & 27: Tertullian denies the possibility of corruption in tradition. This denial, however, does not seem to be substantiated by history.

distorted ear of the hearer. The Spirit must speak in and through the Scripture, not apart from it. Herein lies the Achilles' heel of Tertullian.

Scripture and tradition

Even though the relationship between Scripture and tradition has been touched upon above, it would seem wise to elaborate on this relationship. Tertullian does emphasize the authority of Scripture, for it is part of tradition, and although he feels that tradition is clear in all its forms, it can be perverted by wrong interpretation. Scripture is particularly susceptible to misuse by heretics, as he notes:

Ista haeresis non recipit quasdam scripturas; et si quas recipit, non recipit integras sed adiectionibus et detractationibus ad dispositionem instituti sui intervertit et si aliquatenus integras praestat, nihilominus diversas expositiones commentata convertit.¹⁵¹

This misinterpretation is inevitable for those outside the Church, but all Scripture is basically clear if viewed from the perspective of Christian faith, as he writes further:

Ubi enim apparverit esse veritatem disciplinae et fidei christianae, illic erit veritas scripturarum et expositionum et omnium traditionum christianorum.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹Prescrip., 17: "Now the heresy of yours does not receive certain Scriptures; and whichever of them it does receive, it perverts...even these by the contrivance of diverse interpretations."

¹⁵²Prescrip., 19: "For wherever it shall be manifest that the true Christian rule and faith shall be, there will likewise be the true Scriptures and expositions thereof, and all the Christian traditions."

Scripture does have a clear meaning, but Tertullian lays upon the exegete the admonition to "seek and ye shall find." The guiding principle for interpretation is diligence in addition to the disciplina rationis. That is, Scripture has a rational meaning, it is not "unconnected and diffuse," but its words have meaningful syntax.¹⁵³ Right exegesis, then, must adhere to the manifest meaning or purport of the text.¹⁵⁴ When more obscure passages are found, such as the parables and figurative passages, one should remember that Scripture does not contradict itself, and that these passages should be interpreted in accord with the general sense of Scripture, "incerta de certis et obscura de manifestis praeiudicari," and again, "unus sermo...secundum omnia potius quam adversus omnia...interpretandus."¹⁵⁵

Thus, Tertullian, unlike Irenaeus, felt that Scripture was useful for believers, for non-believers could not understand it or interpret it. It can be understood only where true Christian faith and discipline are found, "Ubi enim apparverit esse veritatem disciplinae et fidei christiana, illic erit veritas et scripturarum et expositionum."¹⁵⁶

At this point, Tertullian emphasizes the necessity

¹⁵³Prescrip., 9.

¹⁵⁴Flesseman-van Leer, op.cit., pp. 176f.

¹⁵⁵On Resurr., 21; and Against Praxeus, 26, resp.; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁵⁶Prescrip., 19.

of relating Scripture to the rest of tradition, for it is by means of the regula that the believer may have confidence in interpreting Scripture. Only where the regula is known can Scripture be understood properly, that is within the Church and its tradition. Only the tradition of the Church can guarantee correct exegesis and interpretation.¹⁵⁷ Thus, although Tertullian does not give oral tradition and the doctrine of the Church superiority over Scripture,¹⁵⁸ he leaves open the possibility of subjugating interpretation to the dogma of the Church. Indeed, he asserts that doctrine is the criterion for proving Scripture to be uncorrupted, as he notes:

Illic igitur et scripturarum...per quae doctrina tractatur.¹⁵⁹

This emphasis allows him to judge the correctness of faith apart from an appeal to Scripture. God's revelation received through apostolic tradition, including but exceeding Scripture, becomes the basis for faith.¹⁶⁰ Thus, tradition does, in fact, interpret Scripture, while the reverse is not necessarily required. Scripture and tradition are not as clearly interdependent here as in Irenaeus, and it is with Tertullian that we see the tendencies developing toward the authoritative criteria for Biblical interpretation.

¹⁵⁷Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 181f.

¹⁵⁹Prescrip., 38; Flesseman-van Leer, Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

Augustine

F. W. Farrar labels Augustine the "oracle of thirteen centuries,"¹⁶¹ and David W. Kerr says, "Such is his stature among Christian theologians that he serves as a dividing point between the ancient and the medieval periods of the Church."¹⁶² His theological and personal influence has greatly affected the Church until the present day. His strengths are as an apologist and theologian, however, and not as an interpreter of Scripture. Although he presents excellent hermeneutical principles, he often falls woefully short of implementing them.¹⁶³ His principles of Biblical interpretation are set forth in his work, De doctrina Christiana, although his well-known statement about the fourfold sense of Scripture is found in another work, De utilitate credendi. The application, or lack of it, of these principles is found throughout his writings, letters, sermons, and commentaries.¹⁶⁴

In this section, we propose to observe Augustine's emphasis on faith as a basis for knowledge of the Bible,

¹⁶¹F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1886), p. 234.

¹⁶²David W. Kerr, "Augustine of Hippo," Inspiration and Interpretation, John F. Walvoord, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 67.

¹⁶³Farrar, op.cit., p. 234; cf. Farrar's discussion of his many questionable and erroneous exegetical conclusions.

¹⁶⁴Kerr, op.cit., p. 67.

his philosophy for interpreting Scriptural truth, and his basic exegetical and interpretative principles.

Faith as a basis for knowledge
of the Bible

Augustine's view of the Scriptures is most reverent. To him they are "the revered pen of thy (i.e. God's) Spirit."¹⁶⁵ A body of writings which is described in this way must be an unlimited source of truth for him. They are so profound that one must approach them with faith if he is to understand them at all. Faith must, therefore, precede understanding.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, he says:

Intellectus enim merces est fidei. Ergo noli
quarere intellegere ut credas, sed crede ut
intellegas; quoniam nisi credideritis, non
intellegeitis.¹⁶⁷

And again he says:

Intellege, ut credas, verbum meum; crede, ut
intellegas, verbum dei.¹⁶⁸

This faith, however, is based upon one's conviction of the authority of Scripture. "Titubabit autem fides, si

¹⁶⁵Augustine, Confessiones, VII, 21, 27; Latin texts from Corpus Christianorum, Avrelii Augustini Opera (Turnholt: Typographi Brepols Editores Pontificii, 1962).

¹⁶⁶Kerr, op.cit., p. 74.

¹⁶⁷In Joannis Evangelium tractatis, 29, 6: "Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe that thou mayest understand."

¹⁶⁸Sermones, 43, 7, 9: "Understand in order that thou mayest believe my words; believe in order that thou mayest understand the word of God."

divinarum scripturarum vacillat auctoritas."¹⁶⁹ "Faith is a gift of God wrought in man by the Holy Spirit, but this is the faith which lays hold of Christ, not the faith which is necessary for understanding the Bible," says Kerr,¹⁷⁰ although making such a sharp distinction is perhaps problematic. Thus, although faith is necessary for understanding, Augustine does not say that the same Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture also enables the believer to understand the truth of Scripture.¹⁷¹ Faith brings understanding, but this faith is not synonymous at all points with the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is here that Augustine stresses the role of the Church. In place of the illumination of the Holy Spirit in understanding the truth of Scripture, he stresses the teaching of the Church.¹⁷² "Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas,"¹⁷³ he says. Polman says that this quotation stresses the kind of authority needed by the carnal, unbelieving man if he

¹⁶⁹De Doctrina Christiana, I, 37, 4.

¹⁷⁰Kerr, op.cit., p. 75.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁷³Contra Epistolam Manichaer Fundamenti, 5, 6:
"I would not have believed the gospel if the authority of the Church had not moved me."

is to believe. The truly spiritual man has a living bond with the Word of God through the Holy Spirit dwelling within him.¹⁷⁴ However, this conclusion ignores the context of Augustine's statement. He is answering the question of how to deal with one who says, "Non credo." Augustine replies that without the testimony of the Church, neither could he believe. That this is the meaning of this passage is proven by Augustine's next sentence:

Quibus ergo obtemperavi dicentibus, Crede Evangelio;
cur eis non obtemperam dicentibus mihi, Noli credere
Manichaeis?...¹⁷⁵

It is clear that when read in context, Augustine's statement of the authority of the Church is his own conviction, not that of the unbeliever, as Polman contends. Augustine's position here is quite understandable, for he owed everything to the Church. It was the Church which opened the Scriptures to him with the allegorical expositions of Ambrose, and to the Church he had committed himself passionately and with no reservations.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the Church is the key to

¹⁷⁴A. D. R. Polman, The Word of God According to Augustine, (London: Hodden & Stoughton, 1961), p. 208.

¹⁷⁵Contra Epist. Man., Ibid.; a footnote by Albert H. Newman in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, IV, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 131 reads, "This is one of the earliest distinct assertions of the dependence of the Scriptures for authority on the Church." "So when those on whose authority I have consented to believe in the gospel tell me not to believe in Manichaeus, how can I but consent...for it was through the Catholics that I got my faith in it (the Gospel)."

¹⁷⁶Kerr, op.cit., p. 76.

faith and understanding for him, just as the Holy Spirit does the work of attestation and illumination in Reformed theology.¹⁷⁷ For him, the Church mediates true knowledge, and if he believes only what the Church teaches, then the Church mediates between him and God's Word. The spiritual fathers of the Catholic Church explore the depths of divine truth and illuminate what cannot be understood by man whose faculties are vitiated by sin.¹⁷⁸ Both revelation and grace are thus mediated through the Church, so that sinful man may receive through faith that knowledge of divine truth which brings salvation.¹⁷⁹ Faith is thus the basis of knowledge, but Augustine means by this the faith that one has in the veracity of the Church of God in mediating divine truth. Although the Church is the most reliable interpreter of Scripture, Augustine does not mean to imply by this that the authority of Scripture is dependent upon the judgment of the Church. He explicitly states that bishops and councils may err,¹⁸⁰ but by this he does not offer the option of believers to hold a private interpretation. The Church holds the key to the meaning of the Bible.

Philosophy of interpreting Scriptural truth

In his Biblical hermeneutic, Augustine emphasizes

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁷⁸Contra. Epist. Man., I, 4, 5.

¹⁷⁹Kerr, Ibid.

¹⁸⁰De Baptismo Contra Donatistes, 2, 12; Kerr, Ibid.

three basic principles: Christ is the guarantor and interpreter of Scripture, the principle of interiorization, and the regula fidei et caritas.

Christological interpretation. In regard to the first principle, we note in the Cambridge History of the Bible that "all study of scripture must, for the Christian, be part of the life of Christ...and arising from the foregoing, we must note the Christocentricity of all Augustine's exegesis. Christ is the guarantor and the interpreter of holy scripture, the witness from whom it derives its authority."¹⁸¹ He believes that man does not know truth in and of himself, but must be instructed and illuminated,¹⁸³ hence, "Magister vester unus est, Christus."¹⁸⁴ Theology is under the guidance of the "one Master, Christ,"¹⁸⁵ who said, "I am the light of the world,"¹⁸⁶ and "without me you can do nothing."¹⁸⁷ Since Christ is the Light who illumines truth, He must open the eyes of the interpreter thus:

¹⁸¹C. E. Schuetzinger, The German Controversy on St. Augustine's Illumination Theory (New York: Pageant Press, 1960), pp. 15, 16; Gerald Bonner, "Augustine as a Biblical Scholar," CHB, I, Peter Ackroyd & C. F. Evans, eds. (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1970), p. 562.

¹⁸²CHB, Ibid.

¹⁸³Schuetzinger, op.cit., p. 15.

¹⁸⁴Matth. 23, 10.

¹⁸⁵Ibid.

¹⁸⁶Joannis 35, 1.

¹⁸⁷John tract 81, 3.

Sic mens nostra, qui est oculus animae, nisi ueritatis lumine radietur, et ab illo qui illuminat nec illuminatur, mirabiliter illustretur, nec ad sapientiam nec ad iustitiam poterit peruenire. Ipsa est enim uia nostra iuste uiuere. Quomodo autem non offendat in uia, cui non lucet lumen?¹⁸⁸

Thus, it is Christ who expounds the Scriptures and teaches us the Word of God.¹⁸⁹ By this he means that "man's heart must be affected before he can even hear God's Words," as Polman says. Augustine refers to this need for illumination by the terms "inner" and "outer." These concepts have unfortunate Neoplatonic connotations, in the sense that they suggest that "the outer call of the Word is received alike by the pious and by the impious, by the faithful and the godless, while, in fact, the inner call is evoked in man's innermost soul," Polman notes.¹⁹¹ Augustine did not mean that there were two aspects to God's Word, but that the inner call, the voice of Christ, enables the believer to hear and learn the message of the Gospel in his heart. This is the distinction between law and promise,

¹⁸⁸John tract., 35,3: "Our mind, which is the eye of the soul, unless it be irradiated by the light of truth, and wondrously shone upon by Him who enlightens and is not enlightened, will not be able to come to wisdom nor to righteousness. For to live righteously is for us the way itself. But how can he on whom the light does not shine but stumble in the way?"

¹⁸⁹Polman, op.cit., p. 85.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 154.

letter and Spirit. Polman notes further, "It is through the subjective work of the spirit in our innermost heart, that the heart becomes concentrated on the preaching of the truth. Hence does it respond to the call, is it called by God's Word and Holy Spirit."¹⁹² In this function of the Holy Spirit inspiring the Word of God, Christ proclaiming and interpreting it, the Trinity works in and through the Word. Thus, Augustine is basically Christological in his hermeneutical emphasis, but in no sense does he ignore the function of the Trinity in the Word.

The principle of interiorization. Secondly, he emphasizes the principle of interiorization or illumination. Schuetzinger says that "Augustine maintains that all knowledge is anchored in the interior realms of the soul, in intimo meo."¹⁹³ Knowledge originates from and returns to the divine light, and this is even more true when man's attention is drawn away from the sensory attraction to the external world: "Deum et animam scire cupio. Nihilne plus? Nihil omnino."¹⁹⁴ Augustine believes that the understanding has need of the light of God to attain truth, just as the

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁹³ Schuetzinger, op.cit., p. 15f.

¹⁹⁴ Solil., I, 2,7,; Schuetzinger, Ibid.

will needs the grace of God to attain virtue. The roles of illumination and of grace are analogous.¹⁹⁵

For Augustine, the origins of intellectual ideas and sensory perception are different. Sensory cognition is only science, whereas he is looking for wisdom. This wisdom can only come from God, the sun of the soul, and intellectual truths cannot be understood unless illuminated by an external Source.¹⁹⁶ God is the inner teacher of the soul and the soul understands by consulting Him.¹⁹⁷ God is the light of our soul and enables us to see all spiritual things.¹⁹⁸ We thus have access to knowledge of spiritual truth only as a result of the illumination of our souls by the divine light of God. It is this aspect of St. Augustine's thought which St. Thomas and the Schoolmen interpreted to mean that God was the creative cause of understanding, and as the source of truth, the divine ideas are the type and model to which all true knowledge must be conformed.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵Eugene Portalie, S. J. A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine, Ralph J. Bastian, trans. (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p. 109.

¹⁹⁶Solil. I, 8, 15; Portalie, Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁹⁷Portalie, Ibid., Epistolae 13,4.

¹⁹⁸Portalie, Ibid.; De Genesi ad litteram libra XII, 31,59; De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum I, 25,38.

¹⁹⁹Portalie, Ibid.; Summa Theologiae, I, q.84, a.5; q.88, a.3.

Regula fidei et caritas. Finally, the master key of interpretation for Augustine is the regula fidei et caritas. That sense of Scripture which most effectively builds up love for God and our neighbor is the preferred one. He says in this regard:

Ut intellegatur legis et omnium diuinarum scripturarum plenitudo et finis esse dilectio rei, qua fruendum est, et rei, quae nobiscum ea re frui potest, quia, ut se quisque diligat, praecepto non opus est. 200

And again he says:

Quisquis igitur scripturas diuinas uel quamlibet earum partem intellexisse sibi uidetur, ita ut eo intellectu non aedificet istam geminam caritatem dei et proximi, nondum intellexit. 201

Heaven states that one principle for determining whether a passage is to be interpreted literally or figuratively must be based on which kind of interpretation tends most effectively to establish the reign of love. 202

His reason for emphasizing love as an hermeneutical key to Scripture is that it is Scripture itself which

²⁰⁰DeDoct. I, 35,39: "We should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves."

²⁰¹DeDoct. I, 36,40: "Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this two-fold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought."

²⁰²DeDoct. III, 15,23.

proclaims love to be the basis on which all else depends.²⁰³ Furthermore, love cannot be perniciously deceptive. Even if one misinterprets a passage, drawing a meaning from it to build up love even when such a meaning is not present, no harm is done, the "error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception."²⁰⁴ Such a person goes astray in a way similar to the man who mistakenly leaves the high road, but reaches through the fields the same place to which the road leads. Augustine is not encouraging irresponsibility in interpretation, however, for he says such a man is to be corrected, lest he fall into the habit of going astray, and may someday thus take the wrong direction altogether.²⁰⁵ His emphasis, rather, is on interpreting Scripture with the mind of Christ, using it for the redemptive purpose for which it was given.

In addition to the criterion of love, Augustine, like Irenaeus and Tertullian, insists upon submitting all interpretation to the regula fidei, the authority of the Church. Any doubtful or ambiguous passage of Scripture must be clarified by the regula, for only the authority of the Church guarantees the veracity of any interpretation.²⁰⁶

²⁰³Grant, S. Hist. op.cit., p. 111; Matt. 22:40.

²⁰⁴DeDoct. I, 36, 40.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Kelly, op.cit., p. 47; Contra ep-Manich, 6; De Doct. Christ 2, 12; Contra Faust. Manich, 22, 79.

Even problems of punctuation or pronunciation should be clarified in terms of which usage is recommended by the rule of faith, either by the authority of the Church or the plainer passages of Scripture.²⁰⁷

Although he sometimes uses the term, regula fidei, to refer to Scripture, his usual meaning for the concept was the apostolic symbol. The regula is the general teaching of the Catholic faith given by the elders to the babes in the faith, although this teaching should faithfully reflect the teaching of the apostles and not, as Paul says, "another gospel" (Gal. 1:9).²⁰⁸ The apostolic symbol, the regula fidei, is a short summary, a verbum abbreviatum, of the clear teaching of Scripture. Thus, the content of the regula should never contradict the content of the Scriptures.²⁰⁹ Unfortunately, the symbol and the regula by their very nature were themselves interpretations, and adherence to them was already one step removed from direct obedience to the Word of God. In spite of his intentions, Augustine assisted in opening the way for an authority, a regula which was not necessarily harmonious with Scripture. The active faith of

²⁰⁷De Doct. III, 2, 2; plainer passages of Scripture as well as the authority of the Church here seem to be included in his definition of the regula fidei.

²⁰⁸Tractatus in Joannis evangelium 98, 7; De fide et operibus II, Sermo 186, 2; 213, 1; 362, 7; Epistula 193, 11.

²⁰⁹Polman, op.cit., p. 211.

the Church was based on the Scriptures by Augustine,²¹⁰ but human interpretations of the regula soon found ways of diverging from the normata of the Bible.

Basic exegetical and hermeneutical rules

Most of the hermeneutical principles suggested by Augustine in De doctrina christiana, the earliest manual of Biblical hermeneutics, are common to the majority of expositors.²¹¹ They are valuable for the most part, however, and are quite useful for all expositors. One of his first basic principles is the need for a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek because of the variety and uncertainty of the Latin versions. He laments that in the early days of the faith, nearly everyone who had any smattering of Hebrew or Greek ventured to work on a translation, hence the sound interpreter must be able to criticize these versions by comparison with the original.²¹²

Next, he stressed the need for interpreting the obscure passages in the light of the plain ones. In order to make such comparisons, one must be familiar with the content of the Biblical books. When one is thus familiar with the language of Scripture and knows these plain matters

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 214.

²¹¹David Schley Schaff, "St Augustine as an Exegete," The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, VI, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. x. (pp. vii-xii).

²¹²Kerr, op.cit., p. 67; De Doct., II, 11, 16.

that concern life and faith, he can then proceed to investigate the obscure and doubtful passages.²¹³

Furthermore, the serious exegete must have some cognizance of various secular fields of knowledge, so that by knowing these, he can interpret Scripture more knowledgeably. The interpreter should be acquainted with sacred geography,²¹⁴ natural history,²¹⁵ music,²¹⁶ chronology,²¹⁷ numerology,²¹⁸ natural science,²¹⁹ dialectics and rhetoric,²²⁰ and the writings of ancient philosophers.²²¹

The spirit and attitude of the interpreter must be meek and lowly and not puffed up with much knowledge. He must be purified from pride,²²² for the spirit and intent are of more importance than scientific and critical accuracy. One must reflect the spirit of the Gospel if he rightly interprets its words.²²³

²¹³De Doct., II, 9, 14; III, 29, 39.

²¹⁴De Doct. II, 29, 45.

²¹⁵De Doct., II, 16, 24; 29, 45.

²¹⁶De Doct., II, 16, 26.

²¹⁷De Doct. II, 28, 42.

²¹⁸De Doct. II, 16, 25.

²¹⁹De Doct. II, 29, 45.

²²⁰De Doct. II, 31, 48.

²²¹De Doct. II, 40, 60.

²²²De Doct. II, 41, 62.

²²³D. S. Schaff, op.cit., p. xi.

Augustine's use of allegory has been sharply criticized. Although he sees its dangers, his own spiritual life had been so deeply affected by it that he cannot reject it out of hand. He occasionally falls into excess in his allegorizing, but sincerely tries to reflect the true spiritual sense and his deep spiritual insights lead one to revere him as a child of his times and excuse him, at least partially, for his weaknesses.²²⁴

Finally, he adopts the seven rules of the Donatist Tichonius as being exemplary principles for a sound understanding of the Bible, although Augustine is more cautious than Tichonius in what he expects may be accomplished through their use. In brief, these laws relate to (1) the Lord and His body, (2) the twofold division of the body of the Lord, (3) the promises and the law, (4) species and genus, (5) times or numbers, (6) recapitulation, (7) the devil and his body.²²⁴

Vincent of Lérins

The final stage of development of the authoritative emphasis in interpretation is articulated by Vincent of Lérins in A.D. 434, in a little work called the Commonitorium. Here Vincent discusses his method of determining what catholic truth is. The falsehood of the heretics can be distinguished from the truth of the divine revelation by two

²²⁴De Doct. III, 30, 42; IV, 37, 56.

criteria: the authority of divine law (the Bible), and the tradition of the Catholic Church.²²⁵ In order to understand rightly these criteria, however, one must apply several principles which help determine the norm of true doctrine.

Methods for determining Catholic truth

Scriptures are the source of all true doctrine.

Since the Biblical canon is complete, says Vincent, and is sufficient for every purpose, why is there need to add to it the Church's interpretation? The reason is that the Scriptures are subject to many interpretations, so that there become almost as many interpretations as there are men. The heretics, especially, delight in the novelty of their new renderings. For this reason, a clear canon of interpretation must be accepted. He says:

For this reason it is very necessary that on account of so great intricacies of such varied error, the line used in the exposition of the prophets and apostles be made straight in accordance with the standard of ecclesiastical and catholic interpretation.²²⁶

Rules for examining interpretations. Even though the Scriptures are sufficient for faith, because they are so variously misinterpreted, we must have recourse to tradition.²²⁷ We must, therefore, examine all interpretations in the light of the Church's teaching. Vincent's famous formula: quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus, is the means

²²⁵Kelly, op.cit., p. 50.

²²⁶Vincent, Commonitorium II, 2.

²²⁷Kelly, op.cit., p. 50.

by which all interpretations are to be tested.²²⁸ Thus, that is truly catholic which can be discerned by the principles of "ecumenicity, antiquity, and consensus."²²⁹

This may be accomplished as follows:

We shall follow ecumenicity if we acknowledge as the one true faith what the whole church throughout the world confesses. So also we shall follow antiquity if we retreat not one inch from those interpretations which, it is clear, the holy men of old and our fathers proclaimed. Likewise, we shall follow consensus if in antiquity itself we earnestly strive after the pronouncements and opinions of all, or certainly almost all, the priests and teachers alike.²³⁰

Therefore, in order to distinguish truth from falsehood in the Holy Scriptures, the divine canon must be interpreted according to the "oral traditions of the ecumenical church."²³¹ This may be done by following the general decrees of the ecumenical councils, and if there are no such decrees on a particular issue, then, next best, follow the harmony of the consensus of the great teachers. In so doing, the errors of the heretics may be unmasked.²³² This ancient consensus of the holy fathers must be zealously sought in matters pertaining to the rule of faith. In this way new heresies may be dealt with and their innovations rapidly squelched.²³³

²²⁸Comm. II, 3.

²²⁹Ibid.; also 27, 38.

²³⁰Ibid.

²³¹Comm. 27, 38.

²³²Ibid.

²³³Comm. 28, 39.

Ancient heresies, however, have had ample time to pilfer from the truth, and should be dealt with on the authority of the Scriptures alone, since the argument of antiquity is not as effective with them.²³⁴ Thus, at the point of Scripture, Vincent disagrees with Tertullian on its usefulness in dealing with heresies.

Implications for the development of doctrine

With Vincent's emphasis as it is on the past, one may ask whether he would allow any progress of doctrine in the Church. He does see the legitimacy of progress, but not of change. Religion, like the body, grows and develops, but does not change in substance.²³⁴

It is right that those ancient doctrines of the heavenly philosophy should in the progress of time be given complete care, be refined, polished, but it is wrong for them to be changed, wrong for them to be mutilated, to be marred. Let them get proof, illumination, definition, but they must still retain their fullness, their integrity, their natural characteristics.²³⁵

And again Vincent writes:

The church of Christ, however, careful and alert guardian of the doctrines transmitted to it, never makes any change in them, no diminution, no addition; prunes away no essential, grafts on nothing that is not; never loses her own properties, appropriates none from others; but bends every energy upon this one task, by expounding faithfully and wisely the ancient truths, if any there are which in olden times were shapeless or left only begun, to care for them and polish them; if there be any already

²³⁴Grant, Short History, op.cit., p. 113.

²³⁵Comm. 23, 30.

defined and revealed in their essentials, to strengthen them and fix them firmly; if there by any already strengthened and defined, to guard them.²³⁶

Vincent is thus not a conservative who excludes the possibility of progress. The councils must perfect and polish the traditional concepts. This is progress (profec-tus), however, and not change (alteratio). Just as in the world of nature we see organic growth in which the appearance, shape, and beauty of each species develop, while the basic nature remains unchanged, so the Church, God's husbandry, nurtures²³⁷ and "guards the deposit,"²³⁸ the revelation in Holy Scripture which is interpreted unerringly in the Church's tradition.²³⁹ Vincent's principle is "not new doctrines, but old ones in new terms" (non nova, sed nove).²⁴⁰ McCracken summarizes Vincent's position by saying: "that which produces something new, not found in antiquity, not ecumenical, is condemned, but what is clearly to be derived from antiquity may be developed."²⁴¹

²³⁶Comm. 23, 32.

²³⁷Comm. 23, 30.

²³⁸I Tim. 6:20.

²³⁹Kelly, op.cit., p. 51.

²⁴⁰Comm. 23.

²⁴¹George E. McCracken, ed. Early Medieval Theology, The Library of Christian Classics, IX (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), p. 25.

The importance of tradition in interpretation

Vincent represents the summation of the developing trend toward the authoritative interpretation of Scripture. The decisions of the councils, the consensus of the interpretations of the fathers, and the authority of the Pope as the guardian of the deposit are the prime authorities in settling questions of interpretation.²⁴² The oral traditions of the ecumenical church thus have precedence over any other interpretation. The Church is the final authority in determining the meaning of the Scripture. tion the role of the Holy Spirit, nor does he stress apostolic succession as channels of illumination. Antiquity, universality, and consent are the sine qua non of authority. Whether or not he meant to mold Biblical interpretation into the crystallized form of unchanging tradition, he did so. Although he was little recognized in the medieval period, his ideas were revived by the Catholics at the time of the Reformation and after. Cassander, Peter Meiderlin, and Hugo Grotius made reference to him,²⁴³ and the Vincentian canon played its part also at the Vatican Council of 1870.²⁴⁴

Since the Council of Trent decreed that divine truth is derived from two sources, Scripture and tradition, and

²⁴²Grant, S.H., op.cit., p. 114.

²⁴³McCracken, op.cit., p. 31.

²⁴⁴Ibid., p. 32.

tradition interprets Scripture, the Roman Church moved beyond Vincent. With the dogmas of the immaculate conception and the universal episcopate of the Pope, the Jesuitical theology in its zeal to substantiate the infallibility dogma, has defined tradition as "what has been taught as such in the Church of Rome."²⁴⁵ Such conclusions, though perhaps inspired by Vincent's tendencies, certainly do not reflect his intent. They do, however, provide examples of the danger involved in allowing tradition to supercede the clear word of Scripture. Modern Roman Catholics have attempted to correct this problem by giving up the idea of certain extra-Biblical traditions and equating oral and written tradition. Some of the ancient traditions were right for their time, but do not now adequately reflect the Biblical emphases on the doctrines which may be in question, such as the concept of infallibility.²⁴⁶

Conclusion

The contribution of Irenaeus to Biblical interpretation was most significant at the point where he stressed the need for integrity and authority in hermeneutical procedures. He saw the need for a valid interpretative authority

²⁴⁵P. Tschackert, "Tradition," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, XI, Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed.

²⁴⁶Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Personal conversation, 1973.

in the face of the autonomy and fantastic exegesis of the heretics. His concern for a grammatical and historical treatment of the text heralded a responsible attitude toward interpretation and the clarity of the Scripture's meaning that we could learn much from today. His emphasis on the perspicuity of the Scripture's meaning was clarified and qualified by his conviction that the illumination of the Holy Spirit was essential to open the darkened eyes of the interpreter to the clear light of Scripture. Tradition also, was dependent upon the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit for its authority, as is expressed by the concept of regula veritatis. Thus, both Scripture and tradition were subordinated to the Holy Spirit, whom Irenaeus saw as the key to truth. Authority rests ultimately in God who appoints bishops, forms the Church, and inspires Scripture. Therefore, hermeneutical methods, Scripture exegesis, and tradition were for him the means through which the Holy Spirit works to give an understanding of revelation, and only He can give the understanding of the spiritual truth of Scripture. This is why the heretics were wrong. They had not been guided by the Holy Spirit in the Church and the Scriptures, for they were outside the Church and had no access to Him.

The question of the superiority of Scripture or tradition, then, never occurred to Irenaeus. They were both vehicles of revelation, and Scripture as illuminated by the

Holy Spirit and interpreted by the regula veritatis was the basis of truth. The validity of the Church's interpretation was checked in turn by the "historical guaranty" of the succession of bishops and by the "divine guaranty" of the Holy Spirit who attested and illuminated God's revelation. Tradition and Scripture thus confirm each other and are both subject to the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Tertullian's approach to the problem of heretics was primarily to deny them the right to use the Scriptures, since these belonged to the Church and not to the heretical sects. The very spirit which led the heretics to rebel against duly constituted ecclesiastical authority would also lead them to reject any valid interpretation of the Scriptures, corrupting them in various ways. One true criterion for judging doctrine was the apostolic faith and doctrine of the Church as expressed in the regula fidei. Without a link with the apostolic faith of the Church, the heretics were so hopelessly lost as to be both unable and unworthy to use the Bible rightly. The one true standard of interpretation for Tertullian was the regula fidei, the traditional understanding of Scripture found in the Church. Thus tradition became both a source of refutation of wrong doctrine and a collective symbol of the apostolic meaning of Scripture. Tradition thus gained a more prominent place in his

hermeneutics than in those of Irenaeus, although Tertullian continually asserted that the Holy Spirit worked through Scripture and tradition to transmit correctly the apostolic tradition. One weakness in his concept of the authority of tradition was his tendency to assert that the Holy Spirit speaks apart from Scripture or tradition. His reasoning is inherently contradictory here, and leads to a subjectivism which was quite possibly the source of his movement outside the ecumenical structure of the Church into the vagaries of Montanism. Thus, Tertullian tended to exalt both the tradition of authoritative exegesis in the Church and the speaking of the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture. These tendencies both undermine the authority of Scripture and lead toward a separation of Scripture and tradition. In his early life, then, He stressed tradition as the final authority, and in his latter life stressed the Scriptures subjectively interpreted apart from the authority of the Church. Both trends aided the dogmatizing of authoritarianism in the Church by making it react against private interpretations of Scripture and subjugate interpretation to its own dogma.

The result of this tendency to interpret Scripture by tradition is that the interpretation itself becomes tradition, and one moves further away from an objective exegesis. A valid hermeneutic must allow Scripture constantly to criticize tradition, and for this process one must have an

inductive interpretation which allows Scripture to speak afresh without the accretions of dogmatic traditionalism. Tradition as such is inherently subjective, for it involves interpretation, which always bears the element of fallibility. Thus, the more Scripture is encrusted with layers of ecclesiastical tradition, the less certainty one has that its true meaning comes through. With Tertullian, then, authoritarian Biblical interpretation begins to develop rapidly.

The failure of Augustine to practice the hermeneutical principles which he set forth in De doctrina christiana, along with his criticism of Jerome who did try to use more discretion, did not further the cause of responsible exegesis and hermeneutics in the Church. His emphasis on faith based upon the authority of Scripture as a prerequisite to understanding is praiseworthy. However, this faith seemed to be elicited more by reliance upon the tradition of the Church than upon the sound exegesis of Scripture or the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Church was thus the means of understanding for him. Ecclesiastical authority provided the attestation and illumination he needed for his Biblical interpretation, just as the Reformers relied upon the Holy Spirit to do this work. Therefore, the Church, not the Scriptures alone, mediate divine truth and hold the key to the understanding of the Bible.

Augustine rightly emphasized that Christ was the Light who illumines truth and expounds the Scriptures, but it is unfortunate that he forced this Light to filter through the ecclesiastical prism. He, like Tertullian, in the final analysis, subordinated the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit to the dogma of tradition. His Christological emphasis in regard to the application of the Word to the inner heart of man was commendable, but even this concept was overshadowed by the regula, which was by now rapidly becoming a crystallized set of proscriptions of belief which were not necessarily synonymous with the apostolic doctrines emphasized by Irenaeus in a much more balanced system. Had his hermeneutical practice been a faithful explication of his philosophy and not a confusing brand of allegory and slavish worship of tradition, the history of Biblical interpretation would most certainly have been redirected toward a consistent regard for the Bible and a truly responsible exegetical heritage.

With Vincent, the Church's commitment to an authoritarian hermeneutic became complete. Although the Scriptures were for him the source of all true doctrine, their meaning must be that which has been prescribed by the "standard of ecclesiastical and catholic interpretation." Since the Scriptures were so vulnerable to misinterpretation, they must therefore be interpreted in the light of the

Church's teaching. That which is catholic is true; quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus. The canon must be interpreted according to the oral traditions of the Church. The councils, the fathers, and the Pope became the sole interpreters, while the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the objective and inductive hermeneutical procedures were ignored. Thus, Vincent achieved consensus at the expense of exegetical freedom and a desire for individual hermeneutical integrity. He placed orthodoxy above the quest for a critical understanding of the Bible. Faith, not truth, became the criterion of apostolicity. Responsible individual initiative was stifled, a reliance upon the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the application of truth was subdued, and the vitality of the Church was gravely affected. When the Bible cannot speak afresh to each generation, even when this fresh speaking is harmonious with the apostolic witness, the Church replaces the vigor of renewed confrontation with the Word by a stylized adherence to sameness.

On the positive side, the Vincentian Canon has the potential for ruling out the type of theological and liturgical innovation found in the medieval West, such as transubstantiation. Since concepts such as this have not been held always everywhere, and by all, the Reformers are able to appeal to the Fathers in the debate against

papal interpretations. Thus Vincent's emphasis can be useful, although the usual effect of his influence results in a shackling of Scripture.

CHAPTER II

THE TENSION BETWEEN ALLEGORISM AND LITERAL EXEGESIS

In addition to tracing the general development of authoritative methods of interpretation and the work of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical processes of the early Church fathers, it is necessary to survey also the development of the allegorical trend in exegesis in order to lay a more complete foundation for understanding the hermeneutical influences upon Martin Luther. We do not intend to develop an exhaustive history of the development of allegorism as a hermeneutical method or of literal exegesis as a reaction to it. Our purpose is to identify hermeneutical trends which were influential either positively or negatively in the development of hermeneutics in the Reformation, and particularly in the work of Luther. We will also note the rise of Scholasticism and its continued emphasis on authority in interpretation. Thus, we intend to study in an introductory manner the development and influence of allegorical and literal hermeneutical methodologies on Luther's Protestant exegesis.

Origen and the Alexandrian School

The development of allegorism

Even though men like Irenaeus and Tertullian struggled valiantly to preserve the authority of the Church in

matters of interpretation, their conclusions did not convince many despisers of Christianity. In Alexandria, men such as Celsus and Porphyry thwarted the attempts to make the Christian faith meaningful by attacking the Scriptures as immoral, trivial, and absurd. A group of scholars commonly known as the Alexandrian School responded to these accusations by applying the use of allegory, a method commonly used by the pagan philosophers themselves, to the interpretation of Scripture.¹ In carrying out this attempt to harmonize religion and philosophy, these apologists tended to deal in speculative philosophy, sometimes to the detriment of their hermeneutical integrity. Gaining the basis of their exegetical procedures from the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, Philo, they developed a hermeneutical approach which found a multiplicity of meanings in Scripture.

Originating with Pantaenus and Clement of Alexandria, this school developed allegory as a means of seeing the underlying truth in Biblical passages in which the obvious or literal meaning was ambiguous or objectionable in some way from an orthodox point of view.² Clement emphasizes

¹A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 32.

²E. C. Blackman, Biblical Interpretation (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1957), p. 92.

that the literal sense must not detain us, for literalism is the basis of the misuse of Scripture typical of heretics. The true exegete must look beyond the bare words to the underlying spiritual meanings. He distinguishes between the body and the spirit of Scripture, a concept later developed more fully by Origen. Thus, the spirit is the element of meaning in Scripture, not the literal sense, the body. From this principle, Clement moves on to see Abraham as an astronomer, the sterility of whose wife, Sarah, shows that his knowledge did not produce any virtue. His association with Agar, worldly wisdom, causes him to neglect true philosophy. Sarah reproaches him and he realizes that she, true philosophy, is his real wife.³ Clement goes on to handle the Gospel miracles as parables. For example, in the Feeding of the Five Thousand he notes that the barley loaves mean the preparation of the Jews for divine knowledge, since barley ripens faster than wheat, and the fishes means the preparation of the Greeks by philosophy, since philosophy was born in the waves of heathendom and was given to those who lie on the ground.⁴

Thus, in his desire to make the Bible palatable to the pagan philosophers, Clement often sacrifices the clear

³Ibid., p. 94; Clement, Stromata, I, 5.

⁴Ibid.; cf. F. W. Farrar, History of Interpretation (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1886), p. 186.

historical or theological meaning of a passage with the result that interpretation becomes bound by subjectivism and the sense of Biblical history is greatly endangered.

The most distinguished and representative member of the Alexandrian School was Origen, the successor to Clement. Although pursued by all sorts of calumny and outrage, much of which was the result of the jealousy of Demetrius, patriarch of Alexandria,⁵ Origen continued to develop the use of allegory in Scripture interpretation. His principles for the interpretation of Scripture are found in Book IV of his De Principiis.

Origen sees the purpose of Scripture to be the revelation of truth, not of God's working in history. The history exists only for the purpose of concealing the truths until they can be apprehended by the careful exegete.⁶ He states in this regard:

But while it was the intention of the Holy Spirit to enlighten holy souls, who had devoted themselves to the service of the truth, on these and similar subjects, there was in the second place another aim in view, namely, that for the sake of such as either could not or would not give themselves up to this labour and industry in order to prove themselves worthy of being taught and of coming to know matters of such value and importance, the Spirit should wrap up and conceal within ordinary

⁵G. W. Butterworth, trans., Origen: On First Principles (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. xxiii-xxviii.

⁶R. M. Grant, A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 82.

language under cover of some historical record or account of visible things certain secret mysteries. (Origen also says in IV, 2,9 that divine wisdom has inserted stumbling blocks and incongruities in the literal sense to encourage the reader to look deeper).⁷

Thus, we see that the concern of the Alexandrian School, and of Origen in particular, is to understand the ultimate mystery contained in Scripture. This mystery can be understood only as one uses allegory to interpret the symbols within Scripture.

In his efforts to grasp the inner mystery of Scripture, Origen asserts that the Bible has a multiplicity of senses and the Scripture itself testifies to this, for the Septuagint translates Proverbs 22:20f. as follows: "Do thou portray them threefold in counsel and knowledge that thou mayst answer words of truth to those who question thee."⁸ Origen applies to this passage Paul's threefold analysis of human personality in I Thess. 5:23, and thus sees that Scripture is composed of "spirit, soul, and body." The "body" is the literal sense, the "soul" is the moral sense, and the "spirit" is the allegorical-mystical sense.⁹ Origen says:

Each one must therefore portray the meaning of the divine writings in a threefold way upon his own soul; that is, so that the simple may

⁷Origen, De Principiis, IV, 2,8.

⁸De Prin., IV, 2,4.

⁹Grant, op.cit., p. 85.

be edified by what we may call the body of the scriptures (for such is the name we may give to the common and literal interpretation); while those who have begun to make a little progress and are able to perceive something more than that may be edified by the soul of scripture; and those who are perfect and like the men of whom the apostle says: 'We speak wisdom among the perfect...' such as these may be edified by the spiritual law..."¹⁰

Thus, although he is an extremely competent exegete, Origen concerns himself less with the literal meaning than with the mystical meaning which he insists was the intended meaning for all of Scripture, for St. Paul said, "The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."¹¹ The spiritual sense contains the essence of divine revelation and is thus of the highest importance.¹² It is by grace through the power of the Holy Spirit in the exegete that this inner, spiritual truth is revealed. Origen says:

Is there not also hidden in them (gospels) an inner meaning which is the Lord's meaning, and which is only revealed through the grace that was given to him who said, 'We have the mind of Christ, that we may know the things that were freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth'?"¹³

Thus, Origen sees the need for spiritual illumination in order to understand and apply the meaning of the spirit

¹⁰De Prin., IV,2,4.

¹¹Farrar, op.cit., p. 195.

¹²Blackman, op.cit., p. 100.

¹³De Prin., IV,2,3.

of Scripture. It is regrettable, however, that he does not relate spiritual illumination more closely with strict grammatical exegesis. As a result, as Blackman aptly states, "It must be admitted that in his actual work as an expositor Origen often takes ingenuity to the point of incredibility and stretches the imagination until it becomes fantastic."¹⁴

In conclusion, it may be said that Origen's insistence upon using the allegorical interpretation grows out of his distrust of the "literal" interpretations of the simplest of simple believers, as well as a desire to refute the attacks of the Gnostics and Valentinians. Such people cannot understand the function of metaphors, parables, or allegories, and they invariably interpret poetry as prose. Since such people would not understand a literary analysis of the use of figurative language, Origen must therefore resort to an allegorical polemic which insists on figures hidden behind every verse and word of Scripture. Grant notes that in spite of the danger of excess in its usage, this method did prove invaluable for its time.¹⁵ This is undoubtedly so, although it is always regrettable when questionable methods are used to contradict error. Farrar

¹⁴Blackman, op.cit., pp. 101f.

¹⁵Grant, op.cit., p. 85.

is less optimistic about the influence of this methodology. He notes that Origen points to Paul's use of "allegory" in Galatians 4:21ff. in an attempt to rationalize his own allegory. Farrar says further:

St. Paul borrows an incidental illustration from the methods of the rabbis, without for a moment disturbing the literal sense; Origen borrows from heathen Platonists and from Jewish philosophers a method which converts the whole of Scripture, alike the New and the Old Testament, into a series of clumsy varying and incredible enigmas. Allegory helped him to get rid of chiliasm and superstitious literalism and the "antitheses" of the Gnostics, but it opened the door for deadlier evils.¹⁶

Although it would have been preferable for Origen to have presented a defense of the Scriptures on a more scientific basis, he simply did not have the adequate literary canons, the linguistic knowledge, and the familiarity with the Hebrew literary style to accomplish his task successfully in any other way.¹⁷ In spite of its limitations, the allegorical method met a critical need at a time when the Church needed a way to uphold the rationality of the Christian faith. Most of the philosophical schools of the time accepted this method, and it was not without its satisfactory results in winning the respect of the secular philosophers and others who did not wish to give up their

¹⁶Farrar, op.cit., p. 196.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 198.

reason for their belief.¹⁸ It did, however, contribute to the development of an elite body of interpreters, those who had the spiritual gnosis to penetrate into the spiritual sense. This trend became more pronounced with time, and it undoubtedly contributed to the rise of authoritarianism in Biblical interpretation by limiting the understanding of the deeper senses of Scripture to those experts who had the ingenuity to understand them.

The influence of allegorism

The use of allegory in Biblical interpretation influenced hermeneutics for centuries. Farrar says in regard to Origen's influence, "His commentaries were in fact the common mine in which all his successors dug; and it must not be forgotten that he was the father of grammatical as well as allegoric exegesis."¹⁹ Beryl Smalley also emphasizes Origen's influence in allegorical methodology, while not neglecting his grammatical exegetical genius:

The soberest scholarship of the middle ages derived its permit and its direction ultimately from Alexandria...Much of the requisite secular learning would be focused on the allegorical and mystical sense; but Origen also founded the scientific study of the literal. He was such a giant that he could concentrate on allegory and yet leave vast monuments of literal exegesis... We shall find that medieval scholarship will

¹⁸Grant, op.cit., pp. 87,88.

¹⁹Farrar, op.cit., p. 189.

reflect Origen's method, attitude and limitations...Alexandrian exegesis penetrated to the Latin middle ages...by two main channels: indirectly through the Latin Fathers and directly through translations of Origen's works...To write a history of Origenist influence on the west would be to tantamount to writing a history of western exegesis.²⁰

The allegorical method influenced some of the interpretation of so scholarly an exegete as Jerome. His commentaries were used by medieval students as models for allegorical interpretation, as well as for literal exegesis,²¹ although Jerome refused to have anything further to do with Origen after the attacks upon the latter's orthodoxy. Augustine himself was profoundly influenced by the allegorical interpretations of Ambrose, as is widely known. It was by this method that he was able to answer the perverse literalism of the Manichees.²² Augustine did, however, move beyond the simple allegory of the type found in Ambrose, and attempted to hold a balanced relationship between the literal and spiritual senses. As he developed theologically, he tended to move away from allegory and concentrate on the literal sense in his commentaries, although he always used allegory quite heavily in his sermons. Thus, in De

²⁰Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952), pp. 12-14.

²¹Ibid., p. 22.

²²Grant, op.cit., p. 109; see section on Augustine in Chap. I of this paper.

doctrina christiana we see a very sound treatise on Biblical interpretation, and allegory is to be used very carefully.²³ St. Gregory also exhibited an allegorical tendency, although the Alexandrian influence upon him has been filtered through Augustine and Cassiodorus.

Gregory's Moralia, directed toward the urgent practical needs of the clergy when civilization seemed ready to disintegrate, concerned itself primarily with allegorical and moral interpretations, for under the urgent circumstances, he saw critical and grammatical issues as "superfluous."²⁴ He did, however, warn against an excess of allegory, and insisted on the importance of the literal sense and of history.²⁵

Allegory lingered on in the exegesis of the Schoolmen, although the attempt was made to show that the literal sense was basic to the spiritual one. Confusion arose as to the proper means of distinguishing between littera and allegoria. The trend continued to be to treat the literal sense as inferior to the spiritual in actual practice. The allegorical sense seemed to be considered the real meaning conveyed to the inspired writers of Scripture. The same

²³Ibid., pp. 109-111 passim; see section above in De doctrina in Chap. I; also, see Smalley, op.cit., p. 23.

²⁴Smalley, op.cit., pp. 33ff.

²⁵Dom Jean Leclercq, "From Gregory the Great to St. Bernard," The Cambridge History of the Bible, II, G.W.H. Lampe, ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), p. 185 (hereafter referred to as CHB).

Holy Spirit who wrote it gave insight to the exegete in order that he might apprehend the spiritual meaning. The literal sense is the husk containing the inner kernel of truth, and only grace from heaven enables the reader to separate the two and extract the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Thus, the grammatical meaning of the text did not necessarily lead the exegete to the historical and spiritual meaning of a passage. Interpretation of the spiritual sense depended upon the ingenuity of the exegete in perceiving allegorical meanings as he was supposedly illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Scripture, then, could come to have several meanings which had no clear relationship to the text itself, and interpretation thus became subjective. The only means to control such diversity was to strengthen further the authority of the Church in interpreting Scripture.

Theodore and the Antiochian School

Rejection of allegorism

Although the allegorical method met with immediate acceptance in many areas of the Church, it also encountered considerable opposition. The principal opposition came from a group of scholars known as the Antiochian School. Founded by Diodorus of Tarsus in the late third century,

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 213f; G. W. H. Lampe, "To Gregory the Great," CHB II, p. 163.

the Antiochian heritage is best represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia. Known as "The Exegete" of the early Church, Theodore possesses rare acumen, arduous discipline, and convincing sincerity. He rejects Origen's methodology while retaining his attention to linguistic details of style and grammar. Furthermore, he is probably the earliest writer to give attention to hermeneutical considerations.²⁷ He diligently studies each passage as a whole and not as a collection of isolated symbols. Farrar says in this regard:

He first considers the sequence of thought, then examines the phraseology and the separate clauses, and finally furnishes us with an exegesis which is often brilliantly characteristic and profoundly suggestive.²⁸

The Antiochenes react against the tradition of the Alexandrians in four significant ways. First, they recognize more clearly the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. Since Theodore refuses to read Christian doctrines back into the Old Testament but insists on taking it in its historical sense while the Alexandrians see Christ in almost every passage of the Bible, he is called a "Judaizer." Secondly, Theodore studies a passage as a whole and in both its narrower and broader contexts. He

²⁷Farrar, op.cit., p. 215; for a thorough and scholarly presentation of Theodore's exegetical method, see Rowan A. Greer, Theodore of Mopsuestia: Exegete and Theologian (Westminster: Faith Press, 1961), pp. 88-111.

²⁸Loc.cit.

does not lift out texts and build doctrines upon isolated passages. In short, he presents a scholarly exegetical method, as Farrar has shown above. Thirdly, Theodore and the Antiochenes take a more independent attitude toward Church tradition, in contrast to the authoritarian tendencies of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Alexandrians. They see Scripture as the basis of knowledge, rather than any tradition of interpretation or the analogia fidei of the Church. To them, Scripture is not one vast mystery, but it can be understood if one searches it humbly, patiently, wisely, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Here we see the foreshadowing of the principles of sola Scriptura, the perspicuity of Scripture, and the need for the illumination of the Holy Spirit--all of which were so greatly emphasized by the Reformers. Finally, the Antiochenes see the difference between the Jewish and the Alexandrian theories of inspiration. Some of the more able Jews regarded inspiration as being ethical in character and consisting of the expansion and ennoblement of the individual consciousness by the Holy Spirit. The Alexandrians were influenced by Plato and viewed inspiration as a pathological suspension of the individual consciousness. Theodore sees this fallacy and argues for the retention of the individuality and human characteristics of the Biblical writers.²⁹

²⁹Blackman, op.cit., pp. 103-105; Farrar, Ibid., p. 217.

Furthermore, unlike the Alexandrians who equated the spiritual sense (theoria) with allegory, Theodore distinguishes between the two. He does not rule out the spiritual sense (theoria), but solidly grounds it in the historical. If the spiritual sense subverts the historical, then it is no longer truly theoria, but allegory.³⁰ Thus, for the Antiochenes, theoria is a sense of Scripture higher or deeper than the literal, historical meaning, but it is firmly based upon it. As Grant says:

This understanding does not deny the literal meaning of Scripture but is grounded on it, as an image is based on the thing represented and points toward it. Both image and thing are comprehensible at the same time. There is no hidden meaning which only a Gnostic can comprehend.³¹

Influence of the Antiochenes

The literal-historical methodology of Theodore had a profound influence on later theology, although it had very little effect upon medieval exegesis in comparison with the allegorical influence of Alexandria. The Antiochian influence was hampered by the condemnations of the Christology of Nestorius, Theodore's pupil, by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, and by that Council's opposition to

³⁰Lampe, op.cit., p. 178; Smalley, op.cit., p. 14.

³¹Grant, op.cit., p. 93; for a Roman Catholic comparison of the use of theoria in these two schools, see R. E. Brown, The "Sensus Plenior" of Sacred Scripture (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), pp. 44-51; see also Lampe, op.cit., CHB II, p. 177.

Theodore's rejection of the Apocryphal books, although Jerome would have concurred with Theodore.³²

A positive influence of Antioch was preserved, however, by the work of John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, and by the exegesis of Jerome. Chrysostom uses the literalist method extensively in his sermons and commentaries. He stresses the concept of theoria, while clearly distinguishing it from allegory. He also uses typology as a legitimate extension of the historical meaning.³³ The brilliant exposition of Chrysostom, coupled with his urgency and moral passion, gives powerful and lasting emphasis to the Antiochian methodology.³⁴ His work strongly influences later scholars, especially Aquinas, who said, "I would rather possess his homilies than be master of Paris."³⁵

The influence of Antioch was also transmitted by the learned exegete, Jerome, whom Grant calls "the greatest doctor of the church in expounding the sacred Scriptures."³⁶ Farrar says of him:

³²Grant, Ibid., p. 96; Farrar, op.cit., p. 225.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Blackman, op.cit., p. 105; Farrar, op.cit., pp. 220f.

³⁵Blackman, Ibid., p. 103.

³⁶Grant, op.cit., p. 97.

The hermit of Bethlehem had less genius than Augustine, less purity and loftiness of character than Ambrose, less sovereign good sense and steadfastness than Chrysostom, less keenness of insight and consistency of courage than Theodore of Mopsuestia; but in learning and versatile talent he was superior to them all.³⁷

As Jerome develops theologically, he moves away from his earlier allegorical tendencies and emphasizes more fully the historical aspects of the Old Testament prophecies and narratives.³⁸

Jerome comes under the influence of the literal-historical method at Antioch under the tutelage of Appollinaris of Laodicea. He is never able thereafter to follow the method of allegorization, no matter how ingenious and alluring it was. The deeper meanings of Scripture must be based on the literal sense, he feels. He emphasizes that the expositor must have a spiritual understanding, a spiritualis intelligentia, of Scripture, but this will not be opposed to the literal sense, the carneus sensus, even though it may go beyond the latter.³⁹ In spite of this emphasis on the primacy of the literal sense, Jerome vacillates in his expositions, examples of extravagant allegories are evident in his commentaries, and his use of the allegorical

³⁷ Farrar, op.cit.

³⁸ Grant, op.cit., p. 97.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 97f.

sense is frequent.⁴⁰ He does, however, provide a sound precedent for the practice of literal exegesis.

The allegorical method captivated the medieval world while literalism fell into disuse, possibly because, as Miss Smalley points out, allegory satisfied a pressing emotional need and seemed relevant to the world-view prevalent at the time, while literalism perhaps seemed "cold and irrelevant."⁴¹ The School of Antioch did, however, enjoy a "delayed legacy," in Blackman's terms, that exerted a profound influence upon later theology. This is seen in the medieval emphasis upon Jewish exegesis and in the interpretive methodology of Thomas Aquinas. It is also expressed in Luther's exaltation of the "grammatical" sense, in the exegetical methods of Zwingli, and in the historical emphasis of Calvin.⁴² Since the Reformation, therefore, the literal-historical method has become the primary hermeneutical procedure of the Church.⁴³

The renewal of literal exegesis

As has been shown, Alexandrian exegesis dominates the interpretation of Scripture through the Middle Ages. The

⁴⁰Farrar, op.cit., pp. 231-233.

⁴¹Smalley, op.cit., p. 19.

⁴²Grant, op.cit., p. 101; Blackman, op.cit., p. 106.

⁴³Grant, Loc.cit.

exegesis of Scripture according to various versions of the multiple sense continues apace. The literal-historical sense is almost entirely ignored, while Origen's threefold sense is expanded by subdividing the spiritual sense into the allegorical and the anagogical. Thus, along with the literal and moral, there is a total of four senses to be found in the Bible. The medieval Latin couplet expresses this classification:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, 44
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.

Hugh of St. Victor

This emphasis on the spiritual sense of the text to the detriment of the literal meaning is challenged by Hugh of St. Victor in Paris. Although he still emphasizes the threefold sense of Origen and Augustine in his textbook on Biblical study, the Didascalicon, he differentiates between the three senses in a way which greatly enhances the stature of the historical sense. He does not subordinate the letter to the spirit, but shows that both letter and allegory pertain to knowledge, while the tropological sense pertains to virtue. This relating of the literal sense to truth on the same level as allegory increased interest in

⁴⁴Grant, op.cit., p. 119; Blackman, op.cit., p. 111.
"The letter shows us what God and our fathers did;
The allegory shows us where our faith is his;
The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;
The anagogy shows us where we end our strife."

the literal meaning.⁴⁵

The reasons for Hugh's increased interest in the letter are both historical and sacramental. He sees the Biblical events in terms of human religious history. He deals with Creation and Restoration in an historical context. He sees the inspired history of Scripture as the primary source of world history; thus, the importance of examining all important historical details is shown. Furthermore, man's history is a history of the sacraments. God effects the work of Restoration through the sacraments, both Mosaic and Christian. History and the literal sense thus have sacramental value, and should be dealt with seriously.⁴⁶

Hugh condemns those who neglect the literal meaning. To him, this is both perilous and ridiculous, for the spiritual or mystical sense can only be reached through the literal, as he says:

The mystical sense is only gathered from what the letter says, in the first place. I wonder how people have the face to boast themselves teachers of the allegory, when they do not know the primary meaning of the letter. 'We read the Scriptures,' they say, 'but we don't read the letter. The letter does not interest us. We teach allegory.' How do you read Scripture

⁴⁵Smalley, op.cit., pp. 88, 89.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 90.

then, if you don't read the letter? Subtract the letter and what is left?⁴⁷

The literal sense must be grasped before the exegete can move into the allegorical expositions. If this is not done, the figurative expressions in the text are useless. Thus he says:

If, as they say, we ought to leap straight from the letter to its spiritual meaning, then the metaphors and similes, which educate us spiritually, would have been included in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit in vain... The outward form of God's word seems to you, perhaps, like dirt, so you trample it underfoot, like dirt, and despise what the letter tells you was done physically and visibly. But hear, that dirt, which you trample, opened the eyes of the blind. Read Scripture, then, and first learn carefully what it tells you was done in the flesh.⁴⁸

History, then, is the basis of the literal sense, and it must form the foundation upon which all exposition must be built. Thus, Hugh sees the importance of the historical-literal meaning and the danger of the fanciful allegorical expositions of his day.⁴⁹ The historical-literal method is the basis for grasping the intention of the writer, and it is only the author's intention that can provide any certain clue as to the meaning of prophecy and metaphor. Hugh, then, grasped this emphasis on the intention of the writer a

⁴⁷Cited by Smalley, Ibid., p. 93 (no reference given).

⁴⁸De Scripturis, V, 13-15.

⁴⁹Didascalicon, V,2; Smalley, op.cit., p. 94.

century before St. Thomas.⁵⁰

In sum, the interpretative philosophy of Hugh of St. Victor teaches the value of the letter. The letter is not good simply in itself, but Hugh emphasizes the increased value of the literal interpretation in relation to the spiritual.⁵¹ This courageous emphasis provides a monumental impetus for change in medieval Biblical exposition. From this point on, allegory could never again be conscientiously practiced to the exclusion of the literal sense of the text.

The literal emphasis of Hugh is carried on directly by his pupil, Andrew of St. Victor. Following his own version of the patristic scholia method of expounding select passages of Scripture, Andrew proceeds to expound systematically the historical sense of the text. He excludes both spiritual-allegorical expositions and doctrinal discussion.⁵² It appears that Andrew received much training from the Jewish exegetes of Northern France, and from the school of Rashi (1040-1105), in particular. Rashi emphasized the literal or rational method of exposition, although he did not exclude the halachic and haggadic methods.⁵³ Building, then, on Hugh's literal emphasis,

⁵⁰Smalley, Ibid., p. 101.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 102; Brown, op.cit., pp. 58f.

⁵²Smalley, Ibid., pp. 120ff.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 149-156, 171ff.

Andrew further develops this approach by his application of these Jewish methods.

Thus, although he was accused of Judaizing exegesis by Richard of St. Victor and others,⁵⁴ Andrew continues to develop the Victorine tradition, and he exerts much influence upon subsequent theology and exegesis. As Beryl Smalley says, "Hugh of St. Victor seemed to his contemporaries like a 'second Augustine'; Andrew was their second Jerome."⁵⁵

St. Thomas Aquinas

The emphasis on the literal sense by Hugo and the Victorines was more precisely and adequately developed a century later by St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas emphasizes that all the meanings of Scripture must be based upon the literal sense. This literal sense is the intended meaning of the human author.⁵⁶ His meaning may be found in all the texts, since a writer communicates a message through language.⁵⁷ This literal sense is, however, more than the outward form of words, or the historical meaning as

⁵⁴Grant, op.cit., pp. 118f; cf. Smalley, Ibid., pp. 115f.

⁵⁵Smalley, Ibid., pp. 173-185.

⁵⁶Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q.1, a. 10, Reply, Blackfriars Series, Thomas Gilbey, trans. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964), p. 39.

⁵⁷Paul Syngave, Prophecy and Interpretation (New York: Desclee Co., 1961), p. 148.

understood by modern critical scholarship.⁵⁸ The full intent of the writer's original meaning was to convey the whole message of God as he was inspired to write it.⁵⁹ The spiritual sense, though based upon the literal, was the explication of the intention of the divine Author.⁶⁰ Thus, Aquinas sees Scripture as the work of both a human and a divine Author. The human author is an instrument of God who responds to the enlightenment of God through the means of his own human limitations and imperfections. He expresses the divine revelation through his own thoughts and words. In the Aristotelian terminology, God is the Primary Cause (Author), and the human writer is the secondary cause (author).⁶¹ God moves upon the human author, then, in a way which does not suppress his own intellect, but which expresses the revelation through his natural abilities, activities, and modes of expression. The human author is thus much more than merely a pen in the hands of the Holy Spirit, for he participates in the revelation by the process of recording it through his own faculties. He understands what he writes, though perhaps imperfectly.

⁵⁸Blackman, op.cit., p. 114.

⁵⁹Beryl Smalley, "The Bible in the Medieval Schools," CHB, II, pp. 213f.

⁶⁰Blackman, op.cit.

⁶¹Aristotle, Aristotle: The Metaphysics, XII, 7. 1-4, Hugh Tredennick, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947), Vol. II, pp. 145-7.

As Aquinas says:

Dicendum quod in revelatione prophetica movetur mens prophetae a Spiritu Sancto, sicut instrumentum deficiens respectu principalis agentis...Sciendum tamen quod quia mens prophetae est instrumentum deficiens, ut dictum est in corp. art. etiam veri prophetae non omnia cognoscunt quae in eorum visis, aut verbis, aut etiam factis Spiritus Sanctus intendit.⁶²

Thus, the author of Scripture speaks by the means of human reason and conversation with the help of the divine light.⁶³

With this emphasis on the element of human participation in the writing of Scripture, Aquinas dispelled the attitude that Scripture was a divine mystery communicated through the passive agency of an uncomprehending writer. This new emphasis on the letter, the words chosen by the human writer, resulted in a new interest in the literal sense and an increase in the study of Biblical languages.⁶⁴

Aquinas also emphasizes at length the fact that the literal sense was basic to all other senses of the text, and only from the literal sense can doctrinal issues be proved. The basic nature of the literal sense is shown as he writes:

⁶² Summa Theologiae, XLV, q. 173, a.4, Reply, Blackfriar Series, Roland Potter, trans. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1970), pp. 64-67; "In prophetic revelation the prophet's mind is moved by the Holy Spirit as a defective instrument by its principal cause...Remember always that, because the prophet's mind is a deficient instrument, as was said, even genuine prophets do not know all that the Holy Spirit intends in visions, words and even deeds."

⁶³ Summa, q. 174, a.2, Reply 3 (Vol.XLV, p. 77).

⁶⁴ Grant, op.cit., p. 126.

Decendum quod auctor sacrae Scripturae est Deus, in cuius potestate est ut non solum voces ad significandum accommodet (quod etiam homo facere potest) sed etiam res ipsas. Et ideo, cum in omnibus scientiis voces significant, hoc habet proprium ista scientia quod ipsae res significatae per voces etiam significant aliquid. Illa ergo prima significatio qua voces significant res pertinet ad primum sensum, qui est sensus historicus vel litteralis. Illa vero significatio qua res significatae per voces iterum res alias significant dicitur sensus spiritualis; qui super litteralem fundatur et eum supponit...Secundum ergo quod ea quae sunt veteris legis significant ea quae sunt novae legis est sensus allegoricus; secundum vero quod ea quae in Christo sunt facta vel in his quae Christum significant sunt signa eorum quae nos agere debemus est sensus moralis; prout vero significant ea quae sunt in aeterna gloria est sensus anagogicus.

Quia vero sensus litteralis est quem auctor intendit, auctor autem sacrae Scripturae Deus est qui omnia simul suo intellectu comprehendit, non est inconueniens, ut Augustinus dicit XII Confess. si etiam secundum litteralem sensum in una littera Scripturae plures sint sensus.⁶⁵

⁶⁵Summa, q.1, a. 10, Reply (Vol. I., pp. 37f): "That God is the author of Holy Scripture should be acknowledged, and he has the power, not only of adapting words to convey meanings (which men also can do), but also of adapting things themselves. In every branch of knowledge words have meaning, but what is special here is that the things meant by the words also themselves mean something. That first meaning whereby the words signify things belongs to the sense first-mentioned, namely, the historical or literal. That meaning, however, whereby the things signified by the words in their turn also signify other things is called the spiritual sense; it is based on and presupposes the literal sense...Well, then, the allegorical sense is brought into play when the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law; the moral sense when the things done in Christ and in those who prefigured him are signs of What we should carry out; and the anagogical sense when the things that lie ahead in eternal glory are signified.

"Now because the literal sense is that which the author intends, and the author of Holy Scripture is God who comprehends everything all at once in his understanding, it comes not amiss, as St. Augustine observes, if many meanings are present even in the literal sense of one passage of Scripture.

Grant observes that by this last sentence, Aquinas means not that there are several literal senses of Scripture, but that all the other senses are based upon the literal. Nothing necessary to faith is contained in the spiritual sense that is not elsewhere expressed by the literal. The allegorical method is no longer the normative source for theology;⁶⁶ allegory has normative significance only in relationship to its literal base.

Aquinas further defines exactly what is included in the spiritual sense. One text does not offer various meanings, although the meaning in the words of the text may signify truths which are spiritual. He thus concludes that the spiritual sense is soundly based on the literal and contains nothing contrary to it.⁶⁷ No inferences can be drawn from Scripture, then, except through the meanings conveyed by the literal sense, and no untruth or falsehood could underlie the literal sense.⁶⁸ Things signified by the literal words might themselves signify a higher, or spiritual, meaning, but this meaning is still based on the things signified by the literal text and cannot be

⁶⁶Grant, op.cit., p. 124.

⁶⁷Summa, Ibid.

⁶⁸Summa, Ibid., Reply 3.

separated from it.⁶⁹ Therefore, Aquinas sees the allegorical sense only when things of the Old Law signify things of the New Law; the moral sense when the things done in Christ and those who prefigured him are signs of our own Christian duties; and the anagogical sense when the things of eternal glory are signified by the literal sense. All three of these senses are aspects of the spiritual sense, and are thus tied to the text.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Aquinas defines the literal sense so that it includes both figurative and parabolic expressions of truth. Scripture employs metaphor to communicate spiritual truth.⁷¹ The metaphorical meaning of the metaphor is the literal meaning of the metaphor, and is thus the natural meaning of the metaphor. Some truths can be pictured literally only in terms of metaphor. For example, any anthropomorphic descriptions of God are metaphorical, for God cannot be described in corporeal terms.⁷² Thus, the terms "rock" or "lion" when applied to God are more accurately understood in a metaphorical sense than in a literal sense.

⁶⁹Summa, Ibid., Reply 1.

⁷⁰Summa, Ibid; James S. Preus, From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 50ff. provide an excellent discussion of Aquinas' emphasis on the sensus litteralis and the sensus historicus.

⁷¹Summa, I, q.1, a.9, Reply.

⁷²Summa, I, q.13, a.3.3.

In fact, such a metaphorical interpretation of these words is the literal meaning of them.⁷³

Also, the parabolic sense of a passage is the true literal meaning of that passage, for words can signify something properly and something figuratively. When they signify something figuratively, the literal sense is not the figure of speech itself, but the meaning which it signifies. Thus, when Scripture speaks of the "arm of God," the literal sense is not the assertion that God has a physical limb, but it is the fact that He has what the figure signifies, the power of doing and making.⁷⁴ The parabolic sense, then, is the truth signified by the metaphor. This is all contained within the literal sense.

Aquinas, then, contains the figurative senses within the literal meaning of the text, and restricts the spiritual sense to "the symbolism of real things and events" which are "chosen to typify Christ." Things visible are used as figures of things invisible. This limits the spiritual sense of Scripture to the symbolic understanding of real, actual things and events whose meanings are designated by Christ alone. God plans the symbolism and providentially carries it through.⁷⁵

⁷³Summa, I, p.13, a. 3.1 and 3.2.

⁷⁴Summa, I, q.10, a. 3.

⁷⁵Thomas Gilby, ed., St. Thomas Aquinas: Theological Texts (London: Oxford, 1955), p. 18.

The contribution of Aquinas to the development of hermeneutics, then, is basically his emphasis on the primacy of the literal sense. He shows that the literal, exegetical meaning of a text is the basis both for doctrine and also for the spiritual sense. He ties exposition to the text and does much to halt the subjective flights of fantasy which had been so characteristic of allegorical exposition. His assertion that emphasizing a multiplicity of meanings would bring confusion leads to a more serious study of the text in the original languages. His emphasis on both the divine and the human participation in the writing of Scripture discredits the stenographic views of inspiration in which the writer was merely a passive instrument. The intention of the writer, both human and divine, can be discerned in the text, thus disallowing the claims of the interpreters who claimed inspiration for their own exegetical procedures to the neglect of the literal meaning. He places exegesis and interpretation upon a scientific basis and forms a rational basis for discerning and interpreting truth. His emphasis on the importance of context for determining the literal or figurative senses of the text leads to a decrease of excesses in the exposition of the text, particularly in relation to the spiritual sense. His emphasis upon the historical connections and relationships between persons, things, and events in the Old

Testament and the corresponding persons, places, and events in the New Testament leads to a legitimate emphasis on typology.

Aquinas does not, however, clearly delineate the relationship of the meaning of the literal sense as opposed to that of the spiritual. In fact, with his emphasis on the literal sense as the intention of the human author and the spiritual sense as the intention of the divine author, he tends to assert two levels of meaning in the text, and thus does not escape the medieval emphasis on the superiority of the spiritual sense. Logically, if the spiritual sense expresses the intention of God more completely than the literal, then it is superior in quality and meaning to the literal, in spite of protestations to the contrary. Furthermore, it is by no means resolved that his primary intention was to develop all doctrine from Scripture. His use of the Scholastic method seems to indicate that his concern for orthodoxy and the priority of reason may have hampered objective exposition and subjected it to the canon of dogma rather than to that of scientific exposition.

Nicolas of Lyra

The influence of Hugh and Andrew of St. Victor is reflected in the fourteenth century works of the Franciscan, Nicolas of Lyra. Nicolas quotes Andrew's works on the

Pentateuch and Octateuch in his postills, and possibly even supersedes Hugh as an exponent of the historical sense.⁷⁶ Farrar says that he was "one green island among the tideless waves of exegetic commonplace...the Jerome of the fourteenth century."⁷⁷ He does show independence in his exegetical methodology, and although he is not the first to stress the importance of the literal sense, he, like Aquinas, teaches that it is the basis of all other meanings.⁷⁸ Nicolas learned the importance of Hebrew grammar and was influenced also by the literalism of the Jewish scholars, Rashi and Maimonides. In fact, in some of his expositions, Nicolas followed Rashi so closely that he came to be called Simia Salomonis, from Rashi's full name, Solomon Jizchaki. Following some of Rashi's best principles, Nicolas gained insight concerning the corruption of the manuscripts, the need for better texts, the difference between true exposition and the chaos of subjective opinion, and the primacy of the literal sense.⁷⁹

Nicolas bears the influence of his predecessors in stressing that God is the auctor principalis of Scripture, and he follows Aquinas in noting that the literal sense

⁷⁶Smalley, op.cit., pp. 185, 274.

⁷⁷Farrar, op.cit., p. 274.

⁷⁸Blackman, op.cit., p. 115.

⁷⁹Farrar, op.cit., pp. 275f.

develops the intention of the author and the spiritual sense expounds the meaning of the things signified by the words of the human author. He is, however, clear and sober in his exposition, and he insists upon the use of the original languages. He will not allow the mystical sense to choke the literal. Although he is vigorously independent in applying these principles, and even though his creativity is abundant, Nicolas makes a practice of submitting all his works to the decision of the Church and her correction (sanctae matris ecclesiae et cujuslibet sapientis). The genius of his exposition, its doctrinal and practical soundness, and the popularity of his commentaries based upon the literal sense all combined to make his influence felt to the extent that he effectively broke down the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition and demolished the reign of bad methodology.⁸⁰

The Rise and Fall of the Medieval Synthesis

In line with the development of the literal sense of Scripture as the primary emphasis of Biblical interpretation arose the Scholastic Method in theology. Whereas allegory had been used earlier in Biblical interpretation as an apologetic to make the truths of Christianity

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 276f.

acceptable to secular reason, Scholasticism was developed in the Middle Ages as a means of showing the harmonious relationship between faith and reason. The motivation for its development, then, was to provide a solution to the controversy between Church authority and independent thought. With the development of the Eucharistic controversies, the disputes concerning universals, and the emphasis on rationalism as exemplified by Abelard, there arose a need for a system which would satisfy the demands both of reason and also of the authority of the Church. Johannes Scotus Erigena (d. 875) is generally considered to have laid the foundation for Scholasticism, the Medieval Synthesis of faith and reason.⁸¹

Erigena says:

Let no authority terrify you from conclusions which the reasonable persuasion of right contemplation teaches. Reason and authority come alike from the one source of divine wisdom, and cannot contradict each other. Reason is not to be overruled by authority but the reverse, and therefore the opinions of the Fathers must only be introduced in case of necessity, . . . for the Fathers often contradict each other.⁸²

He thus stresses the need for free inquiry and develops dogma and dialectics into a system for synthesizing the insights of faith with the truths of reason.⁸³ This

⁸¹Ibid., p. 253.

⁸²Erigena, De Div. Nat., I, 66, 68; IV, 9, 16.

⁸³Farrar, op.cit., p. 255.

insight that true philosophy and true faith are one anticipates the Scholastic system.⁸⁴

Paul Tillich notes that Scholasticism was "the determinative cognitive attitude of the whole Middle Ages. It is the methodological explanation of Christian doctrine."⁸⁵ The era of Scholasticism began roughly at the end of the eleventh century with Roscellinus and Anselm and continued in its rising and waning phases until the work of Gabriel Biel in the latter part of the fifteenth century. The first period of Scholasticism, the rise of the Schoolmen, lasted from about 1099 until the 1150's. The chief thinkers of this period were Anselm, Roscellinus, Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of St. Victor and the Victorines, and Gilbert of Poitiers. The second period, the height of Scholasticism, lasted from the 1160's until the beginning of the fourteenth century. The chief men of this period were Peter Lombard, Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, Roger Bacon, and John Duns Scotus. The final period, the decline, lasted from the early fourteenth to the latter fifteenth centuries. The major thinkers in this period were Durandus, Bradwardine,

⁸⁴Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, V (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 592.

⁸⁵Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, Carl E. Braaten, ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 135.

William of Ockham, and Gabriel Biel.⁸⁶

The basic problem which Scholasticism faced was that of the relationship between authority and reason. The substantive tradition of the Church was the basis for medieval thought. This authoritative tradition was expressed in the church fathers, the creeds and councils, and the Bible. At times, however, the different elements of tradition said different things. These discrepancies had to be harmonized if tradition was to have practical value and retain its authority. Thus a dialectical method, "yes" and "no," was developed to harmonize the different authorities. The tool for accomplishing this harmony was reason. By this means the practical and theological statements of the fathers and the councils were collected, harmonized, and embellished with comments. The most significant of these commentaries was the Four Books of Sentences, the Sententiae, of Peter the Lombard.⁸⁷

In addition to harmonizing tradition, reason functioned as the means of interpreting the meaning of the tradition expressed in the sentences. Reason, however, was not alone, for faith was always presupposed, hence the slogan, credo ut intelligam, I believe that I may know. Reason,

⁸⁶Schaff, op.cit., pp. 592f.

⁸⁷Tillich, op.cit., pp. 137f.

then, functioned only to interpret tradition, and not to create it. This conjunction of faith and reason preserved for the rational man a "religion based on revelation and lived by faith."⁸⁸

With the later emphasis upon Aristotle in Scholastic theology, especially in the work of Aquinas, it began to be taught that reason itself was adequate to interpret tradition.⁸⁹ Aristotelianism thus became the basis of Christian theology, and theology drifted away from exegesis and became more closely aligned with philosophy.⁹⁰ Even though the Christian faith could be substantiated rationally, the authority of the Church still remained the final arbiter of truth.

In the fourteenth century, however, there developed a separation of reason from authority. John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham asserted that reason was inadequate to express the living tradition of the Church.⁹¹ This insistence, especially on the part of Duns Scotus, on the impossibility of proving many dogmatic and traditional assertions leads to skepticism,

⁸⁸James Atkinson, Martin Luther and the Birth of Protestantism (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 37.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 139.

⁹⁰Blackman, op.cit., p. 110; Josef Pieper, Scholasticism (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), pp. 117ff.

⁹¹Tillich, op.cit., p. 139.

the decline of the Medieval Synthesis of fides and ratio, and a separation between faith and science.⁹² Without the dependence upon reason which had been enjoyed by the Schoolmen, tradition becomes a commanding authority to which acquiescence is demanded. Scotus emphasizes that reason could never show the meaning of tradition nor how things should be in matters of faith. The orders of the Church become the expression of the will of God which can neither be denied nor understood in rational terms.⁹³ In contrast to Aquinas, Scotus points out that much in theology is philosophically improbable, but it must be accepted on the basis of the authority of the Church. Thus the dissolution of Scholasticism has begun, for its very purpose had been to show the rationality of the Christian faith. With faith separated from reason, the Scholastic authoritarianism is disastrously weakened and rendered largely defenseless in the face of the awakening intellectual renewal.

The tottering structure of Scholasticism received an even more telling blow with the new system of Nominalism under William of Ockham, a student of Duns Scotus, in the mid-fourteenth century. The Medieval Synthesis had been

⁹²Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 251.

⁹³Tillich, op.cit.,; Atkinson, op.cit., pp. 46-48.

based on the Platonic doctrine of ideas, the Universalia ante rem, which is medieval realism. The universals, the essences, of all things stand behind the particular manifestations of all reality. All divine truth, then, exists in its universal form in the universal concept of the Church. As a result, no individual expression of truth was recognized apart from the particular expression of it through the Church. Thus, the development of independent potential was prevented, and authoritative Church doctrines flourished unchallenged in this atmosphere created by the union of theology and philosophy.⁹⁴

Ockham attacked this foundation of universals by denying any form of medieval realism. He notes that only individual objects exist and that any association of concepts or things in terms of the genera or species of realism, is invalid. The Universalia realia have no objective reality, but are purely mental percepts.⁹⁵ Because of his teaching that these concepts are only symbolic "terms," Ockham is known as a "terminist" or "Nominalist." He dispenses with the arbitrary categories of realism, as well as the endless distinctions of Scotism, with his Principle of Parsimony, or "Ockham's Razor."⁹⁶ With his two axioms, Entia non sunt

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 143; Farrar, op.cit., p. 281.

⁹⁵Walker, op.cit., p. 252.

⁹⁶Paul J. Glenn, The History of Philosophy (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1963), pp. 259f.

multiplicanda praeter necessitatem and Frustra fit per plura quod fieri potest per pauciora, he undercuts much philosophical pedantry and many traditional assumptions.⁹⁷

Ockham can be approached as a logician, a theologian, or a scientist, but his outlook is essentially holistic. He combines a radical empiricism with an extreme contingency in his methodology. In human experience he sees only the individual as real, while God's will is the only arbiter of action.⁹⁸ Thus, he sees the necessity for the individual to realize his own potential, and this understanding of the value of personality provides the basis for modern democracy and independence of spirit.⁹⁹ With the individual thus freed from his identity with the universal mind of the Church, independent investigation into truth finds an opportunity to develop.

Ockham's thought is bifurcated into the natural and the divine areas of concern. At the natural level he is strictly empiricist, refusing to profess knowledge beyond the bounds of experience; at the divine level he is a fideist in the sense that he places all theological certainty in the tenets of faith, and a skeptic in that he denies the power of reason to elicit the theological

⁹⁷Farrar, op.cit., p. 281.

⁹⁸Gordon Leff, Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham (London: The Merlin Press, 1959), p. 280.

⁹⁹Tillich, op.cit., p. 144.

conclusions of faith. He gives consistency and validity to natural knowledge, but he is destructive of any attempt to synthesize faith and reason.¹⁰⁰

He refuses to see theology as a science which can be controlled by principles drawn from metaphysics, and he thus demonstrates the untenability of the traditional theological reasonings. Theology simply is not subject to testing by reason. The fields of concentration for science and faith are different. They both deal with different aspects of truth. Science does not require the assent of faith for what is known through evidence, and neither does faith rely on science for validation. Thus the Scholastic unity is broken for Ockham.¹⁰¹

Since he has shown philosophy to be irrelevant to the substantiation of faith, Ockham asserts that the revelation of Scripture as the infallible Word of God is the basis for faith, and this does not require or admit the proofs of reason for its validation.¹⁰² Theological doctrines, since they are philosophically unprovable, are to be accepted on the basis of authority. Theoretically, this authority should be mediated through the Church, but Ockham's conflicts with a derelict papacy and the absurdities,

¹⁰⁰Leff, op.cit., p. 280.

¹⁰¹Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), pp. 548f.

¹⁰²Ibid.

contradictions, and frivolities in the interpretations of the councils and the popes led him to assert that Scripture alone is the binding authority for the Christian. It is thus not difficult to understand why Luther referred to him as "dear master."¹⁰³

¹⁰³Walker, op.cit., p. 252; Farrar, op.cit., p. 281.

SECTION II

CHAPTER III

LUTHER'S HERMENEUTICAL BACKGROUND

In moving from the medieval period into the age of the Reformation, we note that a hermeneutical as well as a theological protest is involved in the transition. In addition to the revolutionary emphases upon such theological issues as justification by faith and the Word of God, there is also seen the culmination of a Biblical hermeneutic that sets forth the historical-literal sense of Scripture in contrast to the classical type of exegesis which was bound to tradition. The principal figure in this hermeneutical revolution was Martin Luther. Although he certainly did not develop in a theological vacuum, as we shall soon see, it was under his leadership that the Bible replaced ecclesiastical authority as the primary basis for faith and life. As Luther's influence spread, there developed a corresponding decline in the Catholic exegesis which relied heavily upon the Fathers in interpreting the Bible by Church tradition.¹ The purpose of this chapter is to survey the major influences upon Luther's hermeneutical development and to identify his relationship to the theological milieu in which he worked.

¹Grant, Ibid., p. 128.

Historical and Interpretative Influences

The Fathers

In this section we propose to explore some of the more chronologically distant hermeneutical influences upon Luther. Although in the preceding historical survey we have by no means covered all the influences upon him, we have selected certain men who were representative sources of ideas which were influential in his development. Our intention, then, has been to trace the development of the emphasis upon the sensus litteralis, the emphasis upon the function of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter, and the role of ecclesiastical authority and tradition in Biblical interpretation up through the Middle Ages. It is in this light that we seek to show Luther's hermeneutical debt to the Fathers and the Schoolmen in this section, and to Ockham and Erasmus in the latter sections of this chapter.

A survey of the Index to the St. Louis edition of Luther's Works reveals references to many of the Fathers of the Church on Luther's part. Although the vast preponderance of the Patristic entries relate to Augustine, it is clear that Luther is familiar with the work of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and many others. If it would be presumptuous to claim on the basis of these entries that Luther draws his hermeneutical system in toto from men such as Irenaeus and Augustine, we do note trends developing in these men which find expression throughout the history of

the Church, and certain of these trends have obviously influenced the great Reformer. While we do not wish to ignore the caution of Jaroslav Pelikan that "one could ask whether some of the interpreters of Luther's early development adequately considered the possibility that he derived some of his ideas from the Scriptures rather than from Augustine, Occam, Lyra, Hugo Cardinal, or his own virtuosity,"² yet we must not ignore Luther's awareness of the Fathers in his exegetical works as well as the fact that as early as 1521 Melanchthon asserts that Luther's doctrine agrees with that of the Fathers. He points out that Luther constantly appeals to the Fathers in his lectures, sermons, and treatises for the purpose of corroborating his own interpretations of Scripture.³ In fact, as A.S. Wood points out, it was largely through Augustine and the Fathers that Luther was forced back to the Bible as possessing an exclusive authority.⁴ Luther himself expresses this debt as he says that he has learned more about God, Christ, man, and all things from Augustine and the Bible than from all other

²Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther's Works, Companion Volume, "Luther the Expositor" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 42; hereafter referred to as LW.

³A.S. Wood, Captive to the Word (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 32; Wood cites Melanchthon's Apologia in Corpus Reformatorum, I, 405.

⁴Ibid.

books.⁵ With this awareness of Luther's debt to the past, we will look at some hermeneutical emphases of the Fathers and the possible influence of the emphases upon Luther.

In the hermeneutical teaching of Irenaeus, we note several areas which seem to have been influential in later interpretation, and in Luther's work in particular. Irenaeus' emphasis on the need for sound textual study and grammatical exegesis as well as his stress upon the historicity of the Biblical narratives find correlation in Luther's teaching on the primacy of the literal sense. Although we will examine this and other of Luther's principles of interpretation in more detail later, we note here that Luther repudiates the medieval Quadriga because it destroys the simple, literal meaning of Scripture and leaves room for ingenious and extravagant interpretations.⁶ He sees the literal meaning as the basic grammatical and historical sense, and chides the Romanists who toss the Word of God as gamblers toss dice, and rob the Scriptures of their single, simple sense.⁷ Thus, just as Irenaeus insisted upon the historical meaning of Scripture as a means of counteracting the subjective and distorted concepts of the heretics, so Luther insists on the literal, historical, or grammatical

⁵Martin Luther, LW, Vol. XXXI (St. Louis: Concordia Press, 1957), p. 75.

⁶Farrar, op.cit., p. 328.

⁷Martin Luther, Works, Holman Edition, III, p. 37; hereafter referred to as H.E.

sense as a safeguard against Catholic fantasies.

Another emphasis of Irenaeus which is reflected in Luther's hermeneutic is the perspicuity or clarity of the Scriptures. Irenaeus' teaching that insofar as matters of faith are concerned, the Scriptures can be understood "In aperto, et sine ambiguitate, et similiter ab omnibus,"⁸ is seen in Luther's emphasis that each passage of the Bible has one clear and definite meaning.⁹

Futhermore, Irenaeus' warning that the dark and obscure in Scripture cannot interpret that which is obvious, is seen in Luther's emphases that the clear passages throw light upon the obscure and the Scripture interprets itself, Scriptura sui ipsius interpres. He says:

Also ist die Schrift sich selbst ein eigen Licht.
Das ist denn fein, wenn sich die Schrift selbst
auslegt.¹⁰

At the point of Scripture's being clearly apprehended, Irenaeus appeals to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is by the enlightening work of the Spirit that the hearts of sinful men become capable of accepting the clarity of the Word. While the heretics ramble in confusion, the spiritual man

⁸Irenaeus, op.cit., Adv. Haer., II, 27,2.

⁹Martin Luther, Sämmtliche Schriften, Walch Edition, XVIII(St. Louis: Concordia, 1882), pp. 2163-64; Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, H. Cole, ed., pp. 25,27, 290; H.E., III, p. 16.

¹⁰Ibid., Walch Edition, XI, p. 2335; "In this manner Scripture is its own light. It is a fine thing when Scripture explains itself."

using all his tools of exegesis and reason, and working with diligence, apprehends the meaning of Scripture and its personal claim on his life. Thus, Christ teaches his truth through the Scriptures.¹¹ Luther also sees the necessity for the quickening of the Spirit in the interpreter.

Reason is not to be discarded in Bible study, but he believes that only faith can comprehend the doctrines of God, and only the Holy Spirit can create faith. Luther says:

In the end only the Holy Spirit from heaven above can create listeners and pupils who accept this doctrine and believe that the Word is God, that God's Son is the Word....¹²

It may be argued here that Luther minimizes the exegetical process by his emphasis on the illumination by the Holy Spirit, but as he sees it, the word of reason and of the Holy Spirit complement each other. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

A basic issue in which Luther departs from the emphases of most of the Fathers is the relationship between Scripture and tradition as theological authority. Irenaeus is representative of much of the Patristic tradition in his emphasis that authority resides in both Scripture and tradition. Both Scripture and the apostolic tradition of the Church go back to the apostles, therefore tradition and Scripture

¹¹Irenaeus, Adv. Haer., IV, 33, 15.

¹²LW, XXII, p. 8.

are not separate entities. They both reflect the apostolic witness and each attests the validity of the other.¹³ Therefore, neither is subordinated to the other, for they are concomitant channels for transmitting revelation. Both are subjected to the regula veritatis as the ultimate standard for interpretation, for the regula is the truth behind both Scripture and tradition.¹⁴ Irenaeus fails to clarify, however, just what the content of the regula veritatis is or how it may be discerned. He intends to assign this discernment of the regula to the apostolic succession of bishops who reflect the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, his argument becomes circular, for the very tradition which he wishes to verify by the apostolic succession is itself a reflection of the interpretations of the Presbyters who form the succession. Although he does not subordinate Scripture to tradition, neither does he allow it independence from tradition.

Luther's attitude toward tradition is different from Irenaeus' not simply in his definition of it, but in what he perceived its function to be. Neither would consider the ecclesiastical dogmas which arose in the Middle Ages to be tradition, for only those teachings which were derived from

¹³Irenaeus, Adv. Haer., IV, 26,5; III, 4, 2.

¹⁴Grant, op.cit., p. 82; Adv. Haer., IV, 33,8.

the apostles could claim this title. However, Luther was in no way the rebellious anti-traditionalist which the Romanists made him out to be in their attempts to rank him with the heresiarchs of history.¹⁵ He did not set Scripture and tradition over against each other, but he acknowledged tradition wherever it was based upon Scripture.¹⁶ Thus Scripture tests tradition, but not vice-versa as in Irenaeus. Luther says:

...I wish to refute or accept, according to my own judgment, the mere opinions of St. Thomas, Bonaventura, or other scholastics or canonists which are maintained without text and proof. I shall do this according to the advice of Paul to "test everything, hold fast to that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21).¹⁷

In the place of the regula veritatis, Luther uses the analogia fidei as the ultimate criterion for evaluating one's interpretation of the Scriptures. Thus, all interpretations must be submitted to the general tenor of Scripture as reflected in the creed or rule of faith taught by the Bible as a whole. No extraneous canon can be used as a criterion for judging the Word of God.¹⁸ Thus, Luther

¹⁵Wood, op.cit., p. 31.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷LW, 31,83; WA,1, 525.

¹⁸A.S. Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), pp. 21f.

moves beyond the Patristic concept of tradition and Scripture and asserts sola Scriptura as the sole authority for the Christian.

In Tertullian we note a strong emphasis developing on the importance of tradition for evaluating the correctness of doctrine. In his De praescriptione he emphasized that the Scripture was the property of the Church, therefore heretics could not appeal to it for their arguments. Because of the corrupt hermeneutical practices of the heretics, the Church must use another criterion than Scripture to refute them. The apostolic tradition within the Church thus became the basis for doctrine. Although Tertullian did not posit a conflict between Scripture and Church tradition, he did see Scripture as being correctly interpreted only within the Church and only according to the regula fidei, by which he meant the basic Christian doctrine of the Church.¹⁹ Tertullian thus did not find in Scripture itself a strong objective criterion for determining the content of divine truth.

In contrast to this emphasis on tradition, Luther asserts the primacy of the Scriptures as the only true source of Christian doctrine. It is the Bible which mediates the living Word and thus becomes the medium of salvation.

¹⁹See Chapter I, pp. 37-40.

It is in and through the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit gives faith.²⁰ Furthermore, the Bible contains its own authority, and is not invested with it by the Church. Although the Fathers, as well as the medieval Church, asserted the supreme authority of Scripture, they maintained in one way or another that the Bible derived its authority or its interpretation from the Church. Thus, as Tertullian had said, since the Church was in possession of the Scriptures, it had the exclusive right to interpret them.²¹ Luther challenges this medieval assertion by denying any external authority over Scripture. Mackinnon notes that Luther stated against Eck at Leipzig that "no believing Christian can be forced to recognize any authority beyond the sacred Scripture, which is exclusively (proprie) invested with divine right, unless, indeed, there comes a new and attested revelation."²² When he refers to the condemnation of his doctrine by Rome, Luther says:

Da habt sich denn der hader, das sie zu faren
und uns verdamnen und verbannen im namen der
Kirchen, Wir aber dagegen stehen und sagen: Das
thueth nicht die Kirche Christi, sondern des
leidigen Teufels Braut und EntChristis Rotte,

²⁰James Mackinnon, Luther and the Reformation, IV (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 296; cf. Werke, Erlangen Edition, XVIII, p. 139.

²¹Ibid., p. 295.

²²Ibid., p. 296, quoted from Werke, Erlangen Edition, II, p. 279.

Denn die rechte Kirche, so Christum Kennet,
wird gewislich niemand inn Ban thun umb ires
Herrn wort willen, weil sie selbs also predigt,
gleubt und horets hertzlich gerne....²³

Thus, Luther judges the legitimacy and authority of the Church by its degree of conformity to Scripture, and not vice-versa.

Although Luther does not deny the importance of the true Church in the process of the interpretation of Scripture, as we will later notice in the discussion of his principle of the analogia fidei, he believes that correct interpretation and apprehension of the Word of God in Scripture comes only when one is addressed by the Holy Spirit, who reveals Christ in the Word. This "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" defines what is accepted as God's Word.²⁴ Luther is saved from pure subjectivism in determining the meaning and content of Scripture here by showing that canonical Scripture can be identified on the basis of "that which is apostolic," that is, on the basis of its preaching of Christ. Since he feels that this principle itself comes

²³WA, XLVI, 9: "Here the dispute begins. They proceed to condemn and excommunicate us in the name of the Church. But we oppose this and say: 'It is not the Church of Christ that is taking this action; it is the bride of the devil and the mob of Antichrist. For the true Church, which knows Christ, will surely not excommunicate anyone because of its Lord's Word, since this Church itself preaches, believes, and gladly hears this Word'." (See LW 24,308).

²⁴Hermann Sasse, "Luther and the Word of God," Accents In Luther's Theology, Heino O. Kadai, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 87.

from Scriptures, he feels that he has escaped from the trap of subjecting Scripture to tradition.²⁵ This still leaves unsolved, however, his concept of a "canon within the canon." This issue must be dealt with later.

Luther's emphasis on the Holy Spirit's role in testifying to the authority of Scripture and interpreting its meaning may seem to reflect an emphasis similar to Tertullian's on the role of the Holy Spirit as the teacher of truth. For Luther, however, the Spirit works only in and through the Bible. Spirit and Scripture are inseparable.

He says:

The Spirit is not given except only in, with, and through the faith in Jesus Christ, and faith comes not without God's Word, or the Gospel, which proclaims Christ--how He is the God-Man, who died and rose for our sake, and how, through faith, we are enabled to fulfill the works of the law.²⁶

Tertullian, on the other hand, saw the Holy Spirit as not only having a role in transmitting and explaining the revelation in Scripture, but as actually supplementing it. For him, the Holy Spirit could speak apart from either Scripture or tradition.²⁷ This autonomy of the Spirit apart from the Word cannot be tolerated by Luther, and indeed, it is this

²⁵Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 83.

²⁶Mackinnon, op.cit., p. 297, citing Werke, Erlangen Edition, 63, 122.

²⁷See Chapter I, pp. 42-44 and footnotes.

very kind of emphasis on the freedom of the Spirit from the Word which he detests in the Enthusiasts.²⁸

Thus Luther rejects the type of emphasis which subordinates the Scripture to tradition and which sets the Spirit free to work apart from the Word. Neither the dogma of tradition nor the whim of spiritual subjectivism such as are found in Tertullian can be tolerated. Luther, then, learned from such emphases as those of Tertullian that if tradition were allowed to control Scripture, there could be no divinely authoritative basis for doctrine, but only the vagaries of man.

Certainly the most influential of the Fathers upon Luther's theological and hermeneutical development was Augustine. The Indexes to Luther's Works, St. Louis edition, contain an abundance of references to him on many different subjects. As an Augustinian monk, Luther immersed himself in Augustine's works and mastered them. Melancthon even notes that Luther knew the contents of most of his writings from memory.²⁹ In recapitulating some of Augustine's major emphases in interpretation, we note several which are influential upon Luther.

²⁸Mackinnon, op.cit., p. 297.

²⁹Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 38 and notes 1-7; WA Tischreden, 4567; Luther respects Augustine's exegesis, although he notes that the basis for theological truth must always be the Bible, and not the commentators.

First of all, Luther encountered Augustine's distinction between the spirit and the letter, the internal and the external Word of God. This issue also relates closely to Augustine's principle of illumination. Since all knowledge originates from God, Augustine believed that the light of God is needed in order for man to understand divine truth.³⁰ In terms of Scripture, Luther believes that the letter must be illuminated by the inner Word, the Holy Spirit, in order that the reader might apprehend it not as an alien, remote and external letter, but as a Word from God which takes hold of him and becomes alive in his heart.³¹ This illumination, then, comes through the Spirit working in and through the Word. Luther says:

Item in Scripturis sanctis optimum est Spiritum a litera discernere, hoc enim facit vero theologum. Et a spiritu sancto hoc tantum habet Ecclesia et non ex humano sensu.³²

Thus, both Augustine and Luther emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit working in the Word to lead the interpreter

³⁰Chapter I, pp. 29-30 and notes.

³¹Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 93-95.

³²WA, III, 12, 2-4; "In the holy Scriptures it is best to distinguish between the spirit and the letter; for it is this that makes a true theologian. And the Church has the power to do this from the Holy Spirit alone and not from the human mind."

to understand not just the external letter of Scripture, which Luther sees as Law, but to lead him to the inner Word, the spirit, of Scripture, which is, through faith, the redemptive message of the Gospel. Both understand that reason and sound exegesis make possible a correct knowledge of the letter of Scripture, but only faith and the Holy Spirit make possible the knowledge of God through the Word--thus letter and spirit are resolved only in faith by the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Although it will be our task in what follows to elaborate further upon Luther's hermeneutical principles and to evaluate them, we should note the basic principles of Augustine and their similarity to those of Luther. First, Augustine stressed the need for knowledge of the Biblical languages. Secondly, he stressed the need for interpreting the obscure passages in the light of plain ones. Then he emphasized the need for knowledge of other fields of learning and for an attitude of humility in approaching Scripture. Also, he reflected a Christocentric concept for all exegesis. Finally, interpretations must be submitted to the regula fidei; the general teaching of the Catholic faith.³³

One can readily see the importance of Augustine's Christocentric concept of Scripture for Luther's hermeneutic. Furthermore, the need for faith and the Holy Spirit for the

³³Chapter I, pp. 43, 44, 47.

understanding of the inner word of Scripture is important for Luther's Law and Gospel concept, for here he sees that it is only through the Spirit's work that the Law is fulfilled and becomes a unity with the Gospel in the evangelical knowledge of God.³⁴

Luther's interpretative principles also reflect some of the same concerns found in Augustine. The concern for personal spiritual preparation which Luther reflects shows the emphasis of Augustine upon humility and the mind of Christ in the interpretative process. Such preparation allows the Holy Spirit to open the Word which He has already inspired.³⁵ Both men also stress the primacy of the literal sense. Although both do use allegory at times, both, and Luther especially, move away from it in later years.

One point, however, at which Luther parts company with Augustine is in regard to the role of ecclesiastical authority in interpretative conclusions. Whereas Augustine insisted upon submitting all interpretation to the regula fidei, which amounted to the authority and conclusions of the Catholic Church,³⁶ Luther, on the other hand, insists that Scripture be released from bondage to the councils and the experts.³⁷ He refuses to admit that the Scripture is

³⁴Althaus, op.cit., pp. 9, 15, 43.

³⁵Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 13 and notes; LW 13,17.

³⁶Chapter I, p. 58 and notes.

³⁷Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 19; WA I, 659.

dark and obscure and can be understood only by scholars. Because the Holy Spirit illumines it, anyone who approaches it in faith may understand it.³⁸ He does not, however, ignore the fact that Scripture has one basic meaning, for he insists that all exposition should be in accord with the analogia fidei, which is the entire tenor of the Scriptures, not the extraneous opinions of the authorities. All sound teaching must be based in Christ as He is seen in the Scriptures, and not in the Church's tradition of how doctrine should be understood.³⁹

Perhaps the most significant influence of Patristic exegesis upon the Biblical interpretation of Luther, as well as the other Reformers, was the emphasis upon historical-literal interpretation in the School of Antioch as opposed to the allegorism of Alexandria, whose principles largely prevailed during the medieval period. In the Antioch tradition, we note that rejection of allegorism is the basis for a Biblical hermeneutic. The historical sense of both testaments was understood to be the primary meaning. Furthermore, Theodore of Mopsuestia dealt with a Scriptural passage in the light of its context, rather than in isolation. Scripture was understood to be a clear presentation

³⁸Werke, Walch Edition, XVIII, pp. 2163-2164.

³⁹Ewald Plass, What Luther Says, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 98.

of the Word of God, and not an enigmatic text which could only be understood in terms of "inner meanings and abstruse guesses."⁴⁰ Because of this emphasis upon the historical and clear nature of Scripture, the Antiochenes asserted a more independent attitude toward Church tradition and authority in interpretation than their contemporaries. As long as Scripture is dealt with in an attitude of humility, patience, and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it may be understood by the exegete apart from the opinions of the councils. We thus find in Antioch the beginnings of sober exegesis coupled with a conviction that the Spirit illumines the Word in and through the Scriptures as they are literally understood.⁴¹ This legacy finds expression in Luther's emphasis on the grammatical and literal sense of Scripture,⁴² his concern for a contextual principle of interpretation, and his insistence upon independence from ecclesiastical authority and control in interpretation.⁴³

Luther's disillusionment with the allegorical method is reflected in his own testimony of his pilgrimage away from his training in exegesis:

⁴⁰Blackman, op.cit., pp. 103-105.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 105-106.

⁴²Ibid., p. 106.

⁴³See Chapter II, pp. 87-90 for a discussion of the Antiochian hermeneutic.

Hoc enim in sacris literis praecipue est agendum, ut aliquam certam et simplicem inde eliciamus, praesertim in tanta varietate Interpretum tum Latinorum tum Graecorum tum Ebraeorum quoque. Hi enim fere omnes non solum historiam non curant, sed etiam ineptis Allegoriis eam obruunt et turbant... Ac mihi Iuveni pulchre succedebat conatus. Nam etiam absurda licebat fingere: Si quidem hi tanti doctores Ecclesiarum, ut sunt Hieronymus et Origenes, nonnunquam indulserant ingeniis. Qui igitur allegoriis fingendis aptior erat, is etiam doctior Theologus habebatur. Ac Augustinus quoque hac opinione deceptus saepe, praesertim in Psalmis, historicam sententiam negligit, et ad Allegorias vertitur. Persuasum enim fuit omnibus, quod praesertim in historiis verteris Testamenti Allegoriae essent spiritualis intellectus, Historia autem seu literalis sententia esset carnalis intellectus. Sed te quaeso, an non hoc est profanare sacra?⁴⁴

He understands the fascination of allegories and realizes that the exegete has difficulty in extricating himself from the use of them.⁴⁵ Indeed, at times the figurative and symbolic meaning is even called for by the text

⁴⁴WA, XLII, pp. 172f.; "The principal thing to be done when dealing with the Holy Writings is to draw from them a plain and simple meaning, especially in view of the great variety of interpreters, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. For almost all these do not only fail to regard the historical sense of Scripture but also obscure and becloud it by allegories that are entirely out of place... And when I was a youth, my attempt to allegorize succeeded beautifully. For one was permitted to invent absurdities, because such great teachers of the Church as Jerome and Origen had at times indulged their ingenuities. Therefore, he who could best invent allegories was also considered the most learned theologian. And Augustine, too, misled by this notion, often, especially in the Psalms, ignores the historical sense and turns to allegories. For all were persuaded that, especially in the histories of the Old Testament, allegories presented the spiritual meaning, whereas the historical or literal sense gave the carnal meaning. But is this not, I ask you, a profanation of the Holy Scripture?..."

⁴⁵WA, XXV, 142.

itself, as in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Gal. 4:22. One should not, however, misuse such an allegory and make it mean something other than what it is intended to mean.⁴⁶ This is the problem with the Enthusiasts such as Muenzer,⁴⁷ and also with Rome, because the Catholics insert their own interpretations into allegories and also interpret literal passages as allegories in such a way as to make these symbolic meanings into primary bases for doctrines.⁴⁸ This is most regrettable, says Luther, for even Augustine refused to allow the spiritual meaning to form the basis for doctrine. Luther says in this regard:

Recte igitur Augustinus dicit: Figuram nihil probare, nec debere in disputando habere locum: Disputatio enim fundamenta firma iaciat necesse est.⁴⁹

So long as allegories are allowed to prevail, the result will be empty speculation and confusion. For Luther, the allegorical method is mere juggling, or "monkey tricks" (Affenspiel), and Origen's allegories are not worth so much

⁴⁶WA, XLIII, 12.

⁴⁷WA TR, VI, No. 6989.

⁴⁸WA, XLII, 368.

⁴⁹WA XLIII, 12: "Therefore Augustine correctly says that a figure proves nothing and should have no place in a dispute. For it is necessary to lay a firm foundation in a dispute."

dirt.⁵⁰ The traditional interpretations must be laid aside, and the historical-literal sense must be allowed to prevail. He says further:

Ego quidem ab eo tempore, quo cepi historicam sententiam amplecti, semper abhorruī ab Allegoriis nec sum iis usus, nisi vel ipse textus eas ostenderet, vel interpretationes ex novo Testamento possent sumi.

Difficilimum autem mihi fuit ab usitato studio Allegoriarum discedere, et tamen videbam Allegorias esse inanes speculationes et tanquam spumam sacrae scripturae. Sola enim historica sententia est, quae vere et solide docet. Postquam haec tractata et recte cognita est, tunc licet etiam Allegoriis ceu ornamento et floribus quibusdam uti, quibus illustretur Historia seu pingatur.⁵¹

The concept of theoria in Antiochian exegesis seems also to have influenced Luther. Theodore distinguished between allegory and the spiritual sense of Scripture.

⁵⁰Blackman, op.cit., p. 118; other selected references to Luther's emphasis on the primacy of the literal sense are: WA VII, 650; XXIII, 92; VI, 509; SVIII, 700f.; XVIII, 180; XXIV, 19f.; XI, 434.

⁵¹WA XLII, 173: "As for myself, ever since I began to hold to the historical sense of Scripture, I have had a strong distaste for allegories; nor have I used them unless the text itself pointed to them or they were warranted by interpretations drawn from the New Testament.

"But it was very difficult for me to get away from my long practice of allegorizing, although I saw that allegories were empty speculations and merely the froth, as it were, of Holy Scripture. For it is only the historical sense of Scripture that teaches truly and solidly. After this has been mastered and correctly understood, allegories may be used as certain ornaments and flowers, by which the historical sense may be illustrated and portrayed."

The spiritual sense must be thoroughly grounded in the historical, for it is allegory which often subverts the historical. In a similar way Luther emphasizes that the spiritual sense of a text must be harmonious with the literal meaning. By the spiritual sense, he does not imply that Scripture has a meaning in addition to the literal, but that there is a subject matter indicated by the words. Although this subject matter cannot be apprehended except through the words of the text, the exegete needs to know more than words and grammar. He must be a Christian as well as an exegete.⁵² He says:

Aber es gehet, wie man spricht: wer die sprache nicht verstehet der mus des verstands feilen und nimpt wol eine kwe fur ein pferd, Also auch widerumb, ob einer gleich die sprach weis doch die sache nicht verstehet, davon man redet, so mus er abermal feilen. Daher denn allerleh irthumb und fallaciae komen, das man itzt nicht verstehet, was die wort heissen, itzt, was die sache seh, Gleich wie ess jnn andern kunsten auch zugehet, Darumb ist das beste und gewissest, das man allzeit ansehe materiam subiectam, wie und wovon und aus was ursachen etwas geredt wird.

Als (zum exempel) was ists, das die Papisten her poltern mit dem spruch "Wiltu jnns Leben eingehen, so halte die gepot?" Die wort horen und verstehen sie wol: Quid nominis, Wenn man aber weiter fragt:

⁵²WA XLII, 195; see also the exposition on John 14:28, WA XLV, 628-30.

Quid rei, Was ist denn die gepot halten?
 Oder wie hellt man sie? Da feret einer hie
 naus, der ander dorthin....⁵³

When one is spiritually blinded like the papists, says Luther, it does no good to set Scripture before their eyes. He states that he has been amazed that people read and sing glorious passages and yet understand nothing of them.⁵⁴ These people make the clearest passages dark. What is needed, he says, is for the Holy Spirit to make Christ present in the Word. Through the Spirit's working in the interpreter and in the Scripture, the Word is enabled to be not just the Word which speaks of Christ, but the Word which bestows Christ upon us.⁵⁵ It is not enough to approach the Scriptures with sound reason and superb scholarship. Augustine approached Scripture with

⁵³WA XLV, 632: "It is rightly said: He who does not understand the language will miss the meaning and may take a cow for a horse. In like manner, he will fail if he does not know the matter being spoken of even though he does know the language. This causes all sorts of errors and fallacies. Now, a person does not understand what the words mean, now he does not understand the matter. The same thing goes on in other fields of knowledge. The best and safest way, therefore, is always to look at the subject matter: what people are talking about, and how and why they are talking. For example, what do the papists mean by coming on with the passage: 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments?' They hear and understand the words well enough quid nominis, according to their sound. But if one goes on to ask: quid rei? What does it mean to 'keep the commandments,' or how are they kept? Then one goes off in this direction and another in that...."

⁵⁴WA XXXIII, 215.

⁵⁵Prenter, op.cit., pp. 106f.

free reason for nine years and failed to comprehend it. What is necessary is for Scripture to be approached with a simple heart, for it is faith which makes it become plain and clear.⁵⁶ By this Luther did not mean to ignore the virtues of scholarship, for his emphasis upon the need for the use of original languages and such resources as are available to the scholar is widely known.⁵⁷ He meant, rather, that in addition to a scholarly mind the exegete needs a pious, God-fearing, diligent, practiced heart.⁵⁸ Only so can the exegete discern the face of Christ, the inner Word which illumines the soul, in the text of Scripture.

Thus, the Antiochian emphasis on the literal sense, the rejection of allegory, and the illumination of the Spirit needed for the apprehension of the theoria, the spiritual sense, is reflected in Luther. Although Luther's emphasis on the word^K of the Holy Spirit and the role of faith seems to be more dominant than Theodore's at this point, and even though Luther has potential problems in defining the exact sense in which the Spirit leads one to the inner, spiritual sense of the Word, this emphasis was

⁵⁶WA XXXVII, 366; Erlangen Ed. V, 42f.

⁵⁷WA XV, 40; Erlangen Ed. LXIII, 24.

⁵⁸WA XXX, II, 640.

not new in the Church, and it was desperately needed then in the face of ecclesiastical authority even as it is needed now in the face of rationalism and the quest for the historical content of the Gospel to the exclusion of the message of faith in the Scriptures.

The Medieval Scholars

The primary positive influence which the medieval scholars had upon Luther was their work which led to a renewal of literal exegesis after Alexandrian allegory had dominated Biblical interpretation for centuries. The rise of literal exegesis in this period provided both a precedent and an inspiration for Luther. Hugh of St. Victor greatly enhanced the importance of the historical sense of Scripture by dealing seriously with the historical events of religious history. It is through the literal sense of Scripture that the spiritual sense is reached, and the exegete must grasp the literal sense before moving into allegorical interpretations. Thus, allegory was still allowed a legitimate place in Biblical interpretation, but Hugh did not allow its use to the exclusion of the historical sense. His pupil, Andrew of St. Victor, further developed historical exegesis, and in doing so reflected the exegetical influence of the Jewish exegetes.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Chapter II, pp. 94-97.

Aquinas further emphasized the literal sense as the basis for all the meanings of Scripture and the participation of the human author in the process of Biblical inspiration. Since the words of Scripture have come through the rational faculties of the writer, and since he is not simply a pen in the hands of the Holy Spirit, then the literal words themselves have rational meaning and can be understood by the means of human reason with the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Since Scripture is not simply a divine mystery, allegory becomes much less important, and grammatical study becomes crucial. There may be, of course, a spiritual meaning in the text, says Aquinas, but this is signified by the literal sense and is based upon it. Also, Aquinas' explanations of the nature and function of the parabolic and metaphorical senses of the text are invaluable guides to the more mature understanding of the literal sense.⁶⁰ However, Aquinas' actual exegetical practice, for all its erudition, suffered somewhat from the tendency to allow ecclesiastical tradition to dictate the conclusions which one might reach as a result of textual study.

A greater degree of exegetical independence is reflected in the work of Nicolas of Lyra, although he, like Aquinas and others, did subject his conclusions to the correction

⁶⁰Chapter II, pp. 98-104.

of the Church. Lyra sometimes preferred the conclusions of Rashi and the Jews to those of the Fathers, or he would even set aside all Jewish and Christian interpretations in favor of his own. He thus made great gains in breaking down, as Farrar says, "the tyranny of ecclesiastical tradition."⁶¹ His refusal to allow any spiritual interpretation to stand alone, his strong stress on the sensus literalis historicus, moved beyond Aquinas' teaching that the spiritual should grow out of the literal. Lyra held that the spiritual sense could not provide even a basis for faith without being itself based on the literal. He said:

Nihil sub spirituali sensu continetur fide
necessarium quod Scriptura per literalem sensum
alicubi manifeste non tradet.⁶²

Thus, we see in the medieval theologians and Schoolmen a trend developing toward a sound grammatical-historical hermeneutical method. Luther was strongly influenced by this trend, and by the work of Lyra in particular. Although

⁶¹Farrar, op.cit., p. 277.

⁶²Cited by Wilhelm Pauck, ed., Luther: Lectures on Romans, Library of Christian Classics, XV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. XXX: "Nothing can be subsumed under the spiritual sense as necessary for the faith which the Scripture does not somewhere plainly hand down through its literal meaning."

he was repelled by Lyra's literalism at first, he later came to respect him highly. Even if it undoubtedly exaggerates this influence, Lyra's impact on Luther is expressed in the couplet:

Si Lyra non cantasset,
Lutherus non saltasset.⁶³

Luther especially likes the attention Lyra paid to the historical background of his exegesis. He says:

Sic omnia haec sunt historica, Id quod
diligenter admoneo, ne incautus lector
offendatur autoritate Patrum, qui historiam
relinquunt, et allegorias querunt. Ego Lyram
ideo amo et inter optimos pono, quod ubique
diligenter retinet et persequitur historiam,
Quanquam autoritate Patrum se vinci patitur,
et nonnunquam illorum exemplo deflectit a
proprietae sententiae ad ineptas Allegorias.⁶⁴

It is apparent, then, by Luther's own admission, that Lyra's historical method has influenced him. However, Luther is

⁶³Mackinnon, op.cit., IV, p. 291; A. Berkeley Mickelson, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), pp. 37f.

⁶⁴WA XLII, 71: "These, then, are all historical facts. This is something to which I carefully call attention, lest the unwary reader be led astray by the authority of the Fathers, who give up the idea that this is history and look for allegories. For this reason I like Lyra and rank him among the best, because throughout he carefully adheres to, and concerns himself with, the historical account. Nevertheless, he allows himself to be swayed by the authority of the fathers and occasionally, because of their example, turns away from the real meaning to silly allegories." Pelikan also notes Lyra's influence, LW, 1, xi; also, see LW, 2, 164 & 238.

not uncritical of Lyra, but faults him for abandoning his exegetical integrity at certain points in deference to tradition.⁶⁵ Gerrish thinks that what really distinguishes Luther from the Scholastics is this very tendency to deny the authority of Church and Pope in matters of interpretation. What makes his speech at Worms revolutionary is not that it affirms the authority of Scripture, which all the Scholastics do, but that it denies the authority of popes and councils.⁶⁶

We must now ask the question of where Luther developed his insight and the courage to challenge the authority of the Church in matters of interpretation. We believe that the answer lies, in part, in his training in the via moderna.

Ockhamistic Heritage

There is a real need to exercise caution in dealing with the issue of Ockhamistic influences upon Luther, as both Wood and Gerrish rightly warn.⁶⁷ However, Murray's statement that Luther was "no intellectual vagabond," but that his thought has a pedigree, is certainly not without

⁶⁵WA, XLII, 137f. also contains a criticism of Lyra for yielding too much to the authority of the Fathers.

⁶⁶B.A. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation," Scottish Journal of Theology, X, 1957, p. 342.

⁶⁷B.A. Gerrish, Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 5; Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 33.

merit.⁶⁸ To what extent and in what ways Luther was affected by Nominalism is made problematic partly because of the level of obscurity in the writings of the Nominalists themselves and partly because of the relative ignorance of Nominalism among scholars in the field of Scholastic studies.⁶⁹ That there was some Ockhamistic influence upon Luther is evident, however, from a survey of the intellectual environment in which he studied and from statements which he made about Ockham in which he calls him "beloved master," "summus dialecticus," and "the most eminent and the most brilliant of the Scholastic doctors."⁷⁰ Furthermore, certain themes of Nominalism find expression in Luther's theology, either by way of positive influence or through negative reactions.

Luther's early training

Beginning with his matriculation at Erfurt in 1502, Luther was instructed in the Nominalist tradition. Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomeus Arnoldi, two of his teachers, were noted Ockhamists, and Johann Nathin, his theological

⁶⁸R.H. Murray, Erasmus and Luther: Their Attitude to Toleration (London: S.P.C.K., 1920), p. 39.

⁶⁹Gerrish, op.cit., p. 6; Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), p. 87.

⁷⁰WA XXX, ii, 300; WA TR 5, 516, No. 2544a; WA VI, 183; cited in Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 34.

instructor in the monastery, had been a personal disciple of Gabriel Biel, who was an illustrious Nominalist.⁷¹ Luther read Biel's Exposition of the Canon of the Mass in preparation for ordination, and it moved him very much.⁷² After his ordination in 1507, he enrolled in the studium generale of the Augustinians at Erfurt. He studied the Bible extensively there and also paraphrased the Sentences of Lombard with the assistance of commentaries by Ockham, Biel, and d'Ailly. Thus, he encountered Ockhamist thought both through his teachers and also through the writings of Biel and d'Ailly. At Wittenberg in 1508-9, he helped Trutvetter, who had then moved there from Erfurt, with his course in Ockhamist theology.⁷³

Much controversy has developed in regard to the nature and extent of the direct influence of Ockham upon Luther's theology. Certainly, the extreme statement of Denifle that Luther "remained an Occamist" does not seem to be justified.⁷⁴ Gerrish thinks, however, that although verbal resemblances to Ockham may be misleading, there is

⁷¹Wood, Ibid., p. 34.

⁷²LW, 54, 264, No. 3722; this work was in Luther's library in 1538 (see Wood, Ibid., note 6).

⁷³Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 34.

⁷⁴Heinrich Denifle, Luther und Luthertum (2nd ed., 1906), I, p. 591; cited by Gerrish, op.cit., p. 45.

good reason for accepting the suggestion that some of Luther's doctrines may have originated from Nominalism, although he usually adapted them in his own unique way.⁷⁵

Before looking further at possible Nominalist themes in Luther's theology, we must note the work of Biel and d'Ailly as they affected the theological climate in which Luther studied. Gabriel Biel(1420-1495), the "last of the Scholastics," studied at Erfurt and later helped found the University of Tübingen. Luther had read his Exposition of the Canon of the Mass, as we have noted, and he also knew his Collectorium, a commentary on Lombard's Sentences. Biel modified Ockham's dichotomy between faith and reason, about which we shall say more later, and taught that although the Word of God alone conveys the truth of revelation, reason may interpret and confirm it. The Bible is inspired, and the Church and the pope may transmit knowledge received through the Scriptures, but they cannot add to it nor can they contradict it. This emphasis on the relation of Scripture and tradition obviously made an impact on Luther, although he later repudiated what he considered to be Biel's Pelagian tendencies.⁷⁶

Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) of Paris, along with Biel, championed the via moderna, as opposed to the via

⁷⁵Gerrish, Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁶Wood, Captive..., op.cit., pp. 36f.; Gerrish, Ibid., p. 44.

antiqua of Aquinas. The Thomists insisted that reason had a place in attaining the knowledge of God, but the advocates of the via moderna, under the influence of Duns Scotus and also William of Ockham, taught that the Bible was the only guide in matters of faith. D'Ailly taught the supremacy of Scripture, its "infallible author," and he referred to Paul as the "celestial secretary." He asserted that Christ had not built His Church on Peter, but on the Bible, and he affirmed that "a declaration of the canonical Scriptures is of greater authority than an assertion of the Christian Church."⁷⁷ Thus, in the atmosphere of the via moderna at Erfurt, with such authorities as Biel and d'Ailly from which to draw, Luther gained the rationale for a break with the Scholastic tradition,⁷⁸ and he was enabled to see the inadequacy of all philosophical speculation about the saving nature of God.⁷⁹

Ockhamistic themes

The chief figure in the development of late medieval Nominalism was William of Ockham (1280-1349), who taught at

⁷⁷Paul Tschackert, Peter von Ailli (1877), Appendix pp. 9, 10; cited by Wood, Ibid., p. 37.

⁷⁸Franz Lau, Luther (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 39.

⁷⁹Willem Jan Kooiman, Luther and the Bible (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), pp. 14ff.

Oxford and Paris and who was imprisoned by Pope John XXII as a result of his views on the complete poverty of Christ and the apostles and the independence of the state from ecclesiastical authority. After having escaped from prison, Ockham found refuge with Louis of Bavaria, under whose protection he continued to develop his views which rejected the Platonic concept that ideas or universals have reality, which is known as "Realism." Ockham denied that universals have any reality except in the mind, and asserted that they were only terms by which concepts or things could be categorized;⁸⁰ hence the appellation of "Terminism," or "Nominalism," came to be applied to his system. The result of Nominalism was the conviction that men do not have actual knowledge of things in themselves, but only of mental concepts. This led to the conclusion that theological truths are not philosophically provable, but are accepted on the basis of authority. Thus, Ockham brought to completion the breakdown of Scholasticism which had attempted to combine faith and reason, and gave further weight to Duns Scotus' (1265-1308) belief that much in theology is philosophically improbable, although it may be accepted on the authority of the Church.⁸¹ This disintegration of the Medieval Synthesis

⁸⁰Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 251f.; Farrar, op.cit., p. 281.

⁸¹Walker, Ibid.

created a virtually blind reliance upon the Church as the absolute intellectual guide, and as Atkinson phrases it, "the sole and certain possessor of infallible truth."⁸²

Although Ockham accepted the authority of the Church, he also stressed the primacy of Scripture as authority. Scripture is infallible, and the Christian is bound to accept and obey what is written in it or what follows from it. No other authority need supplement it. He says, "What is not contained in the Scriptures, or cannot with necessary and obvious consistency be deduced from the contents of the same, no Christian needs to believe."⁸³ Ockham believes that Scripture is divinely inspired, and is thus divinely authoritative.⁸⁴ With all his assertions of the authority and infallibility of Scripture, however, Ockham accepted the traditional view of the Fathers, such as Irenaeus and particularly Tertullian, that the basis for Christian truth is not the Bible alone, but apostolic tradition, and the continuing revelations of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁵ Thus, again we see the role of tradition as an interpreter of Holy Scripture, and although Ockham stresses that Scripture, and

⁸²Atkinson, op.cit., p. 46.

⁸³Ockham, Dialogus, I, 2, i (Goldast, II, 411); cited by Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 34.

⁸⁴Ibid., II, 3, iv (Goldast, II, 822).

⁸⁵Ibid., I, 2, v (Goldast, II, 416).

not the decisions of councils and popes, is binding upon the believer, in actual practice the Church becomes the final authority and judge of truth, for it places its own interpretation upon Scripture.⁸⁶ Seeberg is perhaps right when he says that the real purpose of Ockham in emphasizing the authority of the Bible was to secure a basis for criticism by which the authority of the Church's dogmas could be shaken.⁸⁷ It is possibly because of this motivation that Ockham did not gain the key to understanding the Biblical message of salvation by grace.⁸⁸

This divorce of fides and ratio was Ockham's principal influence upon Luther. However, the uncertainty generated by Nominalism did not drive Luther, as it did others, to an unquestioning obedience to the authority of the Church as the sole possessor of truth. On the contrary, Luther points men not to the Church, but to Christ as seen in the Scriptures. He recognizes that a saving knowledge of God comes only through Christ, not through the Church, as the Ockhamists taught, nor through reason, as the Thomists were accused of teaching. Like Ockham, Luther teaches that theology is not the object of speculation, but of experience.

⁸⁶Walker, op.cit., p. 252; Gerrish, op.cit., "... Continental Reformation," p. 338.

⁸⁷Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte (1930); cited by Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 35.

⁸⁸Wood, Ibid.

Unlike Ockham, however, Luther denies the dogmas of transubstantiation and of the Church's mediatorship of grace through merits in favor of Christ as seen in the Scriptures alone without the interpretations of the Church in regard to His saving work.⁸⁹ Thus, whereas Ockham was a leader in the Conciliar Movement, and whereas he denied the power of the pope in secular matters only, Luther both affirms the authority of Scripture and also denies categorically the authority of popes and councils.⁹⁰ He carries Ockham's empiricism to its conclusion in analyzing Biblical and historical sources independently of Church tradition, and he thus provides a basis of fact for the Reformation.⁹¹

It is probably at the point of the doctrine of merit that Luther makes his cleanest break with Ockham. His profound spiritual struggles for peace, which were based upon doing works of supererogation and seeking the forgiveness of God and the Church, left him with only a bruised conscience and a sterile understanding of salvation. Luther could never find satisfaction by the means of Ockham's emphasis on the freedom of God and of man and through what he considered to be the Pelagian view of man in Nominalism. It was only as Luther gained a new understanding of Paul's

⁸⁹Atkinson, op.cit., pp. 47ff.

⁹⁰Gerrish, "Cont. Ref.," op.cit., p. 342.

⁹¹Atkinson, op.cit., p. 48.

and Augustine's teachings on the bondage of the will that he broke through to his evangelical experience, his Türmerlebnis. It was thus from the Bible, and not Ockham, that Luther gained his spiritual sight, and from this insight he then reacted against the Nominalist view of man and sin.⁹² It was because of this background that he could not tolerate the doctrine of merit reflected in the sale of indulgences. Such a false concept had left him spiritually adrift, and he could not bear to see it imposed on other searching souls. For Luther, the New Testament did not teach the Nominalist concept of justification on the basis of acceptance (a sola divina acceptatione), or the non-imputation of sins.⁹³ He saw the New Testament teaching that sins are forgiven on the ground of Christ's atoning death. Not only the non-imputation of sins, but the imputation of Christ's righteousness was the insight which Luther saw as leading to spiritual freedom and forgiveness.⁹⁴ Thus Luther rejects the soteriology and anthropology of

⁹²Ibid., pp. 49f.

⁹³Werner Dettloff, Die Entwicklung der Akzeptations- und Verdienstlehre von Duns Scotus bis Luther unter Berücksichtigung der Franziskanertheologen (Münster, 1963); this study is a definitive treatment of the acceptio divina and Luther's reaction to this aspect of the Ockhamist heritage.

⁹⁴Gerrish, Grace and Reason, op.cit., pp. 47f.

Ockham, while he retains many aspects of his epistemology and his emphasis on authority, although Luther greatly modifies the latter emphasis, as has been shown.

Thus, Ockham's epistemology, which cracked the medieval synthesis of faith and reason by showing that theological doctrines are not philosophically provable, provided Luther with a tool to break the Church's grip as the sole authoritative interpreter of Scripture.⁹⁵ At Leipzig in 1519, he sought to show that believers could not place their confidence blindly in the authority of the Church.⁹⁶ In showing the fallacy of trusting in the Church alone for Biblical interpretation, Luther departed from the conclusions of Scotus and Ockham that because men cannot arrive at the knowledge rationally, they must therefore rely upon the authority of the Church. Luther would have nothing to do with the Ockhamist submission to the Church as having an absolutely infallible knowledge of divine truth requires the unconditional submission of the believer to its dogmas. Although he believed reason was incapable of discerning the mysteries of faith in the Scriptures, the history of the councils and fathers proved that the Church's interpretations were not infallible, therefore authority

⁹⁵Walker, op.cit., pp. 252, 307.

⁹⁶Atkinson, op.cit., pp. 46f.

must be in Scripture alone.⁹⁷

Luther's conclusions, then, were directed against traditional hermeneutics, which emphasized the authority of the Church in interpretation, and they asserted the priesthood of all believers, which included the right of individual judgment in interpretation. The result was a hermeneutical revolution in which the Bible as supreme authority replaced ecclesiastical orthodoxy and dogma.⁹⁸ Ockham's emphasis upon the gap between philosophical and theological logic on the one hand and faith on the other had borne fruit in Luther's insistence that the basis of faith was not tradition nor reason, but the literal sense of Scripture which would not lead astray.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Ockham's teaching that apart from revelation man could have no knowledge of God, and that revelation was infallible, greatly influenced Luther.¹⁰⁰ This emphasis placed Scripture at the basis of theology, and subordinated the councils and the Fathers to that revelation.¹⁰¹ Thus, Scripture becomes the judge of

⁹⁷Ibid.; H. Boehmer, Road to Reformation, J.W. Doberstein and T.G. Tappert, trans. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 25.

⁹⁸Clara Dorn, Influences Upon Method of Biblical Interpretation, Unpublished M.R.E. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1956.

⁹⁹Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Boston: W.A. Wilde, Co., 1950), p. 31.

¹⁰⁰Boehmer, op.cit., p. 142.

¹⁰¹Atkinson, op.cit., pp. 48f.

tradition for Luther in contrast to the emphasis on ecclesiastical authority seen in men such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Vincent of Lérins, and the medieval scholars. With this emphasis, Luther lays open the inadequacies of the Scholastic Method and pours salt into the wounds by replacing authoritarian interpretations with a sound Biblical theology.¹⁰²

Erasmus and Humanism

Another profound influence upon Luther's hermeneutic came from humanism. Mackinnon says in this regard:

...it is nevertheless evident that the humanist movement, as represented by a Valla, a Ficino, a Mirandola, a Reuchlin, an Erasmus, was a real, nay an indispensable preparation for the Reformation. Without this preparation the work of Luther would hardly have been possible.¹⁰³

Indeed, the humanist rejection of Scholasticism in favor of a Biblical theology, its appeal to the sources and origins of Christianity as the only basis for faith, its use of a critical methodology in the study of ecclesiastical dogma and history, its individualism, and its demand for reform preceded Luther and prepared an audience for his works.¹⁰⁴ In all fairness, however, one must not place Luther on a

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 52.

¹⁰³Mackinnon, I, op.cit., p. 249.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 249.

simplistically humanist continuum. He was impressed by humanist work, but he was a theologian trained in the Scholastic theology from the point of view of the via moderna, in contrast to the broader Renaissance background of Erasmus.¹⁰⁵ Luther's hermeneutical method can hardly be appreciated, however, apart from a brief survey of the intellectual atmosphere of humanism as expressed most representatively in Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Erasmus' hermeneutical method

Erasmus bases his hermeneutic on the humanist motto, ad fontes, and in this he expresses his basic dissimilarity with the medieval interpretative methods. As a product of the Renaissance, he is vitally concerned with a rebirth of antiquity, although he brings to the movement a Christian dimension. He wishes to see the development of a new age combining the best of Christianity with the purest classicism. In order to accomplish this goal of authentic spiritual and intellectual rebirth, one must return to the sources.¹⁰⁶

He deviates from pure Renaissance scholarship in the purpose for which he seeks the sources. Rather than viewing the classical studies as the summum bonum of good literature, he finds their deepest meaning in the illumination they give

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 250; John W. Aldridge, The Hermeneutic of Erasmus (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966) pp. 10ff, 31ff.

¹⁰⁶ Aldridge, Ibid., p. 9.

to theology, and thus he reflects a Christian Humanism. Under the influence of John Colet in England, in 1499-1500, Erasmus was led to see the importance of Holy Scripture as the chief source. This new interest in Biblical exegesis and the importance which Colet placed upon the Biblical text and languages, although he himself was only a pioneer in Greek and Hebrew, impressed Erasmus with the fact that the Scriptures were not only the highest source, but also a basis for purifying the Church.¹⁰⁷ Ad fontes, then, becomes for Erasmus a means of ridding Christianity of the excesses of superstition, ignorance, and Scholastic theology. It is by this means that he seeks to bring the Church to a true return to the teachings of Christ, the philosophia Christi.¹⁰⁸

Although Erasmus always sees Scripture as the highest source, he never rejects the classics and the culture of antiquity. Indeed, this bonae litterae, by which he means all of good learning and culture in the classical and Christian worlds, should become the means by which we arrive at true knowledge and understanding of the Gospel. Classical literature and languages function to lead a narrow,

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 10f.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 13f.

Scholasticized theology into a broader view of truth and a deeper knowledge of the sources. Thus, bonae litterae, which must include a study of Scripture sources as well as classical ones, will provide a panacea for the stifling traditionalism of the monks and ecclesiastics.¹⁰⁹

In applying the principle of ad fontes, Erasmus uses it as the basis for his exegetical method, thus separating himself from the traditional hermeneutical procedure of exegesis which was bound to ecclesiastical authority. He sees textual criticism as basic to exegesis, and this of course involves a mastery of the Biblical languages. The medieval interpreters, of course, did use the sources whenever possible, but Erasmus' methodology differs from theirs in that he rejects their rationalistic classification of the synthesis of knowledge which they had obtained from their studies. For him, the Scholastic Method is sterile and irrelevant to the spiritual needs of the people.¹¹⁰

The medieval hermeneutic, which was a reflection of the Scholastic Method, was interested in a "logical, orderly, and exhaustive approach to Scripture," as Aldridge describes it.¹¹¹ It used the methods of the glossa and scholia, in addition to other appendages and distinctions

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 20-23.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 27.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 28.

in the work of men such as Aquinas. Thus, although the medieval hermeneutic did not lose touch with the Scriptures, the exegesis became so interwoven with the Scholastic methodology and conclusions that the meaning of the text was obscured. Erasmus wishes to move away from this synthesis of Scripture and dogma in favor of arriving at the basic, original, and genuine meaning of the text. He thus uses the philological method of text criticism.¹¹²

He sees that one must have a sound philological foundation in order to arrive at a sound sensus litteralis. This concern leads him to prepare his editions of the New Testament through the use of the philological critical method.¹¹³ He deems it foolish to attempt to derive theological conclusions from the New Testament without consulting the Greek:

Video dementiam esse extremam, theologiae
partem quae de mysteriis est praecipua digitulo
attingere, nisi quis Graecanica etiam sit
instructus supellectile, cum ii qui divinos
vertere libros, religione transferendi ita
Graecas reddunt figuras, vt ne primarius quidem
ille, quem nostrates theologi literalem nominant,

¹¹²Ibid., pp. 28-31.

¹¹³Ibid., pp. 101f.

sensus percipiatur ab iis que Graece
nesciunt.¹¹⁴

In interpreting the text which has been restored by the philological process, Erasmus sees eruditio as the basic hermeneutical approach. By erudition he means a learned, grammatical, objective, scientific study of the sources. One must understand the language and setting of the sources, not simply engage in reasoning out their meaning through a system such as the Scholastics use. Learning, not simply reason, is the basis for understanding. Only as the interpreter educates himself and devotes time and energy to the sources can he understand them. This is an approach based on humanistic ideals, not the analytical method of a rationalistic approach.¹¹⁵ This is an anthropocentric approach based on scholarship, understanding, and enlightenment. It offers a more open and flexible means of dealing with the text, but it is still an attempt by man to control the understanding of Scripture by his own efforts.¹¹⁶ Whereas

¹¹⁴Percy S. and H.M. Allen, Opus Epistolarum Erasmi, 11 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906-47), 149, 21; "I see it as madness to touch with the littlest finger that principal part of theology, which treats of divine mysteries, without first being instructed in Greek, when those who have translated the sacred books have in their scrupulous interpretation so rendered the Greek phrases that even the primary meaning which our theologians call 'literal' cannot be understood by those who do not know Greek" (trans. by Aldridge, Ibid., p. 102).

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 57.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 58.

Scholasticism controlled Scripture by ecclesiastical dogma and tradition, humanism controls it by knowledge. Knowledge alone leads to faith, which then is not the gift of God, but the result of man's scholarly achievements.¹¹⁷ With this aspect of humanism, Luther could have no sympathy.

Luther's attitude toward humanism

Luther thoroughly appreciates the humanist polemic against the Scholastics. Although his reaction to Scholasticism is primarily religious and theological, while the humanists react rationally and intellectually, they are firm allies at this point. Luther, however, perceived rather early that he was speaking from a different set of presuppositions than Erasmus, for example. He wrote to John Lang in 1517:

I have read our Erasmus (Erasmum nostrum), and from day to day my estimation of him decreases. I am, indeed, pleased that he refutes, not less stoutly than learnedly, both the monks and the priests, and condemns their inveterate and lethargic ignorance. But I fear that he does not sufficiently promote Christ and the grace of God, in which he is more ignorant than Lefébre. The human prevails in him more than the divine. Although I am unwilling to judge him, I nevertheless venture to do so in order to forewarn you not to read or accept his

¹¹⁷Ibid., although he believes the Scriptures to be inspired, Erasmus feels that interpretation does not depend upon the help of the Holy Spirit, but on erudition, Ibid., p. 94.

writings without discrimination. For we live in dangerous times, and it seems to me that a man is not necessarily a truly wise Christian because he knows Greek and Hebrew, since even St. Jerome, who knew five languages, is not equal to Augustine, who knew but one, although it may seem far otherwise to Erasmus.¹¹⁸

Thus, although Luther has humanist sympathies and had taken a serious interest in the classics, his interest in this type of scholarship is more that of a theologian than a man of letters.¹¹⁹ He never did really trust the humanists and was somewhat appalled by their cynicism and flippancy at times. He never could bring himself to such a freethinking independence as one sees in Mutianus, for example, nor could he look at religion simply in the broad human sense. Mackinnon says, "The monk and the theologian outweighed in Luther the humanist."¹²⁰ The meaning of ad fontes for Luther and for Erasmus is quite different. Whereas Erasmus totally rejects the Scholastic Method, Luther developed his exegetical method and theological perception through a sound knowledge of all previous interpreters, be they Patristic, Scholastic, or contemporary, as in the case of his study of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples. Luther

¹¹⁸Cited by Mackinnon, I, op.cit., p. 254 (Enders, "Briefwechsel," I, 88).

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 250f.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 253.

had even taught Scholastic theology at Erfurt in his course on the Sententiarum of Peter Lombard. Luther's approach, however, is to argue with the Scholastics on their own grounds, and using their methodology and terminology, he demolishes their doctrines of justification, sin, and the sacraments and then expounds his own fresh insights.¹²¹ Thus, just as Luther used some of the Scholastic methods for his own purposes, so he uses the humanist tools for a more open and scholarly approach to the text of Scripture, which he considers the only true source. As Aldridge says, "Sola Scriptura was to become the byword of the Reformation, not the ad fontes of Erasmus."¹²²

Thus, we see that Erasmus gives to the Reformation the text and method to be used in the theological exegesis of Scripture. He provides the tools for the Reformed hermeneutic, and although Luther would not allow Erasmus' eruditio to occupy the place of his spiritus in interpretation, he always remained indebted to the great humanist for setting the stage upon which he played and forging the tools for his reform. Zwingli, Calvin, and Melanchthon were all shaped by the humanist scholarship, and the intellectual climate of criticism of the papacy and of ecclesiastical

¹²¹Aldridge, op.cit., pp. 31-34.

¹²²Ibid., p. 37.

abuses had been brought to its culmination by humanism and the Renaissance. Thus, the aphorism that "Erasmus laid the egg which Luther hatched," is not without a great deal of merit.¹²³

¹²³Allen, Opus..., op.cit., V., 1.11; cited by Roland Bainton, Erasmus of Christendom (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 158.

CHAPTER IV

LUTHER'S CONCEPT OF SCRIPTURE

Martin Luther's doctrine of Scripture and his principles of Biblical interpretation were laboriously and carefully hammered out on the anvil of a personal search for salvation. His primary purpose for becoming a monk was to satisfy his need for a personal relationship to God. In his quest for a "gracious God," he faithfully followed his monastic vows and the disciplines of asceticism, prayer, and meditation. His theological mentors of the via moderna--William of Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, and Gabriel Biel--had convinced him that through his own native powers he could divest himself of all lower affections and rise to an unselfish love for his neighbor and a pure love for God.¹

He avidly pursued this goal of seeking spiritual rewards for his works, and at times even felt that he was making progress. For the most part, however, he was painfully aware of the tormenting presence of concupiscentia, self-love, which prevented his attaining the goal of his spiritual pilgrimage. He was unable to find peace, for he

¹Philip S. Watson, Let God Be God! (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1947), p. 15; "They teach that a man, ex puris naturalibus, that is, of his own pure natural strength, is able to do meritorious works before grace, and love God and Christ above all things," LW 26, 172; WA 40, 290-291.

could not experience the pure love toward God which he so desperately sought.²

In his desperation, Luther's counselor, Staupitz, urged him to study the Bible, and it was this exposure to the Scriptures which finally brought him deliverance when he at last understood the meaning of the "righteousness of God." When it became clear to him that God's righteousness was not the execution of His wrath, but an act of grace by which He justified sinners, and that this justification did not come by moral attainment, but through God's grace through faith, Luther found the solution for the problem that had driven him into the monastery. At last he began to understand the different but complementary functions of the Law and the Gospel. Formerly, he had attempted to fulfill the commandments of God by conforming to His Law, but the legalism of the via moderna was overcome by the realization that deliverance came through the forgiveness of the Gospel.³

Salvation was made plain to Luther, then, because he gained a new conception of God and entered into a new relationship with Him. This relationship was not based on Luther's righteousness in fulfilling the Law, but on God's righteousness in fulfilling His promises of love according

²Ibid., pp. 16f.

³Ibid., pp. 20f.

to the Gospel.⁴ Thus, the understanding of the relationship between Law and Gospel as related to Christ was to become the primary principle for his Biblical interpretation, and it was his diligent study of the Bible which led him to this understanding. It will be the purpose of this chapter to study Luther's new insights into the nature and function of Scripture.

The Authority of Scripture

The emphasis on the authority of the Scriptures was not new in Christendom. Luther breaks new ground when he insists that the authority of the Bible does not need to be supplemented by that of the Roman Church. For him, the teaching of Scripture and of the Roman Church are not necessarily identical, and he also denies that the pope or the councils as representatives of the Church have the ultimate right to interpret the meaning of the Word. Sola Scriptura thus becomes the watchword of the Reformation.

Luther came to this understanding of the authority of the Word as a result of his studying the Bible in the midst of his own spiritual struggles. He sought answers to his own spiritual problems, and thus became involved at a deep, existential level with the Scriptures. In his account of how Staupitz had veritably forced him to prepare himself

⁴Wood, op.cit., Captive..., pp. 119f.

for ordination as a professor of Holy Scripture to take over the lectura in Biblia at Wittenberg, Luther says that he put forth no less than fifteen reasons why he was not fit for the office of preacher and doctor. He says, "I had to become a doctor against my wish, merely out of obedience. I was compelled to accept the office of a doctor and had to swear and to vow to my beloved Scripture that I would preach and teach it faithfully and purely."⁵ From this time on Luther was "married to the Bible." His emphasis on the authority of the Scripture was not out of context with the tradition of the Church, for the centuries from 1200 to the Reformation were the time when the authority of the Holy Scriptures was being rediscovered, as was seen in the study of Aquinas and Ockham. Much work had been done by the theologians and the canonists in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in trying to elucidate the source of the highest authority for the Church. The problem was whether this authority was most prominent in the councils, the papacy, in Scripture alone, or in the interrelationship between Scripture and tradition.⁶ The fact that the Scripture itself had divine authority was not seriously questioned.

⁵WA 33 III, 38, 6, 14; see Hermann Sasse, "Luther and the Word of God," Accents in Luther's Theology, Heino O. Kadai, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 51.

⁶Ibid., p. 56.

Luther's encounter with the traditional concepts of Scripture came when he saw the inconsistency in the assertion of papal authority in contradiction to Biblical revelation. Even Aquinas thought it inconceivable that there could be a contradiction between the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of the Church.⁷ When in the controversy about the theses on indulgences, Luther discovered that Rome not only held views that contradicted the Bible, but that it was not at all interested in whether there were or could be such contradictions, he was greatly disillusioned. When in his correspondence with Prierias, his encounter with Cajetan at Augsburg, and his disputation with Eck at Leipzig it became clear that the men in charge of his trial were not concerned with the authority of Holy Writ, but only with that of the Pope, Luther's disillusionment was complete. In his resolution on the thirteenth thesis at Leipzig, he states that neither the church of the New Testament, nor the ancient church, nor the Oriental churches have known anything of the primacy which the Roman bishop claims. His thesis that the office of the papacy had been created by the "decretals" of the medieval church could also be supported by the work of

⁷Ibid., p. 72.

Nicolaus Cusanus and Laurentius Valla, the humanists, in their unmasking of the forgeries of the Donatio Constantini. Furthermore, even conciliarism is no valid substitute when papal power begins to decline, as was seen under Boniface VIII, "for neither the papacy nor the ecumenical council can supply that lasting and final authority without which the church of Christ cannot exist," says Sasse.⁸ Thus, while the papacy has no basis in the New Testament, and since Luther believes that councils and pope are both subject to error, as he reflected at Leipzig, Scripture is the only authority left. This realization "drove him to the Holy Scripture as the only reliable and irrefutable source of all Christian doctrine, though...his sola Scriptura was never that of the Middle Ages."⁹ Luther sees not only the possibility, but the reality of a contradiction between Scripture and the conclusions of the pope and the councils. His sola Scriptura admits no other final authority than that of Scripture.

The lack of emphasis on the authority of the Scripture by Luther's opponents was a result of a non sequitur in the logic of the medieval Church. Although the Church in the Middle Ages did hold the doctrine of the supreme authority of the Bible even to the extent of positing a

⁹Ibid., p. 58.

doctrine of verbal inspiration, it maintained that the authority of the Scripture was derived from the Church and therein was its fallacy. From the time of the Gnostics, the Church had claimed to be the depository of the truth. One of the reasons for this assertion was its possession of a canon of apostolic writings which were the only authentic and authoritative polemics against the heretics. Since the Church possessed these writings by virtue of apostolic succession, their sole authority was guaranteed as opposed to the canon of the Gnostics. They thus assumed that the authority of these writings rested on that of the Church. It is this misapplication of authority that Luther challenges with his doctrine of the supreme and sole authority of Scripture. He points out that the Bible derives its authority from itself, and is not invested with it by the Church.¹⁰ He says:

Nec potest fidelis Christianus cogi ultra sacram scripturam, que est proprie ius divinum, nisi accenderit nova et probata revelatio....¹¹

With this denial of the infallibility of both pope and council, Luther breaks completely with both the Church and medieval theology.

¹⁰James Mackinnon, op.cit., IV, pp. 295f.

¹¹WA 2,279: "No believing Christian can be forced to recognize any authority beyond the sacred Scripture, which is exclusively invested with divine right, unless, indeed, there comes a new and attested revelation."

Luther takes over the traditional doctrine that Scripture had been given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.¹² This doctrine of inspiration, however, is for Luther not mechanical inspiration. He does not see the Bible as a stereotyped collection of supernatural syllables.

The sacred writers received some of their historical matter by research, and under the grace of the superintendence of the Holy Spirit they sifted and arranged it in proportion to the power and illumination they had received.¹³ He does not overlook the co-operation of the human writers.

Reu says:

They are not, in his opinion, mechanical instruments and dead machines, mere amanuenses who set down on paper only what was dictated to them by the Spirit of God. He regarded them rather as independent instruments of the Spirit who spoke their faith, their heart, their thoughts; who put their entire will and feeling into the words to such an extent that from what Luther reads in each case he draws conclusions concerning the character and temperament of the authors.¹⁴

Luther is careful not to use the terminology of dictation. He avoids such words as calamus, secretarius, and dictare, which were used by the medieval writers. It was not Luther, but some of his contemporaries and the later dogmaticians who

¹²Sasse, op.cit., p. 84.

¹³Farrar, op.cit., p. 340.

¹⁴Johann Michael Reu, Luther and the Scriptures (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1944; reprint Springfield, O. F. Stahlke, ed., 24, 1960, pp. 9-111), p. 60 (references from reprint).

formulated a rigidly mechanical dictation theory of inspiration.¹⁵

Some scholars contend that Luther held a view of inerrancy in regard to the original autographs of Scripture. Wood advances many quotations which he thinks validate the view that Luther held to the inerrancy concept. Some of these are as follows:

"The Scriptures have never erred," (LW 32, 11).

"Our faith is not endangered if we should lack knowledge in these matters. This much is sure: Scripture does not lie. Therefore answers that are given in support of the trustworthiness of Scripture serve a purpose, even though they may not be altogether reliable," (LW 2, 233).

"The word of God is perfect: it is precious and pure; it is truth itself. There is no falsehood in it," (LW 23, 235).

There is no deception in Scripture, "consequently we must remain content with them and cling to them as the perfectly clear, certain, sure words of God, which can never deceive us or allow us to err," (LW 47, 308).¹⁶

Wood seems to indicate by such quotations that there is an equation between the concepts of lying and deception and the issue of inerrancy. In other words, if Scripture is erroneous at any point, it is consciously deceptive in its nature. What Luther is indicating here is that Scripture

¹⁵Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁶Wood, Captive..., op.cit., pp. 144f.

does not deceive the reader so as to endanger his faith in it. It is quite problematic, however, whether Luther equates an error of fact with the volitional motivation of deception or lying. Furthermore, the contexts of these quotations do not always bear out the thrust which Wood gives them. When Luther says that the Scriptures "have never erred" (LW 32, 11), he is contrasting their reliability with that of the teachers of the Church who have erred, as men will. He is speaking in the context of the most trustworthy basis for doctrine. He says further in this connection, "Scripture alone is the true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth" (LW 32, 12). The issue here is doctrinal reliability, not factual inerrancy in the absolute sense. Next, when Luther says, "Scripture does not lie," (LW 2, 233), he is speaking in the context of explaining the chronological problems in the birth of Shem's son, Arpachshad. Wood construes this to mean that Luther asserts that since he does not know the explanation here, this does not mean that one does not exist. Therefore, Luther holds to inerrancy. However, the issue for Luther seems to have nothing to do with whether the account is inerrant or not, but rather he means that whatever the facts are in regard to this birth, the purpose of the passage is not meant to be deceptive or destructive of faith. He emphasizes the intent of Scripture here, and not the nature of it as inerrant or not. Next, when Luther says, "There is

no falsehood in it" (LW 23, 235), he is not speaking about factual errancy or inerrancy, but about the ability of the Word to accomplish righteousness in us. Specifically, he says that accepting the Word in faith does away with unrighteousness. The passage reads thus:

For we are perfect in Him and free from unrighteousness, because we teach the Word of God in its purity, preach about His mercy, and accept the Word in faith. This does away with unrighteousness, which does not harm us. In this doctrine there is no falsehood; here we are pure through and through. This doctrine is genuine, for it is a gift of God.¹⁷

It is readily seen that Luther means that there is no falsehood in the fact that the Word of God does away with unrighteousness. Any inference that this passage deals with the inerrancy of the Scriptural documents comes not inductively from the passage, but is inserted into it from an extraneous dogma. The final passage quoted from Wood, (LW 47, 308), is not found in that volume, since the volume 47 ends with page 306; thus, we cannot analyze its context readily.

Another scholar who contends that Luther holds to the inerrancy of the original autographs is Johann M. Reu. He begins his discussion of Luther's supposed doctrine of inerrancy by showing rather successfully that Luther does not assert categorically at any place that Scripture has

¹⁷LW, 23, 235.

erred. Reu concludes:

It is true that Luther read his Bible with open eyes, if anyone ever did, with the result that much in it startled him and caused him concern. But it is quite another matter whether, as a consequence, he even once admitted that in the original documents of Scripture, in the original writings of the Prophets and the Apostles there were errors. We shall see that he did not admit this even in regard to purely external matters that have nothing to do with the faith.¹⁸

He says further:

Consequently Luther puts at our disposal these possibilities: either Matthew did not care about the exact order and this is to be derived from Luke, or both have related the temptations as they occurred and each one related only one instance of recurring temptations. We may regard these solutions as we have a mind to, but it remains clear that an inaccuracy in the Scriptural accounts is not admitted.¹⁹

Reu substantiates his conclusion that Luther does not assert that Scripture erred by several relevant quotations, among which are these:

Wir müssen aber also rechnen, wie auch alle Historici thun, das Christus im 30 jar seines alters ist getaufft worden und nach der Tauf angefangen hat zu predigen und drei jar vollkommen hërumb hab geprediget, die uberige zeit, so auff das dritte jar gefolget ist, als der anfang des vierden jars, anzuheben von der Beschneitung Christi oder am Tag Epiphaniae bis aus Ostern (welchs denn schier für ein halb jar gerechnet wird), da hat er auch vollend noch gepredigt, denn er vierhalb jar (wiewol nicht gar vol) gepredigt hat. Da kans nu wol komen, als Christus dreissig jar alt ist und getauft worden, das denn der Herr umb die ersten Ostern seines Predigampts solchs

¹⁸Reu, op.cit., p. 43.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 45 (italics his).

gethan hab, es ligt aber nicht viel dran. Wenn ein streit in der heiligen Scrifft fürfellet, und man kan in nicht vergleichen, so las mans faren, dis hie streitet nicht wider die Artikel des Christlichen Glaubens, denn in dem stimmen alle Evangelisten mit ein ander uber ein, das Christus für unser fünde gestorben sen, sonst von feinen thaten und Mirakeln da halten sie keine ordnung, denn sie setzen offft etwas zuvor, das hernach erst geschehen ist.²⁰

And:

Sed hoc maxime mirabile est, quod Moses manifeste tres partes facit et firmamentum collocat medium inter aquas. Ego quidem libenter imaginarer Firmamentum esse supremum corpus omnium et aquas non supra sed sub coelis pendentes et volantes esse nubes, quas cernimus, ut sic aquae ab aquis distinctae intelligerentur nubes divisae a nostris aquis in terra. Sed Moses manifestis verbis aquas supra et infra Firmamentum esse dicit. Quare captivo hic sensum meum et assentior verbo, etiasmi id non assequar.²¹

²⁰WA 46, 727: "But we have to reckon, as all the histories do, that Christ was baptized in the thirtieth year of His life, that He began to preach after His baptism and preached for three full years. The remaining time that followed the third year and was the beginning of the fourth, beginning with either the Festival of the Circumcision or Epiphany Day and continuing until Easter (which can be reckoned as almost a half year), He continued to preach, because He preached three and a half years (though it fell a little short of that time). So it could easily have been that when Christ was thirty years old and after He had been baptized, that in the first year of His activity and at the first Easter of that period He did this, but it is a matter of no importance. When discrepancies occur in the Holy Scriptures and we cannot harmonize them, let it pass, it does not endanger the article of the Christian faith, because all the evangelists agree in this that Christ died for our sins. As for the rest, concerning His acts and miracles they observe no particular order, because they often place what took place later at an earlier date," (italics Reu's).

²¹WA 42, 20: "But what is most remarkable is that Moses clearly makes three divisions. He places the firmament in the middle, between the waters. I might readily imagine

Thus, Reu seems quite justified in asserting that Luther does not attribute error to the original autographs.

The problematic area in Reu's approach seems to be in what he infers that Luther means by his not asserting errors to be in the original autographs. Luther's practice, as shown by the two previous quotes, is to withhold judgment in regard to problematic passages, not to make dogmatic assertions about the original autographs, as Reu wishes to infer. He says that these problems "do not endanger the article of the Christian faith." His concern is not with the autographs at all, but with the efficacy and reliability of the Scriptures to work salvation.²² To withhold judgment as to the error or lack of error in the original autographs is certainly a far different approach than to affirm errors or to deny errors in them.

Reu continues his attempt to prove that Luther holds

that the firmament is the uppermost mass of all and that the waters which are in suspension, not over but under the heaven, are the clouds which we observe, so that the waters separated from the waters would be understood as the clouds which are separated from our waters on the earth. But Moses says in plain words that the waters were above and below the firmament. Here I, therefore, take my reason captive and subscribe to the Word even though I do not understand it."

²²For the insight regarding the "reliability" of Scripture for Luther, I am indebted to unpublished material by Howard Loewen, Luther's View of Scripture, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1973.

the view of inerrancy in regard to the original autographs by noting that Luther often refers to the transmitted text as erroneous and sometimes makes corrections of his own in it. The illustrations given by Reu are inconclusive. First of all, he notes that Luther sometimes changes the traditional verse divisions, he does not trust the superscriptions of the Psalms, and he sometimes deviates from the traditional punctuation of the Hebrew text. None of these examples has any relationship to the question of inerrancy, for these problems are not a part of the text and are thus irrelevant to any statement about it. Next, Reu notes that Luther sometimes deviates from the traditional text and reconstructs it (often in conformity with the LXX and the Vulgate), and he often declares that the traditional text suffers from an error in copying.²³ Reu concludes:

These examples must suffice. It is no new discovery nor an "evasion" when inerrancy is ascribed only to the original text and not to the text we possess today. That was taken as a matter of course by Luther. And it is noteworthy that he not only discussed these problems with the small circle of scholars who sat with him around the table, working on the revision of the translation, but that he mentions them in the glosses printed in his translation intended for the common people.²⁴

This material cited by Reu forms a very tenuous basis for any inference about the original autographs. His conclusion that since Luther considers the problems in the textus receptus to be the errors of copyists or not

²³Reu, op.cit., pp. 57-59.

²⁴Ibid., p. 59 (*italics mine*).

explainable on the basis of available evidence, Luther must then accept the inerrancy of the original autographs is a non sequitur. Because Luther feels that certain texts were rendered erroneous by copyists does not mean that he thus concludes that the original documents were inerrant. It means only that the textus receptus is different from the most ancient manuscripts. This is the method of textual criticism, and is not a rationale for inferring inerrancy. If it is an incorrect inference that Luther asserts errors in the autographs, as Reu claims rightly, then it is also an incorrect inference that he asserts the inerrancy of them, as Reu unjustly does. The fact is that Luther does not concern himself with suppositions about the original documents of Scripture, but with how he can interpret the best texts which he had available. Reu gives no reference at all to any statement Luther makes about the autographs. If Luther had been concerned with them, he would most likely have asserted such, but Reu has no record of such a statement, in spite of his diligent searching. Luther's method is not to retreat to the autographs with problems, but to withhold judgment when he finds an insoluble problem in the text and trust the Scriptures to make the reader "wise unto salvation" even when he does not understand every syllable of them.

Luther's emphasis on the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture, as has been shown in the preceding

material, certainly reflects his deep reverence and trust in and for the Bible. Whereas, Reu and others tend to infer an inerrancy concept from his statements about the trustworthiness of Scripture, other scholars tend to minimize his emphasis on the divinity and infallibility of the Word. Farrar says, "Luther was never guilty of the inexcusable misuse of language and confusion of thought which makes inspiration involve infallibility."²⁵ Any view which implies that Luther holds a concept of verbal inspiration would contradict his view of Scripture as the "holy instrument of the viva vox Christi," says Kooiman. "The active, living Word of God cannot be conceived as a static given, which then can be accepted by man as certain truth or not."²⁶ Kooiman says that Luther sees the Scripture as the tool with which God works in the present, and not as a holy codex or legalistic document. Luther can thus ignore any theory concerning the infallibility of letter and word. These concerns are "unnecessary and distracting" for Luther, he says.²⁷ Kooiman continues, "He was concerned about a dynamic and functional understanding of the Word of God that happens now, rather than a legalistic manipulation of a once-and-for-all inspired book."²⁸ It cannot be ignored,

²⁵Farrar, op.cit., p. 340.

²⁶Kooiman, op.cit., p. 236.

²⁷Ibid., p. 237.

²⁸Ibid.

however, that Luther holds a much more definitive view of inspiration than Kooiman indicates. Luther believes that inspiration covers both vocabulary and construction. He says, "Non solum enim vocabula, sed et phrasis est divina, qua Spiritus sanctus et Scriptura utitur."²⁹ Inspiration involves both phraseology and diction.³⁰ He says, "All the words of God are weighed, counted, and measured."³¹ Kooiman argues that Luther does not regard Scriptura and verbum as identical.³² This is true, but for all practical purposes, they are the same, for "when you read the words of Holy Scripture, you must realize that God is speaking in them."³³ Also, he said the Holy Spirit writes, "pen in hand, and presses the letters into the heart."³⁴ Thus, Luther believes that there is an objective quality to the inspiration of Scripture. It is both divine and human in and of itself. The Scriptures are reliable for him, because they produce in the believer "the conviction that they declare the love

²⁹WA 40, III, 254: "Not only the words but also the diction used by the Holy Spirit and the Scripture is divine."

³⁰LW 22, 119.

³¹WA 3, 64, cited by Wood, op.cit., p. 142.

³²Kooiman, op.cit., p. 237.

³³SL 3, 21, cited by Wood, op.cit.

³⁴LW 22, 473.

of God and His power to save."³⁵ They have a self-authenticating power that distinguishes their infallibility from that of the Church.³⁶ Thus, Luther's belief is that the decisive proof of the Word of God is the testimony of the Holy Spirit who "at all times and still today thereby creates faith."³⁷

Although he does not conceive of Scripture as a dead letter, a static collection of syllables, he will not give up his belief in the absolute reliability of the entire Bible. He does occasionally find a "slight error" (levis error), such as in Matthew 27:9, and he sees the critical problems of the Gospels, but he is not truly a precursor of historical-critical methodology.³⁸ For his time, he deals amazingly well with the problems he finds in Scripture. For Luther, the Scriptures are authoritative because they are both the Word of God and the witness to the Word. Luther says:

This is the principle and the foundation that is set forth in all Scripture. First of all, it is God's Word itself, just as the creature itself is the oral Word by which all nations should know GodWe hear God speaking the Word, and we feel Him

³⁵Albert Peel, "The Bible and the People: Protestant Views of the Authority of the Bible," The Interpretation of the Bible, C. W. Dugmore, ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946), p. 68.

³⁶Ibid., p. 71.

³⁷H. H. Kramm, The Theology of Martin Luther (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1947), p. 116.

³⁸Sasse, op.cit., p. 85.

working through the oral Word and the sacraments,
through which He awakens in us knowledge of Him.³⁹

And again, he says:

But then, when you delight in occupying yourself
with the Word, when you read it, hear it preached,
and love it, the time will soon come when you will
confess that God Himself uttered these words, and
you will exclaim: "This is truly the Word of God!"⁴⁰

Luther thus sees a tension between the Scripture as the Word
of God, which it is because it is the written form of God's
speech, and Scripture as the testimony to Christ, as he says:

As for me, I confess: Whenever I found less in the
Scriptures than Christ, I was never satisfied; but
whenever I found more than Christ, I never became
poorer. Therefore it seems to me to be true that
God the Holy Spirit does not know and does not want
to know anything besides Jesus Christ....⁴¹

As the written form of God's speech given by the Holy Spirit,
then, the Bible is the Word of God, but as the testimony to
Christ, it is the witness to the Word, for Christ Himself is
the Word. Thus, Scripture is the derived form of God's Word
which is manifested in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.⁴²

He says, "All Scripture testifies...that Christ has already
come...."⁴³ Scripture is thus the means by which God's Word,
the person and work of Christ, is communicated to us. He
concludes, "And surely the Word of God is most appropriately

³⁹LW 5, 258.

⁴⁰LW 23, 97.

⁴¹LW 14, 204.

⁴²Loewen, op.cit., p. 57.

⁴³LW 27, 15.

a testimony."⁴⁴ Scripture is essentially, then, the means by which Christ is presented to us. The content of Scripture is thus Christ.

This understanding of the tension between the Word as Christ and the Word as Scripture may help solve the confusion between the two views of Scripture and infallibility. Luther sees the difference in the subject matter (die Sache) and the form of the Word and the Scripture. Farrar notes that for Luther, Christ and Christ alone was without all error and was alone the essential Word of God.⁴⁵ He continues by saying that for Luther the essential Word is a living and speaking Word and the Holy Spirit is primarily responsible for communicating this Word to the believer.⁴⁶ Mackinnon states that for Luther, the infallible Pope, the inerrant Council, the Fathers and the Schoolmen, as well as mechanical Biblicism are deposed from their positions of authority. In their place he enthrones the living Word who is in immediate touch with the conscience and experience of the believer.⁴⁷ Although not equated with the Bible, the living Word is mediated through it by the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Bible, then, becomes the medium of salvation. Luther thus says, "The Word is the bridge, the narrow way (semita) by

⁴⁴LW 29, 145.

⁴⁵Farrar, op.cit., p. 339.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 340f.

⁴⁷Mackinnon, IV, op.cit., p. 296.

which the Holy Spirit comes to us," and "it is in and through the Word that the Spirit comes and gives faith to whomsoever He will."⁴⁸ Word and Scripture and Holy Spirit are interrelated. "The Spirit is not given except only in, with, and through the faith in Jesus Christ, and faith comes not without God's Word, or the Gospel which proclaims Christ...."⁴⁹ Thus, in the face of the Spiritualists, he could affirm that the free inspiration of the mind and religious experience is not prompted by the Spirit apart from the Word.⁵⁰ He says, "It is therefore an ungodly thing that the external Word is nowadays despised by many who through diabolical revelation boast of the Spirit apart from the oral Word. And yet they know neither what the Spirit nor what the Word really is!"⁵¹ His greatest argument for the authority and inspiration of the Bible is the fact that the preaching of Biblical truth creates faith in men's hearts.⁵² Luther says, "But such is the power of the Word of God that it restores to life the hearts that have died in this manner; the word of men cannot do this."⁵³ Furthermore, "When a man hears the Word, God must put into his heart the conviction that this is surely the Father's Word."

⁴⁸WA 17, I, 125-26; WA 18, 139.

⁴⁹Mackinnon, IV, op.cit., p. 297; cites EE, 63, 122.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹LW 15, 197.

⁵²Kramm, op.cit., p. 116; Sasse, op.cit., p. 77.

⁵³LW 4, 68.

And when he hears the Word of this Man Christ, he is persuaded that he is hearing the Word of God the Father."⁵⁴ For Luther, then, the authority and infallibility of the Scripture consists in its ability to accomplish the work of salvation in the hearts of men who hear it. It is Jesus Christ working in and through the Scripture who is the infallible and inerrant Word, and the Scripture faithfully reveals Him through the human instrumentality of the inspired writers.

Christ and the Unity of the Testaments

In its function as the medium of salvation, the Bible presents the Gospel of Christ as its distinctive theme. It reveals Christ from beginning to end. The Saviour who is patent in the New Testament was latent in the Old, in the terminology of Augustine. Thus, the Old Testament is an "evangelical book," for the prophets all bear witness to Christ, as do the apostles. Hence Luther's principle that what treats of Christ is specifically revelation, while the rest is of secondary importance.⁵⁵ Luther sees all the Bible as pointing to Christ. He says:

Ab Adam in Seth transfertur promissio de Christo, A Seth in Noah, A Noah in Sem, et a Sem in hunc Eber, a quo Ebraea gens nomen accepit, tanquam haeres, cui promissio de Christo destinata est prae omnibus totius mundi populis. Hanc cognitionem nobis sacrae

⁵⁴LW 23, 96.

⁵⁵Mackinnon, IV, pp. 297f.

literae ostendunt.⁵⁶

Also:

...the entire Scripture deals only with Christ everywhere, it is looked at inwardly, even though on the face of it it may sound differently by the use of shadows and figures...Christ is the end of the Law...as if to say that all Scripture finds its meaning in Christ.⁵⁷

The form in which the Word is originally presented is proclamation. The Scripture exists for and has its source in oral proclamation. The written Scripture is necessary because of the danger that preaching could be heretically distorted if the normative apostolic message were forgotten. Scripture is thus the enduring memorial of Apostolic preaching.⁵⁸ Luther says:

...the books of Moses and the prophets are also Gospel, since they proclaimed and described in advance what the apostles preached or wrote later about Christ. But there is a difference. For although both have been put on paper word for word, the Gospel, or the New Testament, should really not be written but should be expressed with the living voice (viva vox) which resounds and is heard throughout the world. The fact that it is also written is superfluous. But the Old Testament is only put in writing. Therefore it is called 'a letter.' Thus

⁵⁶ WA 42, 409: "From Adam the promise concerning Christ is passed on to Seth; from Seth to Noah; from Noah to Shem; and from Shem to this Eber, from whom the Hebrew nation received its name as the heir for whom the promise about the Christ was intended in preference to all other peoples of the whole world. This knowledge the Holy Scriptures reveal to us."

⁵⁷ LW 25, 405; WA 56, 413. 414.

⁵⁸ paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 72f.

the apostles call it Scripture, for it only pointed to the Christ who was to come. But the Gospel is a living sermon on the Christ who has come.⁵⁹

And again:

...Divine Scripture indeed edifies when it is read, but it is much more profitable if it is turned from letters into voice....⁶⁰

Sasse explains the proclamation and the role of the Spirit in it as follows:

But God speaks to man His word of revelation only in the 'external Word' that comprises the Scriptures and the oral proclamation of the content of Holy Scripture. These two forms of the Word always go together. 'Verbum Dei praedicatum est verbum Dei.' They belong together because in both the Holy Spirit communicates to us Jesus Christ the Savior, who is the content of the Word.⁶¹

Thus Luther sees the Bible as a great unity, since it has only one content, Jesus Christ. He says, "Denn das ist ungetzweiflet, das die gantze Schrifft auff Christum allein ist gericht."⁶² Again, he says, "Tolle Christum e scripturis, quid amplius in illis invenies?"⁶³ Since Christ is the incarnate Word of God, the Bible can be the Word of God only if its entire and exclusive content is Christ.

⁵⁹LW 30, 19.

⁶⁰LW 27, 308.

⁶¹Sasse, op.cit., p. 78.

⁶²WA 10, II, 73: "There is no doubt that all Scripture points to Christ alone."

⁶³WA 18, 606: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures and what more will you find in them?"

However, this does not mean that the Scripture contains only Gospel, for Luther says it contains both Law and Gospel. Christ is the content of the Gospel and the interpreter of the Law. The Law prepares men for Christ and drives them toward Him. Thus the Scripture as both Law and Gospel bears witness to Christ. As Althaus says, "Not everything in the Holy Scriptures is gospel, but it contains the gospel in all its parts, and where it is law it still directs men toward the gospel."⁶⁴ As the revelation of Christ, then, Scripture is a unity because the Old Testament must be interpreted in the light of the New, while the New Testament is "nothing else but an opening and revelation of the Old Testament."⁶⁵ The preaching of the apostles refers to the writings of Moses and the prophets, "that we may read and see how Christ is wrapped in the swaddling clothes and laid in the manger, that is, how He is contained in the Scripture of the prophets."⁶⁶ Luther likes to use the analogy of the punctus mathematicus: Christ is the central point of the circle around which everything else revolves concentrically. He says:

⁶⁴Althaus, op.cit., p. 74.

⁶⁵WA 10, I, 626 (Das neue testament nichts anders ist, denn ein auffthun und offenbarung des alten testaments.)

⁶⁶WA 10, I, 15; Watson, op.cit., p. 149.

In this way the Lord shows us the proper method of interpreting Moses and all the prophets. He teaches us that Moses points and refers to Christ in all his stories and illustrations. His purpose is to show that Christ is the point at the center of a circle, with all eyes inside the circle focused on Him. Whoever turns his eyes on Him finds his proper place in the circle of which Christ is the center. All the stories of Holy Writ, if viewed aright, point to Christ.⁶⁷

Herein lies the new element in Luther's doctrine of Scripture. Other theologians had given the Bible a central place, but to place Christ in the center of the Bible is completely new.⁶⁸ Luther says that it is faith in Christ as the Savior of the world which opens the door to the entire Scriptures. This is why the Jews could not understand the Old Testament. Sasse says that for Luther, "the Bible remains a dark book until we find Christ in it. A stained-glass church window makes no sense until it is viewed against the light. So the Bible conveys its true meaning to us if we see Christ as its real content."⁶⁹ Luther says, "Nam haec cognitio tantum venit ex Spiritu Christi qui ceu Sol meridianum illuminat tenebras."⁷⁰ This concept involves a rediscovery of the significance of the Old Testament; the

⁶⁷LW 22, 339.

⁶⁸Kooiman, op.cit., p. 208.

⁶⁹Sasse, op.cit., p. 64.

⁷⁰WA 42, 196: "Christ is the 'meridian sun' that illumines the darkness of men, and to those to whom the Spirit comes, everything in the Bible becomes as clear as noonday."

medieval theologians were unable to do justice to it because they found only the promise of the Gospel in it, not the Gospel itself.⁷¹ But for Luther, the Christological testimony of the Old Testament from Genesis onwards is fixed. Both the prophets and the apostles, as the mouthpieces of the Spirit, bear witness to Christ.⁷²

Although this new Christological hermeneutical perspective did have much value in asserting the unity of the Testaments, it is not without its problems. Farrar says that it is homiletically true to find Christ as the end of the Law everywhere in Scripture, but "it is an exegetical fraud to read developed Christian dogmas between the lines of Jewish narratives. It may be morally edifying, but it is historically false to give to Genesis the meaning of the apocalypse, and to the Song of Solomon that of the First Epistle of St. John."⁷³ Mackinnon says that Luther's assumption that Christ is the grand theme of the Bible is not shared by modern criticism. It shows a lack of historical perspective and succeeds only through the stringent application of what he calls "the Lutheran equivalent of the allegoric method--the analogy of faith, i.e., the explanation of the text in the light of, or in accordance with, the

⁷¹Sasse, op.cit., p. 69.

⁷²Mackinnon, IV, op.cit., pp. 297, 298.

⁷³Farrar, op.cit., pp. 333f.

dictates of Christian faith."⁷⁴ Luther does indeed tread on dangerous ground when he reads into the Old Testament the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, Justification by Faith, and other Reformation dogmatics and polemics.⁷⁵

It would be unwise, however, to judge him too harshly at this point, for contemporary interpreters are inclined to read their own preconceived ideas into Luther and to evaluate him by their own hermeneutical standards. Luther does not work with the system of later Orthodoxy with its clear-cut definitions and logical systems. He is still a product of his environment and heritage, even though he greatly changes both of these factors through the Reformation. Furthermore, he would probably defend himself against the criticisms of Farrar and Mackinnon by insisting that although it might not be historically accurate to impute a Trinitarian consciousness to Abraham, or to see justification in the sacrifices, the later revelations of God have shown that these inferences were true to the facts as such facts were later revealed in redemptive history.

Law and Gospel as Coordinates

The key to understanding how the Scriptures are interpreted as a unity in a Christocentric sense lies in Luther's understanding of the relationship between Law

⁷⁴Mackinnon, op.cit., p. 298.

⁷⁵Ibid.

and Gospel. Luther sees the entire Gospel already revealed in veiled form in the Old Testament, which already includes the whole wisdom of God in the complete teaching of Law and Gospel. He says:

Anybody who wishes to be a theologian must have a fair mastery of the Scriptures, so that he may have an explanation for whatever can be alleged against any passage. That is to say, he must distinguish between law and gospel. If I were able to do this perfectly, I would never again be sad. Whoever apprehends this has won.

Whatever is Scripture is either law or gospel. One of the two must triumph: the law leads to despair, the gospel leads to salvation.⁷⁶

The Law and the Gospel reflect an interrelationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. He says, "Und ist kenn wortt im neuen testament, das nit hinder sich sehe inn das alte, darinnen es tzuovor verkündigt ist."⁷⁷ Thus, as integral parts of God's written Word, they reflect the innermost heart of God in a complementary manner. Sasse says:

As Moses can proclaim the Gospel, so Jesus can proclaim the Law. In the Word of God they belong together just as in the person of Christ the divine and human natures belong together without confusion, without division, and without separation.⁷⁸

Although there is need for distinction between the functions of Law and Gospel, this distinction does not simply coincide

⁷⁶LW Table Talk, 111, No. 626.

⁷⁷WA 10:I, 1, 181: "And there is no word in the New Testament which does not look back at the Old, where it had already been proclaimed in advance."

⁷⁸Sasse, op.cit., p. 63.

with the difference between the Old and the New Testaments. The Gospel is found in the promises of the Old Testament, and the Law is found in the New Testament, for example, in Jesus' interpretation of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount. However, the Old Testament does contain more Law and the New Testament contains more Gospel. They are unified in that they both contain elements of the Law and Gospel, for the Old Testament promises Christ and the New Testament witnesses that this promise is fulfilled. They are thus related as promise and fulfillment. As Luther says, "And what is the New Testament but a public preaching and proclamation of Christ, set forth through the sayings of the Old Testament and fulfilled through Christ?"⁷⁹

In the face of the unity between Law and Gospel, there is also a tension between them. The Law is the Word of God which tells us what to do and what judgment will come if we fail to do it. The Gospel is the Word of God that tells us what God has done for us and for our salvation. "The Law says: Do this. The Gospel says: I have done it for you."⁸⁰ Thus Luther's emphasis is that the Christ who is the sole content of the Bible is also the Saviour of sinners, the Lamb of God. He performs both legal and evangelical

⁷⁹WA Deutsche Bibel 8, 11; cited by Althaus, op.cit., p. 87 (LW 35, 236).

⁸⁰Sasse, op.cit., p. 63.

functions. He can preach Law, and this is his officium alienum, but forgiveness of sins is His officium proprium. Without the function of the Law to convict, there is no Gospel to save, and forgiving sins is Christ's opus proprium.⁸¹ Thus the doctrine of justification is very closely related to the theme of Law and Gospel, and Christ's function is to fulfill the demands which the Law has placed upon man.

This function of the Gospel is Luther's emphasis in contrast to the medieval idea that the Gospel was essentially the lex Christi, the law that man must fulfill if he wants to inherit eternal life. Sasse says, "Medieval man knew that grace could save him, but he thought he had to do something to merit God's favor, and what he had to do was told by the Law. Nomini facienti quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam."⁸² Luther does agree that the Law points out sin and even increases it, but obedience to the Law can never fulfill its demands.

In order rightly to understand the Law, Luther says that one must distinguish between the "moral" and the "spiritual" observance of it. "Therefore 'to do' is first to believe and so, through faith, to keep the Law. For we must receive the Holy Spirit; illumined and renewed by Him, we

⁸¹WA 56, 376; cited by Sasse, Ibid., p. 64.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

begin to keep the Law, to love God and our neighbor."⁸³

When our behavior conforms to the letter of the Law, the works are done, even though we only do them under the constraint of the commandment, but faith is the basis upon which the works fulfill the Law. He says:

Habes ergo Canonem, quomodo simpliciter respondendum sit ad argumenta quae obiciuntur ab adversariis de operibus, scilicet hoc modo: Hoc opus ille vel alius fecit in fide; Et sic solvis ipsorum omnia argumenta.

Ex his manifestum est in Theologia opus nihil valere sine fide, sed oportere praecedere fidem, antequam opereris.⁸⁴

Watson says in this regard, "The Law is fulfilled, however, only when our behaviour is governed by love in our hearts, and love of such a kind that we would 'do the works' even if they were not commanded. This fulfillment is what the Law essentially and inexorably requires."⁸⁵

It is precisely this spiritual observance of the Law which man cannot accomplish in himself. He despairs of ever fulfilling its demands, and the Law then brings him under the wrath and curse of God.⁸⁶ In his failure, then,

⁸³ WA 40:1, 400; LW 26, 255.

⁸⁴ WA 40:1, 414: "Here, then, we have a rule about how one should reply plainly to the arguments raised by our opponents about works, namely, 'This or that man did this work in faith.' And thus you nullify all their arguments. "From this it is evident that in theology the work does not amount to anything without faith, but that faith must precede before you can do works."

⁸⁵ Watson, op.cit., p. 106 (WA 11, 120).

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

man commits the further sin of hating God. As Luther says, "Lex enim per sese tantum potest terrores incutere et deducere ad inferos."⁸⁷ The Law in itself demands "impossible things" because the obedience of love is completely beyond the capacity of fallen man. Degenerate man has a will that is at variance with the Divine will as expressed in the Law, and for this reason cannot but live otherwise than the Law requires. Therefore, the Law disables him and makes it impossible for salvation through works. Watson elaborates on this problem as follows:

It (the Law) can control his behaviour, inasmuch as he is impelled by fear of punishment or hope of reward to observe its letter; but it is powerless to change his heart and implant in him a good will and a right spirit. The Law demands unselfishness yet appeals to self interest; it demands love, but of a kind that cannot possibly be produced to order. As long, therefore, as man is under the Law, it is impossible that he should ever fulfill the Law.⁸⁸

Thus we see that although the Law exposes the nature of sin, it does not cure it, but rather aggravates it and intensifies the sinfulness of the heart and the fear of damnation (intus in corde excitat terrores et desperationem).⁸⁹ The Law shuts men up as in a prison in two ways: it prevents them from doing what they ought and from performing spontaneously what it commands.⁹⁰ Luther borrows a simile

⁸⁷WA 39:I, 445.

⁸⁸Watson, op.cit., p. 108.

⁸⁹WA 39:I, 557.

⁹⁰Watson, op.cit., p. 109, citing Gal. ET, 230f. (Gal. 3:19).

from St. Augustine (De civitate Dei 21, 4, 3) and likens the effect of the Law on fallen human nature to that of water on lime. Water simply kindles the ardent and fiery nature of lime by stimulating its latent qualities. In the same way, the Law stimulates the sinful human will by thwarting it with commandments and prohibitions.⁹¹ It is human nature to desire those things which are forbidden to us. The purpose of the Law, then, is to make man aware of his desperate condition so that he will desire to have it cured. The cure comes in the form of Gospel which acts like oil on lime and extinguishes its fiery qualities.⁹² As a way of salvation, then, the Law is blasphemous and has been abolished by Christ, but in its spiritual sense it proclaims us sinners and offers us grace.

The function of the Gospel is just the opposite of the Law. Luther says:

Est verbum (Euangelium) salutis, verbum gratiae, verbum solatii, verbum gaudii, vox sponsi et sponsae, verbum bonum, verbum pacis...Lex vero est verbum perditionis, verbum irae, verbum tristitiae, verbum doloris, vox iudicis et rei, verbum inquietudinis, verbum maledicti.⁹³

⁹¹WA 5, 257; 39:I, 555; TR 178, nr. 285.

⁹²Watson, op.cit., p. 110.

⁹³WA 1, 616:

In the Gospel, God discloses His innermost heart and shows Himself to be not an angry judge, but a merciful Father.⁹⁴ The Gospel is based on the proclamation of the Law which reveals sin, and this proclamation is the indispensable presupposition for the preaching of the Gospel. Apart from this Law, we are unable to understand the greatness of what Christ does for us and to us...it teaches us to yearn for the Savior.⁹⁵ Thus it is through the Law that God performs His alien work (opus alienum) in order that He may begin to do His proper work (opus proprium). It is through the preaching of the Law that man recognizes his own sickness and lack of moral capacity.⁹⁶

When a man hears the Gospel, then, he recognizes that the Law is not God's final word and that His goal is not threats, judgment, and condemnation of man. The terrors of conscience produced by the Law can be "evangelical" when man allows the Law to be a disciplinarian to drive him to Christ. Luther says:

Atque ita debet lex per Evangelium interpretari
et reduci per impossibile et ad salutarem usum, ad
Christum, et Evangelium sua virtute facit ex latrone
paedagogum et rapit illum occisum per legem et
reducit ad Christum, id quod non fecit lex.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Watson, op.cit., p. 157.

⁹⁵WA 39:I, 424, 465, 534; 39:I, 533.

⁹⁶WA 39:I, 348.

⁹⁷WA 39:I, 446: "And so the Law ought to be interpreted by the Gospel and to be led back through that which is impossible to that which is salutary; it ought

Thus God places us under both Law and Gospel and wants us to believe both: to believe the Law that we are sinners; and to believe the Gospel that we should not doubt God's mercy, but in contrition and terror over our sins and His righteous judgment, flee to salvation in Christ. Evangelical repentance, then, is worked by Law and Gospel together, with the Law preceding the Gospel.⁹⁸

As a result of the "proper work" of God, we are delivered from the tyranny and curse of the Law and are justified by faith. Luther says that the believer is then "on the way to righteousness," so that the Gospel furnishes the remedy not only for the guilt, but also for the power of sin.⁹⁹ Watson says, "What the Law demands but renders man impotent to accomplish, the Gospel increasingly enables the believer to perform since his sin is both forgiven and conquered in Christ...what the Law demands, the Gospel gives."¹⁰⁰

The justified believer stands no longer under the Law, but under grace. His relationship to God is now filial,

to be brought back to Christ and the gospel, which by its power makes a disciplinarian out of a robber and takes the man who was killed by the law and brings him back to Christ; this is what the Law cannot do."

⁹⁸Althaus, op.cit., p. 260.

⁹⁹WA 39:I, 83.

¹⁰⁰Watson, op.cit., pp. 157, 182, note 80.

rather than legal. He is freed from the Law to the extent that it no longer tyrannizes his conscience because of sin. His freedom, however, does not enable him to do what the Law forbids or to omit what it demands. Through Christ who has fulfilled the Law by His obedience, the believer has imputed to him Christ's righteousness and is thus transferred from "the kingdom of the law" into Christ's kingdom. He thus is set free from his inability to do God's will, so that he may fulfill it by faith.¹⁰¹ Christ and His Spirit live in the believer through faith, and he does what the Law requires of himself, for Christ does it in him.¹⁰² The Law is fulfilled in Christ so that the Christian is no longer concerned with it.¹⁰³ The Holy Spirit produces new drives in him so that he loves God's Law and rejoices in it. Thus the Law "begins to be a joyous thing," and the Christian can begin to fulfill it by being joyfully moved toward it by the power of the Holy Spirit. His activity is spontaneous so that his works are free "works of grace."¹⁰⁴ The Christian can in the power of the Holy Spirit establish new decalogues for himself just as Jesus and the apostles have done. He does not need the Decalogue, for the Spirit teaches him what to do in every situation.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹Althaus, op.cit., p. 266.

¹⁰²WA 39:I, 46; LW 34, 111.

¹⁰³Althaus, op.cit., p. 266.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 266-267.

¹⁰⁵WA 39:I, 47; LW 34, 112f.

Luther says, "Omnibus donata libertate nostro periculo faciendi sive bonum sive malum."¹⁰⁶ However, not every Christian has the Spirit to such an extent, for the flesh struggles against the Spirit within him and confuses his clear moral judgment. At this point the commandments serve as a guide in helping the believer recognize true good works, and to summon him to action.¹⁰⁷ They provide a safeguard against the kind of extremism exemplified by the Enthusiasts.¹⁰⁸

In conclusion, both the Old and the New Testaments give testimony of Christ insofar as they both "preach Christ" (Christum treiben). The external word of Law and Gospel confronts man and the Holy Spirit speaks to him. Faith is produced by the hearing of the word and this faith produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word is a personal, existential relationship. God is properly known to man through this relationship, and vice-versa. This is the basis of the evangelical knowledge of God.¹⁰⁹ Thus both the opus alienum and the opus proprium of God are revealed in Christ--the former in His Cross, and the latter in His Resurrection.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶WA 7, 760: "All of us are given the dangerous liberty of doing either good or evil."

¹⁰⁷Althaus, op.cit., p. 271, note 123.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., pp. 9, 15, 43.

¹¹⁰Watson, op.cit., p. 158.

Thus the Scriptures are a unity because they preach the same message, Christ, and the Holy Spirit works through both Law and Gospel to confront man with the evangelical message.

Christ and Scripture in the Canon

For Luther, the formal unity of the Scriptures is expressed in the concept of a canon basic to both testaments.¹¹¹ Since the Bible is a unity with Christ as its sole content, only those writings can be the Word of God whose sole content is Christ. Through the Holy Spirit Christ authenticates Himself to men and authenticates the Holy Scripture as the genuine Word of God.¹¹² The fact that a book is inspired can be believed only on the basis of an internal criterion, and for Luther, this criterion is the question, "Was Christum treibet?" He feels that a book is not canonical unless it has Christ crucified for its content, even if that book is in the Bible and read in the Church. His thesis that the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit" defines what is accepted as God's Word points out that Scripture can be understood from its content alone, and this content is Jesus Christ communicated by the Holy Spirit in the external Word.¹¹³

¹¹¹Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, C. W. and R. C. Gritsch, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 188.

¹¹²Althaus, op.cit., p. 75.

¹¹³Sasse, op.cit., p. 87.

Luther points out that the Word of God is not necessarily identical and coextensive with the Scriptures. Christ, and Christ alone, is the essential Word of God, while the Scriptures vary in subject matter, form, and the degree to which they reflect Christ.¹¹⁴ This leaves a degree of flexibility as to the content of the canon.

He stresses that the authority of the Scriptures "lies in their ability to produce in the believer the conviction that they declare the love of God and His power to save."¹¹⁵ He thus uses the capacity of the Scripture to validate itself and work faith in itself as an argument against the Roman Catholic emphasis that the Church established the canon and therefore guarantees the authority of Scripture and stands above Scripture. Luther says that this makes as much sense as saying that John the Baptist stands above Jesus Christ simply because he points to him.¹¹⁶ The Church can never stand above Scripture and validate it, for it is the Scripture which validates the Church. "In other words," says Sasse, "the Church makes the canon, but

¹¹⁴Farrar, op.cit., pp. 339f.

¹¹⁵Peel, op.cit., p. 68.

¹¹⁶Althaus, op.cit., p. 75; Luther says that the Scripture is queen and all must submit to it, "This queen must rule, and everyone must obey, and be subject to her. The Pope, Luther, Augustine, Paul, or even an angel from heaven--these should not be masters, judges, or arbiters but only witnesses, disciples and confessors of Scripture," WA 40:I, 120; LW 26, 58.

it can canonize only sacred books, books given by God to the Church."¹¹⁷ Thus the Scripture, insofar as it corresponds to the Word of God, convinces men of its truth, for "the gospel is not believed because the Church confirms it, but because one recognizes that it is God's word."¹¹⁸ Therefore, the traditional canon is not necessarily identical with the Word of God, and thus the Word itself, not the Church, is the validating authority. Insofar, then, as the parts of the canonical books refer to Christ (soweit sie Christum treiben), they are valid and authoritative.¹¹⁹

Man must not err, however, by thinking that mere human reason can perceive the authority of God's Word. Even believing man has no inner criterion by which he can determine what is or is not God's Word. Only when God addresses him by it and penetrates his very heart does it become not simply God's Word as such, but God's Word "for me." Luther does not mean that we should by human insight determine what is "religiously valuable" for us in the Bible and thus confuse our own inner voice with that of God. But as Kooiman says, "The Word of scripture becomes God's Word for us when we hear it as being spoken to us by Christ."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷Sasse, op.cit., p. 87.

¹¹⁸Althaus, op.cit., p. 75; WA 30:II, 687.

¹¹⁹Kraam, op.cit., p. 113.

¹²⁰Kooiman, op.cit., p. 235 (cf. pp. 23ff.).

On the basis of the "internal word" of God to the believer and the distinction between the Word of God and Scripture, Luther establishes the principle that the early church's formation and limitation of the canon is not exempt from criticism and re-examination. Also, within the canon itself, he evaluates individual books in terms of their relationship to the central essence of Scripture, Christ and His justifying work. Thus each book has a relative importance and authority for the Church. This theological criticism which is involved in his distinctions within the canon is based upon the Gospel which each book proclaims. Only at points where he finds a Christocentric Gospel of Justification obscured does he criticize the canonical books. In his evaluation of specific books with this Christocentric principle he gives first place for validity to the Fourth Gospel, Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and also the First Epistle of Peter. Because these writings present the way in which faith in Christ overcomes sin, death, and hell and fills the believer with life and righteousness, he prefers them to the other Biblical books. For him, these books form a "canon within the canon" of the New Testament.¹²¹ In his Preface to the Revelation of St. John, Luther says:

¹²¹Mackinnon, IV, op.cit., pp. 294, 300.

Finally, let everyone think of it as his own spirit leads him. My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. For me this is reason enough not to think highly of it: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound above all else to do; as Christ says in Acts 1(:8), "You shall be my witnesses." Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me clearly and purely.¹²²

Luther thus practices theological criticism of the books in the canon on the basis of "that which is apostolic." His view of apostolicity is based both on the historical factor that Christ called and sent out apostles, and on the content of each particular book. The true apostle will validate his office by preaching Christ as Savior with clarity and decisiveness. If he does this, then the content of his writings shows that he is inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus has authority and infallibility. The authority, or apostolicity, of the Scriptures is not based on the person of the apostles, or of the prophets, but upon the witness which the Word of God bears to itself in regard to the content of each book. It is by clearly preaching Christ alone as Savior that a writer shows that he is an apostle.¹²³ If this apostolic characteristic of preaching Christ is missing or inadequate in any of the writings within the traditional canon, then the author of that particular work

¹²²LW 35, 399.

¹²³Althaus, op.cit., p. 82.

is not an apostle, for it is the preaching of Christ that proves the writer to be inspired. Luther believes this so completely that he does not think of himself as using an arbitrary principle, but is firmly convinced that this standard is directly derived from Scripture so that Scripture itself, not Luther, criticizes the canon.¹²⁴

The letter of James feels the weight of Luther's criticism because it preaches Law instead of Gospel. Luther says that James "wanted to guard against those who relied on faith without works, but was unequal to the task. He seeks to bring it about by harping on the law while the apostles bring it about through encouraging people to love."¹²⁵ Thus he says that James is not on the same level as many of the other epistles:

In a word St. John's Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.¹²⁶

Since James contradicts Paul and ignores Christ, according to Luther, "Therefore I do not want to have him in my Bible,"

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 83.

¹²⁵LW 35, 397; DB 7, 386.

¹²⁶LW 35, 362.

although Luther omits this sharp statement in his Prefaces after 1530.¹²⁷ His main concern in criticizing James seems to have been simply to prevent Carlstadt and the Roman opponents from continually using James as an argument against him. He says, "I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him."¹²⁸ Thus Luther does not condemn the book, but prefers that it not be used to form the basis for any principal doctrine of the faith.

Furthermore, Luther criticizes the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying it was not written by an apostle.¹²⁹ He rejects Jude,¹³⁰ and is doubtful whether the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation, since it does not appeal to him.¹³¹

Luther is also critical of the books of the Old Testament. Mackinnon notes that he believes Moses used many sources for his writings, and indeed, whether he was the author of the whole Pentateuch is a matter of indifference. Kings is superior to Chronicles, and more dependable.

¹²⁷Althaus, op.cit., p. 85; Mackinnon, op.cit., p. 300.

¹²⁸LW 35, 397.

¹²⁹LW 35, 394f.

¹³⁰LW 35, 395f.

¹³¹LW 35, 398f.

The prophets are often wrong when they prophesied of "worldly affairs," and their books are often later compilations by their disciples, and are thus lacking in their order. The later books rely upon the earlier ones and are sometimes built upon a foundation of "wood, hay, and straw." Jonah appears to be a "lying invention" which he would not believe if it were not in the Bible. He would not have included the Book of Esther in the canon, and he is doubtful about the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes.¹³²

In regard to the canon, then, Luther concludes that "only what treats of Christ is the essential of revelation as conveyed by the Spirit through the prophets and the apostles," says Mackinnon. "The rest is only of relative value, and is subject to criticism in the light of this cardinal fact."¹³³ Whatever teaches Christ and His saving work of justification by faith is absolutely authoritative, and whatever is not apostolic in its treatment of Christ is not absolutely valid. He says:

What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if St. Peter or St. Paul should teach it. On the other hand, what proclaims Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were to proclaim it.¹³⁴

It appears, then, that because Luther is able to distinguish between the Word of God and the canon, he can

¹³²Mackinnon, op.cit., pp. 301f.

¹³³Ibid., p. 302.

¹³⁴LW 35, 237; DB 8, 12.

criticize the canon for the benefit of the Scripture as the essential Word of God. He contends that the early Church's formation and limitation of the canon may be open to re-examination. The canon is thus only relative, inasmuch as it is only truly the canon when it has the content of Christ. He thus engages in theological criticism within the canon in the name of the Gospel proclaimed by the Scriptures.¹³⁵ He feels that great strides have been made towards right interpretation of Scripture since it has become understood as all relating to Christ.¹³⁶ Kramm contends that Luther's Christological principle of what "preaches Christ" is thus a principle of interpretation within Scripture, and not a "principle of selection."¹³⁷ It does not necessarily follow that by judging all books to see whether they "preach Christ," Luther thus raises this hermeneutical principle to the level of a "discriminating criterion," as Wood says, for the purpose of picking and choosing from the whole Scripture what is authoritative for the Christian. He believes that all canonical books preach Christ; thus his problem with James, for example, has to do with Luther's concern for its canonicity.¹³⁸ In this concern, Luther should not be accused of being the

¹³⁵Althaus, op.cit., p. 85.

¹³⁶WA 56, 4.

¹³⁷Kramm, op.cit., p. 114.

¹³⁸Wood, op.cit., p. 174.

harbinger of modern liberalism. He is looking to the past, and in doing so, he sees that certain of the Biblical books have also been questioned by the Fathers.

Eusebius, for example, distinguished between the homologoumena, the recognized writings, and the antilegomena, the disputed writings.¹³⁹ Thus Luther contends that those books which preach Christ have been universally accepted as Scripture, while those which do not clearly preach Christ, at least according to his judgment, have not always been enthusiastically received because they do not have the witness in themselves of the clear Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those books which he does consider canonical, however, he does consider to be authoritative.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 158.

CHAPTER V

LUTHER'S HERMENEUTICAL METHOD

In approaching the task of Biblical interpretation, Luther seeks to bring out to his hearers the real, as opposed to the construed, meaning of Scripture. His procedure is first of all to gain an understanding of the general "scope" (scopus) of the text. He attempts to determine what the writer generally wishes to communicate. In this process he deals with history and geography as they relate to and illuminate the text and the relationship of God to man. Secondly, he attempts to elucidate the grammatico-philological meaning of a particular passage. In doing so, he conscientiously seeks the exact meaning of the words and warns against construing meanings to fit one's own theological presuppositions. Thirdly, he searches for the primary thought contained in the text, and attempts to reproduce in his own soul the religious atmosphere and experience of the writer. For him, the appropriation of the religious sense, the practical and experiential meeting with the text, is the goal of the hermeneutical and exegetical process. He says, "Experience is necessary for the understanding of the Word. It is not merely to be repeated or known, but to be lived and felt."¹

¹WA 42, 195.

His procedure, then, is an inductive one. He moves from a general overview to study particular passages. He makes use of the Biblical languages and does not trust the conclusions of other interpreters. He feels that a good interpreter must know the Biblical languages, otherwise he will go around "like a blind man groping along a wall" and often will "give a text a turn in accordance with his devout opinion."² He sees the necessity of developing his theology on the basis of particular evidence found in Scripture, and he does not overlook the element of spiritual perception of the text and empathetic communication with the sacred writers. Blackman describes this spiritual dimension as follows:

It is perhaps proper to describe it as a faculty which is sensitive to the inner Word of Scripture and capable of pointing to it, so that the hearer is ready for that quickening of the Spirit which makes the Word in Scripture a veritable word of God in his own heart. Holl calls it the capacity of "feeling oneself into" the meaning of the Bible passage (sich einfühlen, sich einleben).³

Principles of Interpretation

Luther's principles of interpretation work harmoniously with his inductive method of procedure. His conclusion that Scripture is the only authoritative means through which the Word of God is communicated precludes the placing

²Ewald Plass, What Luther Says, I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 95; WA 15,40.

³Blackman, op.cit., p. 121.

of any other authority above Scripture in order to interpret it. Therefore, any interpretative principles which are applicable to Scripture must come from within its own text. When he insists that the Bible itself must teach us how to interpret the Bible, Luther deals with the very basic problem of the hermeneutical circle. The only source for Biblical hermeneutics is Scripture itself, and to break this circuit is to emasculate its dynamic and authority. It is impossible to approach the Bible from a tabula rasa perspective. The interpreter must approach his work with certain presuppositions, and the inability to construe correctly the Scriptures is often the result of failing to recognize this, or of selecting the wrong perspective. The interpreter must take into consideration the character of the writings with which he is dealing,⁴ although he will use the same hermeneutical procedures in interpreting Scripture as he would in the interpretation of other literature. Luther himself used six basic hermeneutical principles.

Personal spiritual preparation

Luther knows that competence in languages, history, or theology is not sufficient accurately to interpret Scripture, for without the quickening of the Spirit, the

⁴Wood, Principles..., op.cit., pp. 11, 12.

interpreter cannot enter into the inner experience of the writers and thus discern a vital reality and not just words and phrases.⁵ James Wood says, "The starting-point for Luther is that divine inspiration ^{is} necessary for the true interpretation of the Bible. In order to understand the Bible one needed the help of prayer."⁶ Luther says in his exposition on Psalm 68:15, "...the gatekeeper, the Holy Spirit, will open the door to those that enter. For if God does not open and explain Holy Writ, no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness."⁷ From his own experience he has learned that it is only when the Spirit illuminates him that he has been able to grasp the significance of Scripture. He feels a continual need for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in interpreting each successive passage.⁸ He told Spalatin, "Therefore the first duty is to begin with a prayer of such a nature that God in His great mercy may grant you the true understanding of His Words."⁹ Thus the Holy Spirit interprets the Word which He has already inspired, and this guidance of the Spirit is essential to correct interpretation. As he says again to

⁵Mickelson, op.cit., p. 39.

⁶James Wood, The Interpretation of the Bible (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1958), p. 88.

⁷LW 13, 17.

⁸A.S. Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 13.

⁹Works, J.N. Lenker, ed., I, p. 57.

Spalatin, "The Bible cannot be mastered by study or talent; you must rely solely on the influx of the Spirit."¹⁰ As the Fourth Gospel says in regard to the pre-existent Logos, so can it be said of Scripture, "No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand."¹¹

Luther does not mean that reason should be discarded in Bible study, but that it should be condemned when it tries to be wiser than the Word of God. The believer's response to the Word is an existential one, not solely a rational one. The knowledge which comes from Scripture is related to life and personal experience. Wood says, "The way in which the Spirit conveys His interpretation of the Word is through the mind and soul of the man who submits himself to the discipline of instruction."¹² Luther continues, "No one can receive it from the Holy Spirit without experiencing, proving, and feeling it."¹³ Thus his maxim becomes: Sola experientia facit theologum. He means by this that experience of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as

¹⁰Dr. Martin Luthers Briefwechsel, eds., E.L. Enders and G. Kaweran, I, p. 141; cited by A.S. Wood, op.cit., p. 13.

¹¹LW 22, 8.

¹²A.S. Wood, op.cit., p. 15.

¹³Works, Holman Edition, III, p. 127; cited by Wood, Ibid.

He speaks through the Word is necessary for understanding the Word. It is not simply to be repeated and known, but to be lived and felt.¹⁴ Perhaps the most eloquent summation of this experiential principle are the few sentences which were Luther's last writings. They were found by Aurifaber on the desk of Luther two days before his death on February 16, 1546. They are as follows:

Virgilium in Bucolicis nemo potest intelligere,
nisi fuerit quinque annis Pastor. Virgilium in
Georgicis nemo potest intelligere, nisi fuerit
quinque annis Agricola. Ciceronem in epistolis
(sic praecipio) nemo integre intelligit, nisi
viginti annis sit versatus in Republica aliqua
insigni. Scripturas sanctas sciat se nemo
degustasse satis, nisi centum annis cum Prophetis,
ut Elia et Elisaeo, Ionne Baptista, Christo et
Apostolis Ecclesias gubernarit.

Hanc tu ne divinam Aeneida tenta,
Sed vestigia pronum adora.
Wir sind Bettler, Hoc est verum, 16.
Februarii Anno 1546. ¹⁵

Thus, although Luther stresses the objective elements in interpretation, such as the use of the original languages

¹⁴WA 5, 108.

¹⁵TR 5, N. 5468: "No one can understand Vergil in his shepherd poems and peasant songs, if he has not himself been a shepherd or a peasant for five years. Cicero's letters cannot be understood, I contend, by anyone who has not been seasoned for twenty years in political affairs. No one should think that he has tasted Holy Scripture adequately if he has not, with the prophets, led the congregations for a century with John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles. Do not attempt to imitate the divine Aeneas journey, but bow reverently over his tracks. We are beggars. That is true."

and a recognition of critical problems, his hermeneutic is both objective and subjective. The Bible is the sole objective standard for truth, but it must speak to the human heart. Wood says, "Luther recognizes the Spirit as the sole Interpreter, but he is also aware that the Spirit must communicate Himself to a receptive medium. His witness is answered by the acquiescing testimony of the regenerate spirit within."¹⁶ Luther thus believed that the blending of experience and exegesis in New Testament study as not simply a subjective thing, but the work of the Holy Spirit who mediates Christian experience through the Scriptures.¹⁷

Perspicuity of Scripture

The second major hermeneutical principle which Luther presents is the essential clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. He firmly believes, in contrast to the medieval exegetes, that each passage of the Bible contains one clear and definite meaning. He says, "There is not on earth a book more lucidly written than the Holy Scripture. Compared with all other books, it is as the sun compared with all other lights."¹⁸

In conjunction with the illumination of the Holy Spirit as stated in his first principle, Luther thus says

¹⁶Wood, op.cit., p. 16.

¹⁷Pelikan, LW, 21, xiv.

¹⁸Wood, op.cit., p. 17.

that Scripture is released from bondage to the experts.¹⁹ He says, "For heretofore it (i.e. the Epistle) has been evilly darkened with commentaries and all kinds of idle talk, though it is, in itself, a bright light, almost enough to illumine all the Scripture."²⁰ In the preface to the 1539 edition of his German works, he states that the wisdom of Scripture makes the wisdom of all other books foolishness, because it alone teaches eternal life.²¹ He feels that the Christian does not have to submit to anyone the spiritual exercise of the Spirit's unction assisting in interpretation. He attacks the Romanist' distinction between the spiritual capacity of the laity and the clergy. Christ has one body, not two, and every member is a priest. The Word of God was not directed solely to the clergy, but to all.²² He constantly fights against regarding the Bible as a closed book, and it was at this point that he chided Erasmus in De Servo Arbitrio. When Erasmus commented on some passages which are surrounded with darkness, Luther said that by exaggerating the obscurity of Scripture, he

¹⁹Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰HE 6, 447.

²¹WA 1, 659.

²²Farrar, op.cit., pp. 329-30.

was guilty of contradicting the very principle which prefixed his edition of the Greek Testament, namely, that he hoped the Scriptures might be read not only by the Scots and Irish, "but also by the Turks and Saracens, by the ploughboy, the weaver and the traveller."²³ He proclaims "that no part of Holy Scripture is dark...Christ has not so enlightened us that any part of His doctrine and His Word which he bids us regard and follow should be left in the dark."²⁴ He accuses Erasmus of strengthening the traditional doctrine of Scriptural obscurity. Anyone who denies the all-clearness and all-plainness of Scripture leaves us in darkness,²⁵ and abandons all believers to the tyranny of the Papacy.

The concept of clarity, and especially of the right of private judgment, opened the door for differences of interpretation and even excesses. This is why Calvin opposed it in favor of a "synod of true Bishops." It also explains why Melanchthon dreamed of seeking unity through a "concensus of pious men," which was simply a covert method of restoring the infallibility of the councils and the external dictation of the sense of Scripture which

²³Wood, op.cit., p. 17.

²⁴Ibid., p. 18 (Werke, Walch Edition, 18, 2163-64).

²⁵Ibid.

Luther had repudiated. Luther, however, preferred the "hurricane of controversies to the stagnation of enforced uniformity and the pestilence of authoritative error," says Farrar. Farrar continues in his description of Luther's feelings by saying, "He saw the worthlessness of merely nominal unity, which only meant the torpor of an unreasoning acquiescence, and in spite of all trials he continued to assert to the last, that it was at once the duty and the privilege of every Christian to test his faith by the Scriptures."²⁶

In conclusion, Luther feels that even if some passages are obscure, others clarify them, and it is the responsibility of the individual believer to search until the light dawns. He has no patience with those who think otherwise, as he says:

If the words are obscure at one place, yet they are clear at another place...But if many things still remain abstruse to many people, this does not arise from the obscurity of Scripture but from their own blindness and feebleness of understanding...With the same audacity he who covers his own eyes or goes from the light into darkness and there hides himself may charge the sun and the day with being obscure. Let miserable men, therefore, cease to impute, with blasphemous perverseness, the darkness and the obscurity of their own hearts to the brilliantly clear Scriptures of God.²⁷

²⁶ Farrar, op.cit., p.331.

²⁷ WA 18, 609; selected by Plass, op.cit., p. 75, from a rather lengthy statement by Luther on this point.

Scriptura sui ipsius interpres

A third hermeneutical principle of Luther's is that Scripture is its own interpreter--Scriptura sui ipsius interpres. This concept results logically from the principle of the perspicuity of Scripture. If one presupposes that the Scriptures are essentially clear, then it follows that Scripture should be compared with Scripture, so that obscure passages may be clarified. Luther says, "In this manner Scripture is its own light. It is a fine thing when Scripture explains itself."²⁸

A corollary of the principle of Scripture as its own interpreter is the concept that all exposition should be in accordance with the "analogy of faith." Luther uses this term to mean that all interpretations of parts must be in consistency with the whole tenor of Scripture as represented in the Creed or Rule of Faith which the Bible teaches. This means that no interpretation should construe Scripture to teach anything except that in which the light of faith remains intact. Luther says:

Wer da die Schrifft geistlich auslegen wil
odder inn einem verborgenem sinn, sol fur allen
dingen auff sehen, das ers also treffe, das sichs
reime mit dem glauben odder, wie Sanct Paulus
leret, das dem glauben ehrlich sei, wo anders, so
taug es nichts. Was heisset denn "dem glauben
ehrlich sein?" Das heisset: wenn man die leute

²⁸SL, 11, 2335; cited by Wood, op.cit., p. 21.

nicht vom glauben füret und nichts anders leret denn das der glaube bleibe, Denn es gehet mit dem glauben gleich, wie Paulus sagt "Ich habe den grund gelegt als ein weiser bawmeister, Ein iglicher aber sehe zu, wie er drauff bawe, Es kan zwar niemand ein andern grund legen ausser dem, der geleget ist, wilcher ist Jhesus Christus, So aber nemand darauff bawet gold, silber, edel steine, holtz, hew, stoppeln, so wird eines iglichen werd offenbar werden." Das ist alles vom predigampt gesagt, das wer inn der Schrifft faren wil und wol auslegen, der fare ihe also, das er nichts anders lere denn das da eben sei der lere vom glauben, wilche allein gegründet ist und stehet auff Christum.²⁹

Thus all sound teaching must be found to have its basis in Scripture which witnesses to Christ, who is the general norm of the Word of God.

Mackinnon is critical of this hermeneutical principle, for he says that the assumption that Christ is the grand theme of the Bible inclusively is one which modern critical

²⁹WA 24, 549: "Whoever wants to explain Scripture in a spiritual or hidden sense should, above all things, see to it that his interpretation is in agreement with faith or, as St. Paul teaches, according to the analogy of faith. If it is otherwise, his explanation is worthless. But what does the "analogy of faith" mean? It means not to lead people from the faith and to teach nothing except that in the light of which faith remains intact. For concerning faith Paul says: 'As a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest' (I Cor. 3:10-13). All this is spoken of the ministry, so that he who would treat Scripture and explain it well may make sure so to treat it as to teach nothing but what agrees with the doctrine of faith, which alone stands firm and is founded on Christ."

scholarship cannot substantiate. He thinks that Luther was able to impute this Christological theme to Scripture only by the application of what he calls "the Lutheran equivalent of the allegoric method--the analogy of faith"³⁰ However, this is a theological, not a critical issue, and it must be decided at another level, namely, in terms of what conclusion best expresses the Biblical teaching. The analogy of faith is not without its problems, however, for Luther's use of the expression, propheteian ten analogian tes pisteos in Romans 12:6, does seem to be a misapplication of its original sense, which seems to be that the greater one's faith, the greater would be his prophetic endowment.³¹ Furthermore, it is unfortunate that the concept of the Scripture as its own interpreter tended to be crystallized by the "analogy of faith" concept into a Lutheran version of the Romanist rule that no interpretation can be valid which contradicts approved ecclesiastical dogmas. In fact, Luther's belief in the clarity of Scripture sometimes degenerated into the belief that all true interpretation would ultimately and inevitably agree with his own.³² In spite of these liabilities, however, the principle seems to be a valid one when used in moderation.

³⁰Mackinnon, IV, op.cit., p. 298.

³¹Wood, op.cit., p. 22.

³²Farrar, op.cit., p. 333.

If Scripture is a unity, then it does not contradict itself, and its teachings will ultimately harmonize. Luther attempted, not always successfully, to arrive at this harmony, and for this he is to be commended.

Primacy of literal sense

Another most salient hermeneutical principle of Luther's is his insistence upon the primacy of the literal sense. "The literal sense of Scripture alone," he says, "is the whole essence of faith and of Christian theology."³³ He repudiates the medieval four-fold sense of Scripture which neglected the simple words and affected purely subjective (ex proprio cerebro) "tropes and inferences." "If we wish to handle Scripture aright," he says, "our one effort will be to obtain unum, simplicem, germanum, et certum sensum literalem."³⁴ The use of the so-called multiplex intelligentia destroyed the meaning of Scripture in its entirety and deprived it of any certain sense, while leaving room for ingenious and extravagant interpretations. One must respect the context in which a passage is found and allow the literal meaning to interpret the figurative, and not vice-versa. He says:

³³Ibid., p. 327.

³⁴Ibid.

We must observe this principle especially in Scripture that earlier words to which those words which come later refer always take priority. Also, those statements which have been uttered very simply without any figurative language and obscure words interpret those which are uttered with figurative and metaphorical language.³⁵

Although Luther rejects the Quadrige of the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical interpretations of Scripture, he does retain the spiritual sense of the text, although he does not interpret this spiritual sense necessarily to mean allegory. The literal meaning, however is basic, and he often refers to this as the grammatical or historical sense.³⁶ Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, also known as Faber Stapulensis in the latinized form, contributed to Luther's understanding of the literal sense by showing the distinction between two forms of the literal sense: the literal-historical which deals with the time during which the author wrote--this represents the letter which kills--and the literal-prophetic which points to Christ and reflects the spiritual intention of the text. Thus the prophetic interpretation was grounded on Augustine's distinction between the letter and the spirit. With this insight, Luther was able to see the righteousness of God, which he had formerly equated with His justice, and the grace of

³⁵LW 20, 108; Ibid., p. 328.

³⁶Wood, Principles..., op.cit., pp. 24, 27.

Jesus Christ.³⁷ Thus the Old Testament can be understood in the light of Christ without the necessity of allegorizing it.

In approaching a passage for exegesis, Luther follows a rather strange course. He makes certain that the passage is in harmony with the analogia fidei of the rest of Scripture. Not only is Scripture the rule of doctrine, but doctrine is the rule of Scripture through the analogy of faith.³⁸ Thus the content of Scriptural doctrine which has been cumulatively established becomes a canon for the interpretation of all further passages. Even though he now applies philological criteria to uncover the precise significance of each word,³⁹ he has committed an error which precludes an objectively rendered exegesis. His analogy of faith has become a tyrant which renders an inductive approach to hermeneutics well-nigh impossible. This fallacy lies at the root of Luther's selectivity of books within the canon (although the ancient distinction between the antilegomena and the homologoumena plays a part here). If a writer, such as James, appears to go against the analogy of faith as Luther has interpreted it, he merits little further conscientious study, and thus the deeper meanings of such a book are left unplumbed. Luther overlooks the fact that all Scripture passages help to build up

³⁷Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 46.

³⁸Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 28.

³⁹Ibid., p. 29.

the body of truth, a principle which should have been made clear to him in his emphasis on the unity of Scripture.

Luther's emphasis on the literal sense has much merit, however. In addition to criticizing Scholastic exegesis, he also recognizes the validity of an inner or spiritual sense. This is the Word itself to which we must penetrate through the mediation of the literal sense. He thus closely relates the literal and spiritual senses to each other. In so doing, he affirms that the discerning of the spiritual sense comes from the illumination of the Spirit, and not as a result of the philological and rational exegesis. True exposition is literal, but the literal sense is spiritual. Luther's criticism of Erasmus was that he "translated but did not feel" (transulit et non sensit).⁴⁰ There is a distinction between littera and spiritus, as Augustine and Faber had shown, but through the work of the Spirit a living relationship develops between the reader and the Word, so that the letter becomes the Spirit. In doing so, the word of Scripture becomes "the living witness of that which God in Christ does with his own."⁴¹

Inner and outer Word

Like Augustine, Luther shows the significance of the letter and the spirit as it relates to the work of the Law

⁴⁰Blackman, op.cit., p. 122.

⁴¹Kooiman, op.cit., pp. 32f.

and the Gospel. As has been shown, he does not equate Law with the Old Testament and Gospel with the New, but he notes that all of Scripture is Law without the Spirit, and with the Spirit all of Scripture is Gospel. He says, "Where the Spirit is present, all Scripture is saving."⁴² Thus the Word as letter alone is Law, but as spirit it is Gospel. The spiritual sense of Scripture, then, is a new apprehension of the Word in faith, and therefore the Spirit gives a new interpretation which then becomes the literal sense.⁴³

In maintaining the primacy of the literal sense and its connection with the spiritual sense, Luther hopes to gather everything into one meaning. He uses the analogy of a picture to explain this. A portrait of a person signifies that person, but does not contain a twofold sense, a literal sense which is the picture and a spiritual sense which is the person. Likewise the things in Scripture do have a deeper significance, but the Scriptures do not therefore possess a double sense, but only the single comprehensive meaning which the words themselves convey.⁴⁴

In Luther's new interpretation of the old hermeneutical formula of "letter" and "spirit" he fills these concepts

⁴²Wood, Principles, op.cit., p. 32 (quoted in Luther Today, p. 83).

⁴³Ibid., pp. 31, 32.

⁴⁴Ibid.

with a Christological content. Werner Schultz explains thus, "Christ . . . is man and God, mortal and immortal; in him God is at the same time both hidden and revealed; in Christ we see how everything with spiritual life exists only in contrario, as life in the midst of death. In the same way, the verbum internum, the 'spirit,' is concealed in the verbum externum, the 'letter.'"⁴⁵ Exegesis, then, has a two-fold orientation. It is first of all directed to the verbum externum, and gives exact attention to the philological and grammatical details of the text. This literal understanding is necessary before the exegete can enter into the interpretation of the meaning, the reception of the verbum internum. In this process, the exegete becomes understood by the Spirit and then is able to understand. Schultz says again:

The person who, aware that he comes with empty hands, is ready to receive all things at the hands of the same Spirit. Only he is capable of understanding who has been brought to the cross beforehand...Scripture opens itself only to him whom the Holy Spirit has enlightened....⁴⁶

Christocentric hermeneutic

Integrally related to this literal-spiritual hermeneutic is Luther's final major principle of interpretation,

⁴⁵Werner Schultz, "The Problem of Hermeneutics in Current Continental Philosophy and Theology," Lutheran World, VI, 1 (June, 1959), p. 44.

⁴⁶Ibid.

the Christocentric hermeneutic. He says, "The whole Scripture is about Christ alone everywhere, if we look to its inner meaning....,"⁴⁷ "Weil die Schrifft hat nit mehr denn Christum und Christlichen glauben inn sich,"⁴⁸ "Sic in tota scriptura nihil aliud est quam Christus vel apertis verbis vel eingewickelten Worten."⁴⁹ His canon that "what urges Christ" is Scripture, becomes his basic principle of interpretation, and understanding Scripture means finding Christ in it. Luther says:

Thus all of Scripture, as already said, is pure Christ, God's and Mary's Son. Everything is focused on this Son, so that we might know Him distinctively and in that way see the Father and the Holy Spirit eternally as one God. To him who has the Son, Scripture is an open book; and the stronger his faith in Christ becomes, the more brightly will the light of Scripture shine for him.⁵⁰

This Christocentric approach resolves the tension between the literal and spiritual senses by synthesizing both through a new and dynamic understanding that Christ is both the literal and spiritual sense of Scripture and that both are one in Him. Thus Christ becomes the context in which the alliance of letter and spirit is achieved,⁵¹ and the dynamic

⁴⁷Luther, Römerbrief, J. Ficker, ed., p. 240.

⁴⁸WA 8, 236: "Scripture contains none other but Christ and the Christian faith."

⁴⁹WA 11, 223: "In the whole Scripture there is nothing but Christ, either in plain words or involved words."

⁵⁰LW 15, 339.

⁵¹Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 34.

interpersonal relationship of faith in Christ unites the believer's spirit with the Spirit of Christ so that the Word becomes internalized and is therefore understood in an existential encounter. Thus, although he recognizes that there is an inward sense of the Word which can only be penetrated by the eyes of faith, he does not say that the inner sense is supplementary to the outer, but the inner is communicated by it.⁵² Christ is both the literal and the spiritual sense of Scripture, and the two are one in him.⁵³

Since the content of Scripture is appropriated in a spiritual sense through a living relationship with the Spirit of Christ, Luther's view of the Bible has strong ties with the doctrine of the incarnation.⁵⁴ For him, Scriptura sacra est Deus incarnatus.⁵⁵ He emphasizes the two natures of Scripture as an analogy to the two natures of Christ, and in the unity of natures he thus safeguards the unity of the Bible from arbitrary fragmentation.⁵⁶ Thus this Christological hermeneutic is firmly based on the objective letter of Scripture and is not to be confused

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Blackman, op.cit., p. 102.

⁵⁴Kooiman, op.cit., p. 237.

⁵⁵Wood, op.cit., p. 35.

⁵⁶Ibid. (cf. Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice, 105)

with the mystical, "revelational" encounter of those who see subjective enthusiasm as a sign that "God has spoken."

Subjective Hermeneutical Emphasis

The Spirit and the Word

The Spirit and the letter. For Luther, the essence of theology is the concern for the task of interpreting the Scriptures and expounding their doctrine as well as the concern for the Holy Spirit and man's own personal, spiritual existence. On the one hand theology is concerned with the texts handed down by tradition, the historical data, and on the other hand it is concerned with the Word and with faith. Hermeneutics, therefore, becomes primary in its importance.⁵⁷ In striving to understand Scripture so that it does not remain merely the alien, remote, and external letter, Luther perceives the necessity of the Spirit's taking hold of the interpreter and becoming alive in his heart. The hermeneutical principle which he formulates from this insight is thus:

Item in Scripturis sanctis optimum est Spiritum
a litera discernere, hoc enim facit vero theologum.
Et a spiritu sancto hoc tantum habet Ecclesia et
non ex humano sensu.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to His Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 93-95.

⁵⁸WA 3, 12: "In the holy Scriptures it is best to distinguish between the spirit and the letter; for it is this that makes a true theologian. And the Church has the power to do this from the Holy Spirit alone and not from the human mind."

We should not attempt to hear and read the Word of God through our own powers, nor should we be content with the outward Word alone, but we should listen to the Spirit Himself. The outward Word that is uttered vocaliter by the voice must be understood vitaliter in the heart through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must be drawn out from the letter in which it is concealed.⁵⁹ Luther thus sees a tension between the letter and the spirit, and the Word and the Spirit are thereby in tension.

The external vs. the internal Word. Luther says that the means by which the Spirit does His work is the Word. The Word and the Spirit are closely related, but is the Spirit always present where the Word is? Can the Word function without the Spirit? Can the Spirit function independently of the Word?⁶⁰ These are the questions one must ask in order to understand the relationship between the Word and Spirit. Luther says, "God wants to give the Holy Spirit through the Word, and without the Word He does not want to do it."⁶¹ Although the Spirit could work without the Word, He has not chosen to do so:

Sic placitum est Deo, ut non sine verbo, sed per verbum tribuat spiritum, ut nos habeat suos cooperatores, dum foris sonamus, quod intus ipse solus spirat, ubi voluerit, quae tamen absque verbo facere posset, sed non vult. Iam qui sumus

⁵⁹Ebeling, op.cit., p. 98.

⁶⁰Prenter, op.cit., p. 101.

⁶¹WA 16, 270.

nos, ut voluntatis divinae causam quaeramus?
 Satis est nosse, quod Deus ita velit, et hanc
 voluntatem revereri, diligere et adorare decet,
 coercita rationis temeritate.⁶²

Althaus points out that Luther never sees God's Word as an external Word, spoken by human lips and heard with human ears. Rather, God speaks His truth simultaneously with the external proclamation. This is the method of the Spirit of God so that men receive the Word not only externally, but internally, and thus can believe. Hence the external Word and the internal Word are intimately connected. The Spirit does not speak without the Word, the Spirit speaks in and through the Word. God does not give the Spirit until He has given the external Word. Thus the Spirit comes by means of the Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart is dependent upon the prior hearing of the external Word.⁶³

Thus we see that Luther makes use of the Augustinian distinction between the outward and the inward Word. Scripture is the outward, or external, Word, and the Holy

⁶²WA 18, 695: "Thus it pleased God not to give the Spirit without the Word but through the Word that He might have us as His co-workers who proclaim without what He Himself works by the Spirit within, wherever He will. He could, of course, do this apart from the Word; but He does not want to do it in that way. And who are we to inquire into the reason for the divine will? It is enough for us to know that God so wills it; and it becomes us to reverence, love, and adore this will and to bridle the impertinence of our reason."

⁶³Althaus, op.cit., pp. 36ff.

Spirit is the inward Word of God's own voice. By preaching and the Sacraments man can bring the Word of God to the ear, but not into the heart. Only the Spirit of God can do that. God uses the outward Word as the means of bringing His own living Word into the heart.⁶⁴

Without the work of the Holy Spirit, then, the outward Word remains the word of man and law. The Word of Scripture compels us to wait on the Spirit of God, for if the hearer is not infused with the Spirit, he is no different from a deaf man.⁶⁵ It is impossible to understand rightly the Word of God unless the inward Word of God speaks in the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶

It is important to note at this point that God gives the Holy Spirit only through the written and spoken Word. There are no new revelations, for the Spirit speaks only through the Word. The content of His speaking is bound to the external Word. Luther will not accept the idea of the Enthusiasts that the Spirit is free from the Word and that He can inspire anything one might think of. He says in the Smalcald Articles:

⁶⁴Prenter, op.cit., p. 102 (WA 3, 256; 3, 259, 250; 2, 469, 499).

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 102 (WA 3, 348, 347, 466; 4, 9).

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 102 (WA 1, 632; 3, 259, 372; 4, 243; 2, 108).

Und inn diesen stücken, so das mündlich,
 eusserlich wort betreffen, ist fest darauff
 zu bleiben, das Gott niemand seinen Geist
 oder gnade gibt on durch oder mit dem vorgehend
 eusserlichem wort, Damit wir uns bewaren fur den
 Enthusiasten, das ist geistern, so sich rhümen, on
 und vor dem wort den geist zu haben, und darnach
 die Schrifft oder mündlich wort richten.⁶⁷

He says again:

Derhalben man dasselb immer dar predigen,
 hören, handeln und treiben mus, bis der
 heilige geist ein mal kome, sonst ist kein
 ander weg da zu, Das du allein im winckel
 sitzert, gen himel gaffist und wartest, wenn
 du ihn sehest komen, ist eitel gauckelwerk,
 Das wort ist die einige brück und steig, durch
 wilche der heilige geist zu uns kömpt.⁶⁸

Although Luther sees the tension between overemphasis on the Spirit at the expense of the Word, or vice-versa, he refuses to opt for an easy solution. A genuine tension exists between these two tendencies, and this cannot be resolved simplistically. Prenter points out that, for Luther, the concept of the sovereignty of the Spirit coupled

⁶⁷ WA 50, 245: "In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold to the conviction that God gives no one His Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which goes before. Thus we shall be protected from the Enthusiasts--that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word."

⁶⁸ WA 17 I, 125f.: "We must constantly preach, hear, handle, and inculcate the Word until the Holy Ghost comes. There is no other way to achieve the desired end. To sit in a corner, to gape heavenward, and wait to see Him come is sheer folly. The Word is the only bridge and path by which the Holy Spirit comes to us."

with the insufficiency of the outward Word will ultimately lead to a predestinarian concept of God. On the other hand, a consistent application of the idea of the dependence of the Spirit on the outward Word will place the responsibility for any insufficient effect of the Word only upon the man who hears it. Luther sees a solution to these two poles in the union of this tension as it is resolved in Christ.⁶⁹

Luther does not see the Spirit's being bound to the Word. "Only when the Holy Spirit makes Christ present in the Word does it become the living Word. If this does not happen, the Word is only a letter, a law, a description of Christ," says Prenter.⁷⁰ Christ is the Logos, and only through the Word as it comes through Scripture can the Holy Spirit make Jesus Christ present. "Without the work of the Spirit," says Prenter, "the Word may continue to be the Word which speaks of Jesus Christ, but it is not the Word which bestows Christ on us."⁷¹

By opposing the inner Word to the outer Word, the Enthusiasts not only distorted Augustine, but they came to understand the Spirit in a metaphysical, idealistic way which was the antithesis of all of Luther's teaching on the

⁶⁹Prenter, op.cit., p. 106.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 107.

⁷¹Ibid.

realism of the Spirit's work. Thus the Enthusiasts replaced God's own sovereign presence in the Word with a sort of metaphysical power of the Spirit which was not essentially bound to the Word. Thus Prenter says:

It is for that matter of no significance whether this rationalized doctrine of the means of grace appears in the form of a Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments, an orthodox Lutheran doctrine of verbal inspiration or modern Protestant historicism. In each one of the three the revelation is at the mercy of the one who has the means of grace.⁷²

Christ and the Spirit. Luther thus sees God entering into a saving encounter with man through Jesus Christ. As he emphasizes in the Preface to James and Jude, Christ is found in the Holy Scriptures as they "preach Christ" (Christum treiben). The Word of God as read in Scripture or proclaimed by preaching is not a direct mystical communication from God, but through the work of the Holy Spirit this external Word is received internally and speaks to the heart.⁷³ Therefore the Word of God is not spiritually effective apart from the work of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit depends upon the Word for the content and means of His revelation. Luther means that the Holy Spirit is the one who speaks. The Word of Scripture is the means by which He speaks. The reader seeks to

⁷²Ibid.; cf. Ebeling, op.cit., pp. 108ff.

⁷³Althaus, op.cit., pp. 35ff.

hear the Spirit by means of the Word. Grammatical exegesis alone can lead the reader to understand the meaning of the words in Scripture, but he must have a faith relationship and must respond to the Spirit Himself if he hopes to apprehend the self of the Holy Spirit who is speaking. The Word is the written form of the Spirit's speaking. Luther says:

Das wortt Gottes liesset, mit denen redet auch der heilige Geist. Do ist dan reden und schreiben ein dieng allein das das mundliche reden stercker ist den das schriefftliche, den durch Schriefft kanstu auch reden mit denen, die uber hundert meilen von dir feind. Also ist des Heiligen geistes reden fein schreiben und verfiiegeln. Wen der Heilige Geist prediget und bat die fedder in der Handt und drucket die buchstaben auff ins hertz, do werden die leuthe gahr anders und verendert, und ein solcher ist gewiss, den es ist ihme in seis hertz geschreiben und gedruckt, ehr tregt ein pfandt, einen rieng und pietzschaft, das ehr keinen zweiffel dran hat, Gott sei warkafftig, und das ist eine grosse hehrlickeit ihn seinem hertzen das Gott wahafftig sei.⁷⁴

It is the Spirit who brings understanding to the heart.

Luther says:

Darauff ist die Predigt Christi gestellet, da er leret, seine wort und reden sind Leben und Geist, das ist: sie sind recht Geistliche ding, gehen

⁷⁴WA, 47, 184; LW 22, 473: "The Holy Spirit speaks to those who read the Word of God. In this way speaking and writing become identical, only that the oral Word is more powerful than the written Word. By means of the written Word, however, you can communicate with people more than a hundred miles distant from you. Thus we find the Holy Spirit speaking in His writing and in His sealing. When He speaks, pen in hand, and presses the letters into the heart, people change radically. Such people become convinced, for the Holy Spirit writes and imprints His message into the heart. They have a pledge, a ring, a seal, so that they entertain no doubts as to the truthfulness of God. The knowledge that God is true is a glorious treasure in the heart."

weit, weit uber vernunfft und sind viel höher,
ja himlisch. Wollen wir nu den Geist und
das Leben finden, so müssen wir auch Geistlich
werden und das Wort Gottes hören, das überwigt
die Vernunfft und streichet höher hinauff,
denn die Vernunfft weiss. Die wort, so ich höre,
sol ich sie verstehen so geschiets durch den
heiligen Geist, der macht mich auch geistlich,
das Wort ist geistlich und ich werde auch
geistliche, denn er schreibet mirs ins hertz
und ist in summa alles Geist.⁷⁵

He says also:

Quare in novo testamento fit, ut dum foris
ministratur verbum vitae, gratiae et salutis,
intus simul doceat spiritus sanctus.⁷⁶

⁷⁵WA, 33, 276; LW 23, 175: "The core of
Christ's sermon is this, that He proclaims that His
words and speeches are life and spirit. That is,
they are really spiritual and transcend reason by far;
they are far more sublime; yes, they are heavenly.
Now if we want to find spirit and life, we, too, must
become spiritual and hear the Word of God. This excels
reason and rises higher than reason can rise. Any
understanding of these words that I hear must be
wrought in me by the Holy Spirit. He makes me
spiritual too. The Word is spiritual, and I also
become spiritual; for He inscribes it in my heart, and
then, in brief, all is spirit."

⁷⁶WA, 57-3, 196; LW 29, 198: "Therefore it
happens in the New Testament that while the Word of
life, grace, and salvation is proclaimed outside,
the Holy Spirit teaches inside at the same time."

Thus Luther means that the Word may exist without the Spirit, but when it does so it is just a letter. It describes the life we should live, but does not give it to us. As a letter, the Word is Law, not Gospel. It is the outward Word in contrast to the work of the Spirit in us in the "inner Word." It cannot be God's living Word without the Spirit.

Similarly, the Spirit can exist apart from the Word; He is not bound in the Word, but He cannot be God's revealing Spirit without the Word. The work of the Spirit is to make the risen Christ real and present to us, and the Spirit cannot work apart from the Word, for He needs the Bible's testimony about Christ in order to make the real Christ present. Through proclamation the outward Word penetrates the heart through the power of the Spirit, and the Spirit thus brings Christ into the heart as the gift of God. Thus, as Prenter says, "The Word may be without the Spirit, but not as the Word of God; and the Spirit may be without the Word, but not as the revealing Spirit."⁷⁷

The Spirit and Faith

Faith as a creation of God. Luther sees faith as having universal significance, as comprising the entire relationship of God to man. It is faith which brings

⁷⁷Prenter, op.cit., pp. 122-24.

salvation, and this saving faith is defined as trust in the Word of Christ.⁷⁸ Faith as an act of trusting in the saving promises of God is never, however, an act which man can produce by himself. Only God can create it as the Holy Spirit works faith in man through the preaching of the Word. Luther says, "Faith...comes only through God's word or gospel."⁷⁹ He draws two emphases from this concept. First, it is only the Word which works faith, for in the Word I experience the working of the Holy Spirit. Second, only the Word of God can provide authority for the basis of faith.⁸⁰

In the first emphasis, we see that no human work can produce faith, for it is God's creation in man. It is God's gift and work, and this faith alone gives us the assurance that the promise of the Gospel is the Word of the living God to us. Thus, faith is created by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit.⁸¹ Secondly, the hearing of the Word is the means and the authority by which the Holy Spirit works faith in the believer. Faith is born when one is inwardly and spiritually convinced that it is the living voice of God

⁷⁸Kooiman, op.cit., p. 66.

⁷⁹WA DB 7, 7; WA 39; I, 83; LW 35, 368.

⁸⁰Althaus, op.cit., p. 47.

⁸¹Watson, op.cit., p. 167; cf. Althaus, op.cit., p. 47.

speaking in the Word.⁸² Christ enters by the Gospel through one's ears into his heart, and He brings with Him His life and Spirit, and all else in Him. Thus, in faith itself Christ is present so that when we believe that Christ came "for us," He dwells in our hearts and purifies us with His proper work. Luther says:

Sondernn auch also durch sich selb, wer da
gleubt inn ihn, das er solchs fur uns than hatt,
durch und umb desselben glaubensz wonet er selb
inn uns und reinigett uns teglich durch sein
selbs eigen werk also.⁸³

It is by means of this faith and in this faith that Christ is present (in ipsa fide Christus adest).⁸⁴ Thus Luther affirms, "To him who has the Son, Scripture is an open book; and the stronger his faith in Christ becomes, the more brightly will the light of Scripture shine for him."⁸⁵ Since Christ is present, so is the Holy Spirit, who applies the Word inwardly to our lives in continual redemptive activity.

Word as basis for faith. As the authoritative basis for faith, the Word of God is different from any other source of a fabricated faith. The validity of faith depends upon its foundation, whether it be founded upon the word of man or upon the Word of God.

⁸²Althaus, Ibid.

⁸³WA 10:I, 160.

⁸⁴Watson, op.cit., p. 167.

Neither miracles, human authority, angels, nor even the earthly person of Jesus Himself can provide the ultimate ground for faith.⁸⁶ To Luther, the Word in its true sense is Christ. He is the incarnate Word, the risen Christ Himself, the center of the Word of God. As the Spirit causes the risen Christ to live in the outward Word, faith moves from Law to Gospel, from verbum imperfectum et dilatum to verbum abbreviatum et consummatum, from "the imitation of Christ as an ideal to the accepting of Christ as a gift," notes Prenter.⁸⁷ As the Father's eternal and inward Word, Christ is the adequate basis for our faith. Faith based on Him is not a "do-it-yourself faith" which succumbs under the stress of life, but a faith and a word which authenticates itself to me. It is a faith that is grounded in the cross, not in empirical experience. It experiences Christ's redemption upon the witness of the Spirit, so that the Spirit and faith may stand against any antagonist, be it reason, law, sin, or death.⁸⁸ Luther says, "...if we believe the Word and adhere to it in firm and steadfast faith, He will also help us and set us free...."⁸⁹ And he continues, "For the Holy Spirit sanctifies through the

⁸⁶Althaus, op.cit., p. 49.

⁸⁷Prenter, op.cit., p. 112.

⁸⁸Althaus, op.cit., pp. 48-63 passim; note especially the discussion of the tension between faith and experience which is resolved only eschatologically, pp. 60-63.

⁸⁹LW 6, 41.

Word taken hold of through faith...,⁹⁰ and "Where the Word is, there faith is also...."⁹¹

For Luther, then, faith appears to be the relationship which is established between the self and the Word of God, the inward Word, by the witness of the Holy Spirit. Hearing the Word of God as God opens our ears by the Spirit is the work which renders one worthy to bear the name of Christian. It is faith, not the Sacraments, which brings salvation.⁹² In this regard, Luther says:

Quare fides est pertinacissimus intuitus qui nihil aspicit praeter Christum victorem peccati et mortis et largitorem iustitiae, salutis et vitae aeternae. Hinc Paulus in Epistolis suis fere in signulis versibus proponit et inculcat Iesum Christum. Proponit autem per verbum, cum aliter proponi non possit quam per verbum neque apprehendi quam per fidem.⁹³

In summary, it is Luther's Christocentric approach to Scripture which provides the key for understanding the tension between the primacy of the literal, outward sense of the text and the inner, spiritual meaning of it. The literal sense was fundamental, and he never allowed

⁹⁰LW 5, 266.

⁹¹LW 6, 40.

⁹²Kooiman, op.cit., p. 66.

⁹³WA 40:I, 545: "Faith is an unceasing and constant looking which turns the eyes upon nothing but Christ, the Victor over sin and death and the Giver of righteousness, salvation, and life eternal. This is why Paul, in his epistles, sets Jesus Christ before us and teaches about Him in almost every single verse. But he sets Him before us through the Word, for in no other way can He be apprehended except by faith in the Word."

allegorical or tropological interpretations to impinge upon it. But he was fully aware of the inward meaning of the Word which can be understood only through the eyes of faith. This inner meaning is communicated by the literal sense, and since Jesus Christ is both the literal and spiritual sense of Scripture, the tension is resolved in Him.⁹⁴ Faith thus resolves the hermeneutical tension between letter and spirit and enables the reader to see the unity of these inner and outer senses and to experience Christ through the mediation of the Spirit who communicates Him through the Word to the ear of faith. The Scriptures must be understood in faith if they are to come to life, and must be experienced "in the heart" if they are to be understood. Luther says, "They (the wicked) do not have it (Scripture) in their heart; therefore they do not understand it. They are deceived by the outward fact that they cite the words of Scripture."⁹⁵ The words remain mere words apart from faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. Doermann notes, "A Turk can read John 3:16 and understand it perfectly, but for him it is not and cannot be the Word of God until the Holy Spirit enables him to hear the passage addressed

⁹⁴Wood, Captive..., op.cit., p. 175.

⁹⁵LW 14, 223-24.

to him personally."⁹⁶ Neither has the Christian any criterion by which to determine what is God's Word unless "the Spirit writes within the heart the Word that is preached to us,"⁹⁷ and this is accomplished through faith.

The Spirit and the Interpreter

Spirit as interpreter. The Christological interpretation of Scripture forms the basis for Luther's hermen-
eutic. Those books are primary which "preach Christ," and the grammatico-historical method of exegesis is the means to the understanding of the Christ taught in these books. "Christ is the point in the circle from which the whole circle is drawn."⁹⁸ Christ is the punctus mathe-
maticus of Scripture.⁹⁹ He is the literal sense of Scripture, and this literal sense is primary in contrast to the Quadrige of the Schoolmen. Luther says, "The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the literal sense, as they call it. For it alone holds its ground in trouble and trial."¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, "If we want to treat Holy Scripture skillfully, our effort must be

⁹⁶Ralph W. Doermann, "Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation," Interpreting Luther's Legacy, F. W. Meuser and S. D. Schneider, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), p. 24.

⁹⁷WA 45, 22; cited by Doermann, Ibid.

⁹⁸Grant, op.cit., pp. 129, 131.

⁹⁹LW 22, 339.

¹⁰⁰LW 9, 24.

concentrated on arriving at one simple, pertinent, and sure literal sense."¹⁰¹ The commentator "should take pains to have one definite and simple understanding of Scripture and not to be a wanderer and a vagabond, like the rabbis, the Scholastic theologians, and the professors of Law, who are always toiling with ambiguities."¹⁰² The allegorical approach to exegesis had succeeded only in buttressing the authoritative grip of the Church and had thoroughly obscured Christ with its fanciful conclusions. This Luther condemned as "mere jugglery," "a merry chase," "monkey tricks," and "looney talk."¹⁰³ Luther said to Karlstadt, "Brother, the natural meaning of the words is queen, transcending all subtle, acute, sophistical fancy. From it we may not deviate unless compelled by a clear article of faith. Otherwise the spiritual jugglers would not have a single letter in Scripture. Therefore, interpretations of God's Word must be lucid and definite, having a firm, sure, and true foundation on which one may confidently rely."¹⁰⁴ In his study of Romans, Luther came to the conclusion that Christ was no allegory, but the literal

¹⁰¹LW 3, 27.

¹⁰²LW 8, 209.

¹⁰³Wood, op.cit., p. 164; citing PE 3, 334; LW 9, 7; LW 40, 189.

¹⁰⁴LW 40, 190.

content of Scripture. It was upon Him that true and sound doctrine should be based.¹⁰⁵

At this point in his Christocentric interpretation of Scripture, Luther introduces a new element which moves beyond "objective" elements in exegesis into the subjective area of faith. Only by faith can one determine those passages which preach Christ. Under the guidance of faith, one moves into a "spiritual interpretation" of the Bible.¹⁰⁶ This emphasis in no way demeans sound exegesis, however, for the literal and spiritual understandings of Scripture are not to be separated. The philological-grammatical and the pneumatical expositions belong together.¹⁰⁷ It is at the point of ignoring the spiritual content of Scripture that Luther criticizes the rabbis and the grammarians:

I am advising this because even among our own theologians many give too much credit to the rabbis in explaining the meaning of Scripture. In the matter of grammar I readily bear with them; but they lack the true sense and understanding, in accordance with the well-known words in Is. 29:14...This statement declares that there will be no understanding of Scripture among the Jews.¹⁰⁸

Here again the rabbis cause trouble for us in the matter of grammar. If the grammar were certain, we could extract the true meaning without any difficulty. But they obscure it with their glosses

¹⁰⁵Wood, op.cit., p. 165.

¹⁰⁶Grant, op.cit., pp. 131ff.

¹⁰⁷Kooiman, op.cit., p. 68.

¹⁰⁸LW 4, 351.

and pointings, just as this passage (Gen. 49:4) is mutilated by them in various ways. For because they drag it contrary to its spirit into an inapposite meaning, forced and inapposite explanations must later be sought. This is truly diabolical sophistry in Holy Scripture.¹⁰⁹

Therefore the Jews must be left to their own evil genius, just as the Turks and the papists, who either do not understand the clearest testimony of Scripture or jeer at it, because they are crazed by their own opinions. Let this be enough concerning the essential points of this chapter.¹¹⁰

Thus Luther believes that the Jews have an adequate philology, but they miss the meaning of the Scripture. He thinks that one must consider the subject matter (die Sache) of the text, as well as its grammar, if he is to understand it. He says:

Therefore, how great a folly it is in the instance of the sacred language, where theological and spiritual matters are treated, to disregard the particular character of the subject matter (die Sache) and to arrive at the sense on the basis of grammatical rules.¹¹¹

Therefore, even though they know the language, they do not know the true meaning of Scripture.¹¹² To them...Scripture is a book they cannot read.

He says of the Humanists:

Gerondi has an excellent knowledge of the words (just as there are many today who far surpass me in their knowledge of the Hebrew language); but

¹⁰⁹LW 8, 211 (cf. LW 8, 238).

¹¹⁰LW 3, 98.

¹¹¹LW 2, 15.

¹¹²LW 3, 69.

because he does not understand the matter, he distorts the passage with which we are dealing.¹¹³

The reason for their going astray is that they are indeed familiar with the language, but they have no knowledge of the subject matter; that is they are not theologians. Therefore, they are compelled to twaddle and to crucify both themselves and Scripture.¹¹⁴

Thus we see that philologists who are nothing but philologists and have no knowledge of theological matters have their perplexing difficulties with such passages and torture not only Scripture but also themselves and their hearers.¹¹⁵

What Luther means is that in addition to the work of the exegete on the grammatico-historical level, the Holy Spirit must provide His illumination to unfold the Christocentric meaning.¹¹⁶ Prenter summarizes Luther's emphasis as follows:

If God does not speak into the heart while the ear listens to the outward Word, the outward Word remains the word of man and law. When we hear the Word of the Scripture, we are compelled to wait on the Spirit of God. It is God who has the Scripture in his hand. If God does not infuse his Spirit the hearer of the Word is not different from the deaf man. No one rightly understands the Word of God unless he receives it directly from the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁷

¹¹³LW 1, 264.

¹¹⁴LW 1, 296.

¹¹⁵LW 1, 298.

¹¹⁶Grant, op.cit., p. 132.

¹¹⁷Prenter, op.cit., p. 102 (WA 3, 348, 1; 347, 25ff.; 466, 9ff.; 4, 9, 36ff.).

Thus we see that it is God who interprets Scripture through the Holy Spirit. The gatekeeper about whom Jesus spoke (John 10:3) is the Interpreter Spirit. He provides both the revelation and the interpretation of the Word. It was the Spirit alone who illuminated Joseph so that he was able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. "Interpretations belong to God."¹¹⁸ The things which the Spirit reveals to the eye of faith include that which "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived" (I Cor. 2:9). These truths are of such a nature, says Luther, that:

They can be taught and understood only by the Word and the Holy Spirit. It is characteristic of all the articles of faith that reason abhors them, as we see in the case of the heathen and the Jews. They cannot be understood without the Holy Spirit, for they are abysses of divine wisdom in which the reason is completely submerged and lost.¹¹⁹

It is only through the Holy Spirit that one arrives at a proper understanding of Scripture. "No one can accept the Word unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit. It is as impossible of comprehension by reason as it is inaccessible to the touch of the hand."¹²⁰ In

¹¹⁸LW 7, 150.

¹¹⁹LW 12, 284-5 (note on Ps. 45:11).

¹²⁰LW 22, 8; WA 46, 543: Darin sich kein Mensch hat richten können, denn allein die ienigen, welchen der heilige Geist das Hertz gerüret und auffgethan hat, man kans sonst mit der Vernunff nicht begreifen noch mit den Henden tappen oder verstehen.

the final analysis, Luther says:

Es mus doch der heilige Geist vom Himel herab
hie alleine Zuhörer und Schüler machen, die da
diese Lere annemen, und gleuben, das das Wort
Gott sey, und Gottes Son das Wort sey, und das
das Wort sey fleisch worden und auch das Liecht
sey, so da erleuchte all Menschen, die in die
Welt komen, und one dieses Liecht sonst alles
Finsternis sey.¹²¹

Thus Luther shows that competence in languages,
history, or theology is not sufficient to interpret Scrip-
ture accurately, for without the quickening of the Spirit,
the interpreter cannot enter into the inner experience of
the writers and thus discern vital reality instead of just
words and phrases.¹²² Grammar and history are not to be
ignored, however, for Luther says:

...you should be reminded of the historical facts,
which serve in an excellent way to bring about a
correct understanding of Scripture.¹²³

My purpose in presenting these facts rather
carefully and in bringing them to your attention
has been to encourage those who want to study
the Holy Scriptures to apply themselves to the
Hebrew language, in order that they may be able
to refute the nonsense of the rabbis even on the
basis of grammar.¹²⁴

¹²¹WA 46, 543; "In the end only the Holy Spirit from
heaven can create listeners and pupils who accept this
doctrine and believe that the Word is God, that God's Son
is the Word, and that the Word became flesh, that He is
also the Light who can illumine all men who come into the
world and that without this Light all is darkness."

¹²²A. Berkeley Mickelson, Interpreting the Bible
(Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963), p. 39.

¹²³LW 3, 319.

¹²⁴LW 4, 154.

His desire is to emphasize that personal spiritual preparation is essential for sound interpretation.

James Wood says, "The starting-point for Luther is that divine inspiration is necessary for the true interpretation of the Bible. In order to understand the Bible one needed the help of prayer."¹²⁵ Luther felt a continual need for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in interpreting each successive passage. As we noted earlier, "Therefore the first duty is to begin with a prayer of such a nature that God in His great mercy may grant you the true understanding of His words," and "The Bible cannot be mastered by study or talent; you must rely on the influx of the Spirit."¹²⁶

The Holy Spirit thus interprets the Word which He has already inspired, and this guidance of the Spirit is essential to correct interpretation. A.S. Wood says, "The way in which the Spirit conveys His interpretation of the Word is through the mind and soul of the man who submits himself to the discipline of instruction."¹²⁷ The Word, then, is understood only as it is experienced and felt.¹²⁸ As Luther insists, Sola experientia facit theologum. But the exper-

¹²⁵James Wood, The Interpretation of the Bible (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co., Ltd., 1958), p. 88.

¹²⁶ A.S. Wood, Principles..., op.cit., p. 13 (LE 1, 57).

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 15.

¹²⁸WA 7, 546.

ience to which Luther refers is the inward work of the Spirit.

Blindness of natural man. It is because of man's spiritual blindness that the Holy Spirit must act as interpreter. In his condition of blindness man allows Satan to pervert his understanding. He shuts his eyes against the truth and will not understand though the truth be as clear as day. He allows his reason to interfere and supposes that his own ideas are clearer than God's Word. Luther insists:

Si de interna claritate dixeris, nullus homo unum iota in scripturis videt, nisi qui spiritum Dei habet, omnes habent obscuratum cor, ita, ut si etiam dicant et norint proferre omnia Scripturae, nihil tamen horum horum sentiant aut vere cognoscant...Spiritus enim requiritur ad totam scripturam et ad quamlibet eius partem intelligendam.¹²⁹

One walks in darkness without the faith in Christ which opens the Word.¹³⁰ This was the problem of the Humanists, for although they had all the technical aids for exegesis, they were lacking in what was essential. "They translate

¹²⁹WA 18, 609: "If you speak of the internal clearness, no human being sees one iota of Scripture unless he has the Spirit of God. All men have a darkened heart, so that even if they know how to tell and present all that Scripture contains, yet they are unable to feel and truly know it...For the Spirit is required to understand the whole of Scripture and every part of it."

¹³⁰Plass, op.cit., p. 83; WA 44, 790.

Paul very well," Luther said, "but they do not understand him."¹³¹

The proud will of the reader often leads him to make himself master over the Word without the aid of the Spirit. His study is futile. Thus it is not always those who have read the most books who are the best Christians. He who does not have the guidance of the Holy Spirit finds nothing in the written Word that is not in himself. He finds in the Scripture only the lex naturae, not the Word which transforms, for the spiritual truth is found only in the Spirit hidden in the letter. As long, therefore, as a man knows only the written Word in his own wisdom, the Word as a letter and not as spirit, he remains his own master.¹³² For Luther, this was not enough. He says finally:

"Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a Preacher. He does so to prevent one from gaping toward heaven in search of Him, as the fluttering spirits and enthusiasts do, and from divorcing Him from the oral Word or the ministry. One should know and learn that He will be in and with the Word, that it will guide us into all truth...."¹³³

Conclusion

In regard to the restrictive use of his Christocentric principle and its resulting "canon within the canon" concept, Luthers ascribes to his own inner illumination

¹³¹Plass, op.cit., p. 83; WA 44, 790.

¹³²Kooiman, op.cit., p. 58.

¹³³Prenter, op.cit., pp. 116f. }

what he had denied the Church, namely, the inspiration and selectivity given by the Holy Spirit to ascertain what was genuinely apostolic in the Biblical writings. This is not entirely unwarranted, for the Church had proven on many occasions that it was more interested in its own vested interests than in objective evaluations and interpretations of Scripture. Luther's fallacy, however, is based on his confusing what the Church prescribes upon its own authority, i.e., dogma, with what the early Church recognized under the direction of the Holy Spirit to be already authoritative, namely, the books which they recognized as worthy of inclusion in the canon. Eusebius' doubt as to the validity of some of the books was an honest doubt, but his personal doubts should not be reason enough to lead Luther to reject the consensus of the Church on this matter. In developing a new "canon within a canon," Luther became restrictive and arbitrary, thus limiting the canon to those books in which God's Word can be discerned by him to address man. But who is to say that all the books in the canon did not address man as God's Word when they were accepted by the early Church? Luther apparently overreacts to ecclesiastical tradition and authority here, and in doing so rejects some sound doctrine as well as the dogmatic accretions of a decadent Church. His principle of selectivity is open to question, for he accepts Romans as canonical because Christ is presented clearly by Paul, but he finds the approach of James deficient and

rejects him. His opinion tends to become a dogma. What "preaches Christ" may involve more than Luther allows it to mean, and if a Biblical book does not conform with one's idea of what the faith is, then perhaps he should seek to re-examine his faith instead of seeking to arrange the teaching of the book to agree with one's faith.

Another problem basic to the question of the canon is the distinction between the Word of God and Scripture. Luther needs to reconcile his high view of the inspiration of Scripture with his arbitrarily critical view of the canon. Although he separates Word and Scripture, he then unites them again in the fusion of letter and spirit in Christ. Is this not a contradiction, at least in regard to his question of the canon? If the Word is not equal to Scripture and Christ is equal to the Word, then Christ is not equal with Scripture. But Luther says that Christ is the whole content of Scripture and is thus equal to it. If, therefore, Christ is equal to both Scripture and the Word, then the Scripture should equal the Word, and the question of omitting part of Scripture as not being the Word and thus not being canonical should not occur. Luther's "canon within the canon" is based on a logical non sequitur. In using the Christocentric hermeneutical concept to determine what in Scripture is canonical, Luther confuses a hermeneutical principle with a critical procedure. With this approach, there is no objective safeguard by which one may objectively

determine what does preach Christ or what is canonical.

In spite of these problems, however, Luther's Christocentric hermeneutic is extremely significant when used carefully and analytically and when it is not made to be the only definitive Biblical hermeneutic. The alliance of Christ and the Word as the basis for all faith and doctrine is a valid and happy insight, and a greatly needed corrective to medieval hermeneutics.

Luther's concept of Scripture has much that is salutary about it. His use of Law and Gospel as the basis for his view of the unity of the Testaments has value when he points out that all of Scripture has saving merit when the Spirit is present. He is on very insubstantial grounds, however, when he implies that Scripture is all Law and has no saving merit when the Spirit is not present to help the reader understand. Scripture has an inherent power of conviction and is not wholly dependent upon the spiritual apprehension of the believer, for it is with and through the Word that the Spirit works. It seems that Luther here prepares the way for neo-Reformation views of Scripture and inspiration.

He does present a strong corrective to medieval concepts of authority when he enthrones the Living Word as presented through the Bible. In showing that faith in Christ cannot come except through His Word, he strikes a telling blow at the Free Spirits and at the substantialistic concepts of grace of the medieval Catholic Church.

His grammatical-historical emphasis in interpretation of Scripture is a much needed corrective to the subjective allegorical methods which were so prevalent. He provides a sound basis for exegesis and proclamation by adhering to the clear word of Scripture.

The methodology of exegesis and interpretation which Luther applies is commendable in that it is primarily inductive. He sets aside the opinions of the commentators and attempts to gain a general overview, or "scope," of Scripture and allow it to speak to him individually without the bias of previous interpretations. His emphasis on a methodical study of the text with the aid of sound exegetical principles and the illumination of the Holy Spirit enables him to uncover depths of meaning which had been obscured by the methods of authoritarian Scholasticism. He does limit himself somewhat, however, in his use of the "analogy of faith." Although the interpretation of every passage should be compared with the larger context of Scripture, Luther is guilty of drawing premature and perhaps oversimplified conclusions as to the content of the whole of Scripture and then subjecting all further interpretations to this view. Thus a deductive element is sometimes added to his inductive approach. This causes theological problems when he finds books within the canon which do not harmonize with what he had somewhat arbitrarily concluded to be the "analogy of faith." These problems are resolved by the rationalization

that since the offending books do not present the Gospel of Christ and justification, they are therefore non-canonical and not binding on the Christian. He fortifies this conclusion by equating the Church's recognition of the canon with other, later assertions of ecclesiastical authority, and thus says that the early Church had erred and that the canon is not closed to re-evaluation.

CHAPTER VI

THE EMPHASIS ON THE SUBJECTIVE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ZWINGLI, BULLINGER AND CALVIN

Zwingli's Emphasis on the Subjective Work of the Spirit in Interpretation

The purpose of this section is to analyze the teachings of Huldrych Zwingli on the subject of the subjective work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the interpreter of Scripture. This emphasis on the necessity of the Spirit's work within the interpreter is an important element in the Reformer's doctrine of Scripture and exposition of the Word of God.

The most explicit statement of Zwingli in regard to the subjective illumination of the Biblical interpreter by the Holy Spirit is found in his sermon, "Of the Clarity and Certainty or Power of the Word of God," which was preached at the Oetenbach convent near Zurich in the summer of 1522. He here asserts the doctrine of the Word of God from two aspects, its ability to bring to pass that which it declares and its power to bring with it its own inward illumination so that it is clearly understood and interpreted by the reader.¹

¹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. and trans., Zwingli and Bullinger, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXIV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 53. Bromiley's "General Introduction" to this volume and the "Introduction" to this sermon are particularly thorough and helpful.

Although a learned scholar himself and fully aware of the importance of scholarly exegesis, Zwingli believes that since the Word of God was mediated through the documents of Scripture, the Holy Spirit needs to direct and apply this divine content to the faithful reader. The Word is light and life, but it does not automatically give light and life to all who read the Scriptures. Even though the Word may be outwardly understood, the Holy Spirit still needs to give inward illumination.²

Imago dei

In the opening section of "Clarity and Certainty," Zwingli shows that as man was created in the image of God, this imago dei consisted not in a physical likeness to God, for the basic error of Melitus and the Anthropomorphites was to conceive of God as having a corporeal existence. Man was made in the image of God in respect to his mind or soul only, counters Zwingli. Augustine and the early doctors stressed that man was in the image of God in the faculties of the intellect, will, and memory (intellectus, voluntas et memoria).³ Zwingli, however, feels that more than these elements are involved in the likeness to God. "There is in particular that looking to God which is a sure sign of the divine relationship, image and similitude within us," he

²Ibid., p. 55; see also p. 56.

³Huldrych Zwingli, "Of the Clarity and Certainty of Power of the Word of God," Zwingli and Bullinger, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXIV, Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 60.

says.⁴ He proceeds to show from several Biblical passages that man has a universal thirst after God and a desire for eternal blessedness after this life. If there are those who do not have this longing for blessedness, it is as a result of the despair and lust into which they have sunk. Thus the desire for salvation is present within us by nature, by virtue of the likeness which "God the master-workman has impressed upon us." This He did by breathing into Adam that lifegiving breath which is to be understood as the Spirit of God.⁵

In Colossians 3, St. Paul exhorts to put off the "old man" and put on the "new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." Therefore, this universal longing for God is renewed and increased by the redemptive work of Christ so that the new man tries more and more to come to a knowledge of Him who implanted this image in Him. Thus, as the old man is more and more overcome by Christ, the new man is "renewed day by day," (II Cor. 4). This new man has a desire to live according to the law and will of God, but is opposed by the old, outward man, although the grace of Christ assists the believer and gives food to the soul and great joy and assurance because it is in God's image.⁶

⁴Ibid., p. 61.

⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁶Ibid., pp. 66-68.

This section on the image of God, then, suggests that Zwingli sees the image as being darkened, but not obliterated by the fall, and that the imago dei can be nourished and renewed by the Word of God. Just as Adam was made alive by the inbreathing of God, so the imago may be nourished and revived so that its desire for spiritual food may be increased by the inbreathing of the Holy Spirit who works with and through the Word of God.

Certainty or Power of the Word of God

The following section of the sermon deals with the certainty or power of the Word of God. By the certainty of the Word of God, Zwingli means that it has the power to bring to pass that which it speaks. All things are brought into conformity with its purpose. The proof of this certainty or purpose is seen in numerous examples found in both the Old and New Testaments. In Genesis 1, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." The Word is alive and strong, and even brings into existence those things which did not exist. Furthermore, the Word speaks judgment upon the disobedient, as is seen in the curse upon Eve and the toil and death laid upon Adam and his descendants when the ground is cursed with thorns and thistles. The disobedient in Noah's day were lost when what the Word spoke came to pass. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Lot's wife came to pass when the commands of the Word

were disobeyed. On the other hand, great miracles occurred in fulfillment of the promises of the Word. For example, what God accomplished through Moses exemplifies the power of the Word, as is also seen in the lives and deeds of Joshua, Gideon, Jephthah, Saul, David, and Solomon.⁷

This same strength and certainty and power of God's Word is seen in the New Testament. The divine promise to Zechariah and the barren Elizabeth came to pass in John the Baptist. The Word of God conceived the Saviour of the world in the Virgin Mary without any detracting from her purity. The divine prophecies were fulfilled in the ministry and miracles of Christ. God punishes or saves according to His Word.⁸ Zwingli thus concludes that "the Word of God is so alive and strong and powerful that all things have necessarily to obey it...The whole teaching of the Gospel is a sure demonstration that what God has promised will certainly be performed."⁹ With the Word of God proved certain, Zwingli would then exhort us to conform our lives to its commands or else suffer its certain judgments.¹⁰

⁷Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁰Bromiley, op.cit., p. 53.

Clarity of the Word of God

Zwingli begins his section on the clarity of the Word by showing that God has revealed Himself in parables, proverbs, and riddles in former times, and now He has revealed Himself fully in Jesus Christ. Parables and proverbs have provoked us to search out hidden meanings and they have shown us that God has attempted to give His message to us in a gentle and attractive way. God's intent has always been to communicate His Word clearly to men. Those who have not understood have failed to do so because their own iniquities have blinded them.¹¹ Zwingli's thesis is that he who desires to understand the Word of God and lays aside his own understanding with an eye toward learning from the Word of God and giving himself wholly to God, will be given understanding. In contrast, he who comes to the Scriptures with his own opinion and interpretation and wrests Scripture into conformity with his own preconceptions, will not receive anything, but will be blinded by his own wickedness. This is the same kind of hardness of heart which brought God's judgment upon Israel.¹²

As in the section on the imago dei, Zwingli points out that it is the rightful function of the creature to love the Word of God and to profit from it. If there are those who cannot bear to receive it, they are sick. In

¹¹Zwingli, op.cit., p. 73.

¹²Ibid., p. 74.

itself, the Word of God is always clear, right, and good. It is never God's will for us to fail to understand Him.¹³

In substantiating his contention that the Word of God shines on human understanding to enlighten it in such a way that it understands and confesses the Word, Zwingli turns to Biblical evidence. David says in Psalm 118, "The entrance of thy words, O Lord, giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." Thus, those who humble themselves as little children will receive understanding, just as the simple shepherds understood clearly the words of the angels at Jesus' birth. Further examples demonstrate the clarity of the Word as seen in the Old Testament.

1. Noah understood God's command to build the ark, even though other men continued to live their lives as usual. He did not interpret God's Word as a delusion, for the Word brought with it its own enlightenment so that Noah could know that it was from God, and not another (Gen. 6).

2. Abraham understood God's command to sacrifice Isaac in spite of the human questions which must have challenged its authenticity. The Word so enlightened him that he knew it to be the Word of God. Although his reason could not accept the command, his faith gained the victory and he obeyed. His faith was thus enabled only by the light which the Word of God brought with it (Gen. 21, 22).

¹³Ibid., p. 75.

3. When Moses had brought Israel into a precarious situation with the sea in front and the enemy behind, God directed him to stretch out his hand over the sea and divide it. He did not despair or think that the voice of God was a delusion, but recognized it with utter certainty. This voice he recognized because it contained the light of the Word of God which came with clarity and assurance (Exod. 14).

4. When Jacob heard the voice of the One who stood at the top of the ladder he recognized and clearly understood it, not because he had previously seen or heard God, but because God's Word brought with it its own clarity and enlightenment (Gen. 28).

5. Micaiah recognized the voice of God and prophesied according to it even though 400 prophets contradicted him and the power of two kings might have intimidated him. But the Word of God revealed itself to him and brought its own clarity to assure the prophet's understanding (I King 22).

6. Jeremiah proclaimed the Word of God without fear even when his life was threatened, because he trusted the Word of God and had been taught by God to understand it (Jer. 26).

7. Elijah, even when he believed that he was completely alone, obeyed God against the prophets of Baal because he was divinely enlightened (I Kings 19).

Zwingli concludes his Old Testament substantiation of the clarity of the Word of God by stating:

These seven passages from the Old Testament will be enough to show conclusively that God's Word can be understood by a man without any human direction: not that this is due to man's own understanding, but to the light and Spirit of God, illuminating and inspiring the words in such a way that the light of the divine content is seen in his own light, as it says in Psalm 35 (A.V. 36): "For with thee, Lord, is the well of light, and in thy light shall we see light." And similarly in John 1.¹⁴

Through numerous New Testament passages, Zwingli substantiates his thesis that the Word is clarity itself and it lights every man who comes into the world (John 1). His thrust in this section takes three major directions: 1) the clarity of the Word validates individual interpretation through the illumination of the Holy Spirit in contrast to the official and authoritative interpretations of the Caiaphas's and Annas's; 2) the Word illuminates the individual only if he is willing to discard prior presuppositions and allow it to speak; 3) faith is basic to the correct understanding of the clear Word of God.

Clarity of individual interpretations. Anything which we receive and understand must come to us from above, not from other men. If we allow our comprehension and understanding of divine doctrine to come from other interpreters rather than from above, we are just as liable as

¹⁴Ibid., pp. (79-80.)

Balaam to be led astray. If Christians are to be taught of God (Isaiah 54), let them learn from Christ who is the caput ecclesiae, rather than subject the truth to the Annas's and Caiaphas's, the official interpreters. The true teacher of doctrine is not the doctores, the patres, the pope, the cathedra, nor the concilia, but the Father of Jesus Christ. Zwingli declares:

Even if you hear the gospel of Jesus Christ from an apostle, you cannot act upon it unless the heavenly Father teach and draw you by the Spirit. The words are clear; enlightenment, instruction, and assurance are by divine teaching without any intervention on the part of that which is human.¹⁵

Christ says (John 6): "Therefore I said, that no man can come to me except it be given him of my Father." If the Father leads to Christ and gives understanding of Him, why is there need for any other teacher or interpreter? The disciples knew of no teacher other than Christ, for "Thou hast the words of eternal life." It is significant that Zwingli interchanges the work of Christ, the Spirit, and the Father as the only teachers of doctrine. His understanding, then, of the internal illumination of the Christian as he hears the Word is a Trinitarian one. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work as One in the Word.¹⁶

Zwingli continues to emphasize the concept that one is taught only by God and His Spirit. If God instructs,

¹⁵Ibid. 79

¹⁶Ibid.

there is no need to ask of men. As in I Corinthians 2, Paul says that he speaks not that which was received from the spirit of the world, but those things which he was taught by the Holy Ghost, so must the Christian realize that God does not allow Himself to be known by the spirit of this world. He reveals Himself to babes, not to a council of bishops who are too lofty and distant for Him. "God reveals himself by his own Spirit, and we cannot learn of him without his Spirit."¹⁷ It is only through the anointing of the Holy Ghost that one can abide in and be taught by the Spirit of God. Only through the Spirit can one receive certainty of truth as the mind is brought into captivity to God who alone gives inward certainty and assurance.¹⁸ Thus, the Spirit is the agent through whom knowledge of the Word of God and of the Father is given. Any attempt to arrive at this knowledge from the words of men or councils is doomed to barrenness and death.

Furthermore, any attempt to conclude that an interpretation of the majority is correct merely because its supporters are numerous is absurd. Truth is not necessarily with the majority, for even popes and councils have erred, as in the Arian heresy. Ultimately, only God can teach us the truth with certainty. "We do not need human interpreters, but his anointing, which is the Spirit,

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 83.

teaches us of all things...."¹⁹ We must leave the wisdom of men and be theodidacti, taught of God, not of men.²⁰

The result of this reliance upon God alone is the destruction of the theologica scholastica, which is merely a system of man by which he thinks divine teaching is to be judged and perverted by infallible human wisdom. Worldly or human wisdom is confounded and overthrown by those whose inward longing and faith have led them to true divine doctrine. This spiritual man brings to the Word the mind given him by God, and not his own mind of human wisdom. With this illumination, even the lowliest can speak on Scripture when the leading prophets have missed the truth.²¹

Discarding of human presuppositions. Even though one may sincerely desire to let the Word speak to him, human biases and presuppositions may be imposed upon the Word so that it cannot be clearly heard. One of the most damaging obstructions to a clear perception of the Word is the tendency to want to find support in Scripture for our own view, and we thus wrest it to make it say what we want it to say.²² Zwingli himself confesses that for many years his reliance upon philosophy and theology, human teaching, prevented him from learning the doctrine of God directly from the

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 89, 91, 93.

²² Ibid.

Scriptures. The proper procedure of study is first to consult the mind of the Spirit of God (Ps. 84). Ask God for His grace, that you may have the mind of the Spirit to lay hold on His opinion, not your own. Correct interpretation, then, comes from the subjection of oneself to the Word in humility, not from an arrogant overestimation of one's own feeble understanding.²³ This is an important emphasis from one who has been labeled the "Humanist" Reformer.

Necessity of faith. How may one overcome the problems which distort true doctrine from the Word? First, one must put his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his atonement for us. The moment one believes, he is drawn by God, and the work of the Spirit of God becomes operative within him.²⁴ Allowing the Father to draw one to the Word (John 6) is to believe firmly in the Word of God rather than in the wisdom of men. This inward longing and faith confounds and overthrows worldly wisdom.²⁵ In a sense, then, in faith, man becomes free for God. His biases and his worldly wisdom are overcome by his dependence upon the Word to bring its own illumination through the Holy Spirit. Faith is thus the antithesis to all human reasoning and authoritative interpretations which are built upon fallible human understandings. Interpretation grows out of the illumination

²³Ibid., pp. 88, 89, 91.

²⁴Ibid., p. 86.

²⁵Ibid., p. 89.

of the reader as he reads the Word made clear by the Holy Spirit.

Zwingli directs his thoughts concerning the clarity and certainty of the Word of God to a very practical conclusion. He is not interested simply in academic discussion, but more particularly in applying his very perceptive insights to practical performance. In his conclusion he sets down twelve principles by which a sincere Christian can gain instruction in understanding the Word of God and may personally experience the fact of being taught of God. Essentially, these principles are that the Christian must pray that the old, worldly mind may be killed off so that God's Spirit may infill and reveal the Word and give assurance and joy that God's grace will magnify itself within him so that the Word will become clear.²⁶

Conclusion and Summary

Zwingli recognizes man's need for the Word of God as this need is reflected in the imago dei. The Word of God fills this need because it has the power to accomplish what it promises. If the reader will but open his heart to the Word, it will speak to him in all clarity, and will give him illumination for his life. The Scripture has a basic natural perspicuity, and the reader must allow the Spirit to illuminate his own darkened mind to the light of the Word.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 93-95.

By clarity, Zwingli means that the Word brings with it its own inward enlightenment. The Spirit of God teaches all things and applies the message of the Word of God to the Christian who receives it in faith and penitence.²⁷ The knowledge of God which man desires is found in His Word, and this Word is lucid in and of itself.²⁸

Zwingli realizes the importance of scholarship and a knowledge of the original languages, and also the fact that the essential message of the Bible is within the grasp of rational understanding alone. He does not understand the clarity of the Word to be a mystical illumination, but a perception which is rooted in the proper study of the text. He does not wish to subject Scripture to the teaching office of the scholar, and he sometimes oversimplifies in not seeming to recognize that understanding of the Word can come through exegetes and scholars as well as through Bible reading itself. He recognizes that the scholar's work is necessary to open up the more difficult places or to fix the exact meanings of certain passages. Yet even here he insists that scholarship can do its work only as informed and used by the Holy Spirit. Thus the primary emphasis remains, for, as Bromiley observes, Zwingli's main insight is "that the Word is more than the external letter of

²⁷Bromiley, op.cit., pp. 57, 57.

²⁸Jacques Courvoisier, Zwingli: A Reformed Theologian (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), pp. 28, 35.

Scripture, and that it has its effect and carries with it inward conviction only in so far as the Holy Spirit applies it as the living Word."²⁹

Oswald Myconius, Zwingli's associate and friend, offers a balanced summary in which, speaking of Zwingli's own expository works, he shows how scholarly exegesis need not be divorced from the ministry of the Spirit:

...in the judgment of learned persons, he was a thorough master of the Holy Scriptures, but, unlike the scholars of his day, he needed more and more the knowledge of original languages, for he knew that only such knowledge could fill certain gaps... He learned from Peter (II Peter 1:21) that interpretation of Scripture is beyond the unaided capacities of the children of men and he looked above to his master, the Holy Spirit, praying that he make him understand God's thoughts aright. And in order not to err, or lead others astray with a false picture of the Spirit, he compared Scriptural passages with each other, explaining the obscure ones with the clear ones. In order that everybody could recognize the Holy Spirit's teaching, as opposed to that of human wisdom....³⁰

Certainly it seems that Zwingli's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit as the interpreter of Scripture is the key to his concept of the clarity of Scripture. It is because the Word is the Word of God that the Spirit of God gives testimony to it and an inner apprehension of it. In Zwingli's Trinitarian understanding of the work of the Word, there is a dynamic relationship among the Father and the Son and the Spirit, all of whom find expression as God

²⁹Bromiley, op.cit., pp. 55, 57; quote on p. 57.

³⁰Myconius (cited by Courvoisier) op.cit., p. 18.

through the Word. Hence, there is not an attempt to differentiate between the Word and Scripture, for he considers the Word to be expressed through Scripture, but only when the believer apprehends the utterance of God Himself through the Spirit. The Scripture is the Word, but it does not become alive in the reader apart from the activity of God through the Holy Spirit. He does not separate between form and content, Word spoken and Word written, as some theologians attempt to do, even though he does see that the Word is more than the written content of Scripture. The Word is expressed in the external forms of speech and writing which can be apprehended rationally, but it has power and authority only when it becomes dynamically operative through the work of the Holy Spirit who applies it as the living Word.³¹ Thus, Zwingli sees no valid interpretation of the Word, whether by bishops, cardinals, popes, or councils, without the inward presentation and apprehension of the Word by the Spirit.

Bullinger's Concept of Interpretation

Heinrich Bullinger concurs with Zwingli that the true sense of Scripture may be corrupted by bringing one's own opinions and fancies to it. The Arian church did not refuse the Word of God, but they thoroughly corrupted the

³¹Ibid., pp. 55-57.

right meaning of it by their blasphemous interpretations.³² One should not interpret Scripture according to his own fantasies, but according to the mind and meaning of Him who first revealed the Scriptures (II Peter 1:20, 21). "Therefore," he says, "the true and proper sense of God's word must be taken out of the scriptures themselves, and not forcibly thrust upon the scriptures...."³³

Bullinger also believes that a knowledge of languages and the liberal sciences is an academic requisite to sound interpretation.³⁴ In this emphasis he again reflects the scholarly interpretative methods of Zwingli, his mentor and predecessor.

He feels, too, that the Word of God is not dark, but should be read of all men. God's will is to have His Word understood, therefore He spoke in the common language, and the writers of Scripture wrote in plain and easy phrases. Although Satan tends to blind the understanding, especially of unbelievers, most difficulties may be overcome by study, diligence, faith, and the help of skillful interpreters.³⁵

³² Heinrich Bullinger, "Of the Holy Catholic Church," Zwingli and Bullinger, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XXIV, Geoffrey Bromiley, ed. and trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 303.

³³ Henry Bullinger, The Decades of Henry Bullinger, I-II (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), p. 75.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

Although Bullinger presents several other principles of interpretation such as the facts that the exposition of Scripture must not be contrary to the articles of belief in the church of the Reformers, exposition should not be contrary to the love of God and our neighbor, the context should be considered, and the dark and obscure passages must be understood in the light of the clearer and more evident, the most effectual rule is, he says, the need to expound the Scriptures with a heart zealous for God and only after earnest prayer. Scripture may not be properly interpreted by a heart full of pride and vainglory, heresies and evil affections. Only the heart "which doth continually pray to God for his holy Spirit, that, as by it the scripture was revealed and inspired, so also by the same Spirit it may be expounded to the glory of God and safeguard of the faithful."³⁶ Thus, the Spirit who revealed Scripture is required to expound it properly. It is the Spirit who causes the seed of God's Word to be quickened in our hearts, and the hearing of the Word must be joined with faith. "For what will it avail to hear the word of God without faith, and without the Holy Spirit of God to work or stir inwardly in our hearts," he reasons.³⁷ His emphasis on the need for the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 66f.

inner working of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter is basic to his hermeneutic. Although all scholarly methods should be used, the interpreter does not attain to a satisfactory spiritual interpretation of Scripture by these means alone. We may most clearly conclude his position on the work of the Holy Spirit by quoting him as follows:

If therefore that the word of God do sound in our ears, and therewithal the Spirit of God do shew forth his power in our hearts, and that we in faith do truly receive the word of God, then hath the word of God a mighty force and wonderful effect in us...Let us therefore beseech our Lord God to pour into our minds his holy Spirit, by whose virtue the seed of God's word may be quickened in our hearts, to the bringing forth of much fruit to the salvation of our souls, and the glory of God our Father.³⁸

The Second Helvetic Confession

This confession, which was the composition of Bullinger, is representative of the doctrinal position of the Zurich Reformers, and the Biblical teaching of the Reformers as a whole. It is substantially a restatement and amplification of the First Helvetic Confession which was drawn up in Basle in 1536, with the help of several of Zwingli's associates, among whom were Bullinger, Myconius, and Leo Jud.³⁹ The Second Helvetic Confession was

³⁸Ibid., pp. 67, 69.

³⁹Philip Schaff, ed., The Creeds of Christendom, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), pp. 388-393.

composed by Bullinger for his own use, but it was subsequently translated and published by the Elector Frederick III.

In Chapter I, "Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God," Bullinger declares that both Testaments are the true Word of God and do not derive their authority from men. God, who spoke to the writers of Scripture, still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. It is His living voice that we hear in the Word, and in this Holy Scripture is proclaimed all that is necessary for salvation. The Scriptures give true wisdom and godliness, they give instructions for the reformation and government of churches, they instruct in all duties of piety, they confirm doctrines and confute errors (II Tim. 3:16, 17). Thus, in the Word of Scripture, the Spirit of the Father speaks (Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20).

Because its very content is spoken by God in the Scriptures and in the proclamation of preachers lawfully called, the Word of God itself is preached and received by the faithful. Thus, preaching as it rightfully is grounded in Scripture is the Word of God. At this point the Confession deals with the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the reader or hearer of the Word. Bullinger points out that although it is the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit which instructs in true religion, this inward instruction cannot be separated from the outward content of the Word

as it is preached. He thus does not separate inner apprehension of the Word from correct and sound objective exegetical and homiletical procedure. The study of the original languages and the use of sound exegetical and interpretive methods are not minimized. Even though God could illuminate whom He will without the external ministry of the Word, He has not chosen to do so. Heresies are detestable because they attempt to separate the outer statements of the Scriptures from the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. Heretics maximize the inner illumination of themselves without any reference to the outer Word of Scripture; they thus claim that new revelations and interpolations are the Word of God. Bullinger abhors this practice and insists that the Spirit speaks to us only in and through Scripture and the proclamation of the Word. Thus, the inner ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to be separated from the outward ministry of the Word in Scripture and preaching.⁴⁰

More specifically related to the theme of this study is Chapter II, "Of Interpreting the Scriptures; And of Fathers, Councils, and Traditions." Bullinger here sets forth several basic hermeneutical principles which relate primarily to his refutation of the Roman Catholic method of authoritative interpretations, but he also emphasizes the fact that irresponsible individual interpretations must

⁴⁰Ibid., vol. III, pp. 831-833.

also be rejected. First of all, he insists that the authoritative interpretations called "the meaning of the Church of Rome" cannot be forced upon all men as the "true and natural interpretation of the Scriptures." The interpretations which are orthodox are those which are taken from the Scriptures themselves as they are read in the original languages, not those which are merely based on some translation, however widely it may be used. Here he strikes a blow at the exclusive use of the Vulgate as the basis of all Roman interpretations. Bullinger realizes that translations may very well reflect the biases of the translators who then turn again to the translation to support the biases left there in the first place.⁴¹ Here is reflected the scholarly emphasis of both Zwingli and Bullinger, as well as their desire to discard human presuppositions in coming to the Word.

Next, Bullinger points out that the historical circumstances surrounding the Scripture passages must be taken into account. For God speaks within the context of history, and historical meanings must not be carelessly extracted from their original settings. This principle would call to account any method, Roman or otherwise, which attempted to abstract from the historical meaning of Scripture a sense which would do violence to the clear meaning of a passage.

⁴¹Ibid., vol. III, p. 833.

Zwingli's emphasis on the clarity of the Word of God is no doubt reflected here. The plain, historical interpretation must prevail over that which is abstracted, allegorized, and made authoritative by arbitrary ecclesiastical decisions, and the clear passages must explain the difficult ones.

Furthermore, the correct interpretation must be in accord with the rule of both faith and charity. As we have shown above, Bullinger teaches that any exposition of Scripture which is not in harmony with the expression of love toward God and one's neighbor is to be rejected. The loving and true interpretation will thus make for God's glory and man's salvation, rather than for the strengthening of the tyranny of authoritarianism.⁴²

At this point Bullinger states that even though we do not despise the interpretations of the Greek and Latin Fathers, and do not reject these secondary sources insofar as they agree with the Scriptures, we do modestly dissent from them when they are found to set forth things which differ from or are contrary to, the Scriptures. Bullinger further applies this same principle to the decrees and canons of the councils. It is interesting to note here that, although Zwingli would agree with this principle, his statement of it would probably be less moderate and balanced

⁴²Loc.cit.

in tone than Bullinger's. Where Zwingli would find a father or a council contrary to the Scriptures, he would be more likely to call them the "Annas's and Caiaphas's" than to "modestly dissent." We plainly see here, not only the difference in temperament between Zwingli and Bullinger, but also the difference of setting between the first sharp break with the Catholic Church and the more settled period of reflection as the Reformation progressed.

Bullinger refuses to be intimidated in his interpretation by the "bare testimonies of fathers or decrees of councils; much less with received customs, or with the multitude of men being of one judgment, or with prescription of long time." In matters of faith, there is no other judge than God Himself, who pronounces by the Scriptures what is true or false, what is to be followed or avoided. The judgment of spiritual men based on the Word of God is the only trustworthy guide.⁴³ This is a direct refutation of the Vincentian canon, the principle of universality which was articulated by Vincent of Lerins in the fifth century. As shown in an earlier chapter, Vincent crystallized the trend toward authoritarian interpretation by his dictum, quod ubique, quod semper, et quod ab omnibus creditum est, that is true which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all. Thus, his principles of ecumenicity, antiquity,

⁴³Ibid., vol. III, p. 834.

and consensus formed the structure of authoritative interpretation by the Catholic Church.⁴⁴ Bullinger directly refutes this ancient formula for testing orthodoxy by showing that the assemblies of priests in the Old Testament were sometimes condemned by the prophets.⁴⁵ In this regard he follows Zwingli, who points out that any attempt to conclude that an interpretation of the majority is correct merely because its interpreters are more numerous is absurd. Truth is not necessarily with the majority, but with God, who alone can teach men the correct interpretation.⁴⁶ Thus, the true test of orthodoxy is not based on antiquity or majority, but on that which is attested to by the Spirit of God.

In conclusion, it may be noted that although the Second Helvetic Confession stresses the work of the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of the Word, it does not explicitly develop the subjective work of the Spirit in the interpreter in the section on interpreting the Scriptures. However, one must read this section in the larger context of the work of both Zwingli and Bullinger, as well as with an awareness of the thought of the other Reformers. Zwingli emphasizes the need for faith

⁴⁴George E. McCracken, ed. and trans., Early Medieval Theology, Library of Christian Classics, vol. IX (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), pp. 25, 78.

⁴⁵Schaff, op.cit., vol. III, p. 834.

⁴⁶Zwingli, "Clarity and Certainty," op.cit., pp. 87-88.

in understanding true doctrine. The Word of God is clear, he says, because the Holy Spirit illuminates and guides the man of faith in interpreting it. Bullinger also emphasizes that the interpreter must approach the Scriptures only after earnest prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit in expounding the Word and quickening it to his heart. Thus, the need for the inner working of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter is important for Bullinger's hermeneutic, just as it is for Zwingli's. For the Zurich Reformers the judgment of "spiritual men" must be trusted above the ideas of the "bare testimonies of the fathers" or the "decrees of the councils."⁴⁷

Calvin's Emphasis on the Testimonium

As a theologian and expositor, John Calvin emphasizes the need for both piety and learning in the study of Scripture. He feels that the Bible could not be properly interpreted and applied without the illumination and sealing witness of the Holy Spirit. Murray thus calls him "the theologian of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁸ One of Calvin's greatest contributions to the history of doctrine is his emphasis on the new understanding of the theology of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the experience of the believer.

⁴⁷Schaff, op.cit., vol. III, p. 834.

⁴⁸John Murray, Calvin as Theologian and Expositor, (London: The Evangelical Library, 1964), pp. 10f.

This emphasis, however, has not been widely emphasized by Reformed theologians.⁴⁹ It was upon the basis of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, the testimonium spiritus sancti internum, that Calvin forms much of his doctrine of the authority and clarity of the Scriptures.

Opposition to other theories

Along with the renewal of interest in Biblical study in the Reformation came a renewed concern for the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrine. Both Luther and Calvin underscore the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Scripture and the redemptive work of Christ. Calvin teaches that an epistemology for the Christian faith could be based authoritatively only on the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of men to the truth of the Bible. This is his doctrine of the testimonium.⁵⁰

Calvin seems to have developed the doctrine of the testimonium in the face of three other epistemological

⁴⁹J. K. Parratt, "The Witness of the Holy Spirit: Calvin, the Puritans, and St. Paul," Evangelical Quarterly, vol. 41, no. 3, July-Sept., 1969, p. 161; on this subject, see W. Krusche, "Das Wirken des heiligen Geistes nach Calvin," (1957); R. S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament, (1953); F. Wendel, Calvin, the Origins and Developments of His Religious Thought, (1963, English trans.); Theo Preiss, "Das innere Zeugnis des heiligen Geistes," (Theologische Studien, 21, 1947); and Bernard Ramm, The Witness of the Spirit, (1959).

⁵⁰Richard Ray, "Witness and Word," Canadian Journal of Theology, vol. 15 (June, 1969), p. 14.

theories. First, the Roman Catholic view was that certainty of faith was given by the testimony of the infallible Church. The Church declared the Scriptures to be the Word of God. Ramm summarizes Calvin's objections to this theory in four points:

(1) The voice of the Church is the voice of man and thus rests on human authority. The voice of the Church is external to man, whereas the voice of the Spirit is an inner voice of assurance.⁵¹

(2) To say that the Church guarantees the authority of the Scriptures is to deny their majesty and autopistia. Scripture is Scripture within itself, just as black is black in itself and sugar is sweet within itself.⁵² The Scriptures witness to their divinity within themselves; they are autopistic. Calvin says:

But with regard to the question, How shall we be persuaded of its divine original, unless we have recourse to the decree of the Church? this is just if any one should inquire, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? For the Scripture exhibits as

⁵¹Bernard Ramm, The Witness of the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 14; see Institutes I, vii, 1 and I, vii, 3.

⁵²Ibid.

clear evidence of its truth, as white and black things do of their colour, or sweet and bitter things of their taste....⁵³

(3) The Church as a group of redeemed men existed before it became an institution. Therefore the Church is founded upon the prophets and apostles. The foundation of the Church is the Word of God, and not vice-versa. The Church cannot be "lord of Scripture, when Scripture is the foundation of the Church."⁵⁴

(4) The sign of the Church is the Word of God, not the presence of the Spirit, as Sadolet contended. The Romanists separated Word from Spirit, but God governs the Church by His Spirit and through the Word. The Church must thus be governed by the Word and the Spirit, and not just by a claim to the Spirit and tradition.⁵⁵

A second epistemology which Calvin opposes is that of the Enthusiasts who attempted to verify faith by direct revelation. His answer to this view has three basic points:

(1) This view errs, like the Romanist one, by separating Word from Spirit. Calvin says:

⁵³John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Library of Christian Classics, vol. XX, John T. McNeill, ed. and F. L. Battles, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), I, vii, 3.

⁵⁴Ramm, op.cit., p. 14.

⁵⁵Ibid.; see Calvin's Reply to Sadolet.

For the Lord hath established a kind of mutual connection between the certainty of his word and of his Spirit; so that our minds are filled with a solid reverence for the word, when by the light of the Spirit we are enabled therein to behold the Divine countenance.⁵⁶

It is a "detestable sacrilege" to separate the Word and the Spirit, a union which has been established by God. Revelation is not given apart from the Scriptures, for God illumines by the Spirit through the Word.⁵⁷

(2) The Enthusiasts claim to have revelations of material content; they involve the communication of knowledge. This, however, is contrary to the whole meaning of the testimonium which is not a revelation in itself, but works in connection with an already existing revelation.⁵⁸ Calvin says:

The office of the Spirit, then, which is promised to us, is not to feign new and unheard-of revelations, or to coin a new system of doctrine, which would seduce us from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers.⁵⁹

In order to profit rightly from the Spirit, then, one must diligently "read and attend to Scripture."⁶⁰

⁵⁶Institutes, I, ix, 3.

⁵⁷Ramm, op.cit., p. 15; Institutes, I, ix, 3.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Institutes, I, ix, 1.

⁶⁰Ramm, op.cit., p. 16; Institutes, I, ix, 2.

(3) In claiming to receive revelation from God independently of the Word, the Enthusiasts present an image of the Spirit's work which is not found in the Scriptures. Since the Spirit is consistent with Himself, and His actions conform to the image presented in Scripture, the spirit spoken of by the Enthusiasts is not the Holy Spirit, but a devilish spirit.⁶¹

Finally, Calvin objects to a purely rational apologetics of the faith. He does not believe that the Scriptures agree with this method, for the prophets and apostles appealed to the name of God, not rational arguments. Rational apologetics gives human certainty, when divine assurance is needed.⁶² The Christian faith is not to be propped up by human testimony or opinion; it is not founded upon human authority, but is written on the heart by the finger of God and is thus certain. Only the testimony of God Himself is effective to convert the pagan. Calvin says, "Prophecies can now be no more understood by the perspicacity of the human mind than they could at first have been composed by it . . . pray to have their genuine meaning opened to us by God."⁶⁴

⁶¹Ramm, op.cit., p. 15; Institutes, I, ix, 3.

⁶²Institutes, I, vii, 4; Ramm, Ibid., p. 13.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Institutes, I, viii, 14.

Thus he asserts that the Scripture provides the means for the knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, a knowledge which cannot be known by nature and reason. Neither power of reason, authority of the Church, nor subjective experience can provide a canon for attesting the authoritative truth of Scripture. The only valid way man can recognize the importance of the Scripture is by knowing that God Himself is its Author.⁶⁵ "Credibility of doctrine," says Calvin, "is not established until we are persuaded beyond doubt that God is its Author."⁶⁶ This knowledge comes not through the ordinary mental processes which are used to determine the author of a book, but by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Holy Spirit certifies the divine origin of Scripture.⁶⁷ No amount of glossae or scholia can make the Scripture the instrument which dispenses the illumination of the Spirit to believers. Calvin, along with Luther, opens a new path to the knowledge and authority of the Scriptures. Neither the Alexandrian nor Antiochene methods, the Augustinian Four-fold sense, nor the Quadrige of the Scholastics can suffice.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁵Ray, op.cit., p. 15.

⁶⁶Institutes, I, vii, 4.

⁶⁷Ray, op.cit., p. 15.

⁶⁸T. D. Parker, "The Interpretation of Scripture: I. A Comparison of Calvin and Luther on Galatians," Interpretation, vol. 17 (January, 1963), pp. 62ff.

testimonium is basic for a right conception of the Bible.

Presentation of Calvin's doctrine

Scripture has its authority from God. In contrast to the Romanist doctrine of ecclesiastical authority, Calvin asserts that the authority of Scripture is derived not from the Church but from the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. He says, "But a most pernicious error widely prevails that Scripture has only so much weight as is conceded to it by the consent of the church."⁶⁹ He disputes this by pointing out that the Bible is the sole authority which must rule the life of the Church. There is no other source of authority, as Wallace says:

This means that the Scripture is set over the Church by God as the authority that must be allowed full freedom to rule the life of the Church . . . It was through the Word that the Church was brought into being; it is through the same Word always being given afresh that the Church is continually renewed in its life and preserved as a Church⁷⁰

Thus although it is the duty of the Church to recognize the authenticity of the Scriptures, the Church

⁶⁹Institutes, I, vii, 1.

⁷⁰Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans', 1957), pp. 99f.

does not bestow authority on them.⁷¹ It is only by being persuaded that God is the Author of the Scriptures that one is convinced of their authenticity. The highest proof, then, of Scripture is the fact that God speaks personally in it. This proof is given validity by the testimonium. Calvin says:

. . . the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.⁷²

Scripture is thus self-authenticating, αὐτόπιστον, and is not subject to the authority of the Church nor does it rest merely on rational proofs. It is sealed upon the heart by the Spirit's inward testimony that its word is the Word of God.⁷³

The Holy Spirit works with the Word. The appeal to the Holy Spirit by the fanatics is altogether erroneous, Calvin declares. These men are carried away with frenzy as they despise what they call the "dead and killing letter." They are carried away by another spirit than that of Christ. They tear asunder the bond

⁷¹Institutes, I, vii, 2.

⁷²Institutes, I, vii, 4.

⁷³Institutes, I, vii, 5; see also Parratt, op.cit., p. 162.

between God's Spirit and His Word. Even though the prophets and apostles were uniquely endowed with the Spirit, they did not forsake their study of and dependence upon the Word. The Holy Spirit does not have the task of inventing "new and unheard-of revelations," or of developing new doctrines which lead us away from the Gospel. Instead, the Spirit is to seal our minds with the doctrine commended in the Gospel.⁷⁴ It is the role of the Spirit to confirm the Word which He has already dispensed to the prophets and apostles. Thus the Spirit confirms and seals the Word, and it is in and through the Word that the illumination of the Holy Spirit is dispensed.⁷⁵

Calvin thus defines the inseparable relationship which exists between the Word and the Spirit. The Word of God is made effective by the Holy Spirit's working in the hearts of the hearers to create faith and remove the inward veil from their minds so that they may receive and understand the Word.⁷⁶ Calvin says, ". . . Intelligit Propheta donec velum ex oculis nostris abstulerit, nos

⁷⁴Institutes, I, ix, 1.

⁷⁵Institutes, I, ix, 3.

⁷⁶Wallace, op.cit., pp. 128f.

caecutire in clara luce."⁷⁷ Wallace points out that although Calvin repudiates any attempt to make contact with the Holy Spirit apart from the Word of God, the external voice of the Word strikes the ear to no purpose unless Christ speaks to the heart by the Spirit and opens it so that the Word may be received in faith.⁷⁸ Before the Word can change us, it must touch us to the quick and correct our slowness of apprehension.⁷⁹

"Haec solida est fidelium perfectio, dum cordibus eorum insculpit Deus quod voce ostendit rectum esse."⁸⁰

Christ has joined together the Spirit and the Word, and any spirit that introduces a new doctrine or revelation apart from the Gospel is a deceiving spirit and not Christ's Spirit.⁸¹ Thus the testimony of the Holy Spirit is intimately bound up with the person of Christ and the mediation of salvation to the believer. The Holy Spirit testifies to the Gospel alone, and to

⁷⁷ Calvin's Commentary on Ps. 119:17, Corpus Reformatorum, 32:221 "The prophet here means that we are blind amid the clearest light, until He remove the veil from our eyes."

⁷⁸ Wallace, op.cit., p. 129; Comm. on John 5:25, Corp. Ref. 47:117.

⁷⁹ Sermon on I Tim. 2:3-5; Corp. Ref., 52:155; Comm. on Ps. 119:124, Corp. Ref., 32:270.

⁸⁰ Comm. on Ps. 119:113, Corp. Ref., 32:275, "Herein consists the completeness of the faithful, in that God engraves on their hearts what He shows by His Word to be right."

⁸¹ Wallace, op.cit., p. 130; Comm. on John 14:25, Corp. Ref. 47:335.

no other message.⁸² This secret testimony of the Spirit "makes the Word of God come alive for the individual," but it does not add a new revelation to the word of the Gospel. It certifies to the believer the truth that is already there,⁸³ and confirms within us what God promises by His Word.⁸⁴ It thus quickens not any word, but only the Word of Scripture.⁸⁵

Calvin emphasizes that the Scriptures bear witness to their own authority by the testimonium of the Holy Spirit in the believer. This emphasis poses the problem of understanding how the Scriptures may be authoritative in speaking to the non-believer. It seems that, for Calvin, their autopistic nature is evident only to the one who approaches them in faith. The problem is rendered more complicated by his refusal to allow the authority of Scripture to have any rational base. One must believe in order to be convicted by Scripture.

His understanding of Word and Spirit, however, is a strong point in his favor. Contrary to the subjectivism

⁸²Parratt, op.cit., p. 161; Institutes, I, ix, 1.

⁸³Ibid., p. 162.

⁸⁴Paul T. Fuhrmann, "Calvin, The Expositor of Scripture," Interpretation, vol. 6 (April, 1952), pp. 195f.

⁸⁵Wallace, op.cit., p. 98.

of the Enthusiasts, Calvin refuses to allow any separate content in the Spirit's witness. What is communicated by the Spirit is the doctrine of Christ in the Word. The testimonium, then, is not the addition of cognitive content to the Word, but the illumination of that content of divine authority which cannot be fully comprehended by the veiled mind of the natural man.

Conclusion

We see, then, that in the hermeneutics of both Calvin and the Zurich Reformers there is the emphasis on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter of Scripture. They do not minimize responsible exegetical work, nor do they separate Word from Spirit. They are not, however, essentially Humanist in their approach to the Word of God. In this respect they reflect the same hermeneutical emphases as Luther, and with him, they restore the grammatical-historical approach to Biblical interpretation. Not since Antioch and Theodore of Mopsuestia, with the possible exceptions of Nicholas of Lyra and Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, had this emphasis had any appreciable influence on Biblical interpretation. With the Reformers, a new day dawned in hermeneutics. The Church must take care that these insights are not lost.

SECTION III

CHAPTER VII

THE SUBJECTIVE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BARTH'S HERMENEUTICS

In the study of the hermeneutics of Martin Luther, we wish to note the contemporary relevance of some of his principles in the hermeneutics of twentieth-century scholars. One point of contact may certainly be found in the relationship between Luther's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture and the emphasis on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation in the theology of Karl Barth.

The work of the Spirit's witness is an emphasis to which Barth seems to give more prominence in his earlier years.¹ Nevertheless, although his later trend away from subjectivism of any sort in theology demands that the doctrine of the Spirit's witness be stated in a more cautious way, it certainly remains an important area for consideration. The primary sections where he deals with this issue are in the Church Dogmatics I, 1, pages 213-283 and 513-560; I, 2, pages 203-280 and 457-538; and IV, 4, pages

¹Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Inspiration," Journal of Transactions of the Victoria Institute, LXXXVII, 1955, p. 80.

110-111, in the "Fragment on Baptism," where Barth offers a brief exposition of his hermeneutical method.

In pursuing Barth's teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit in interpretation, it might be helpful to look first of all at his doctrine of inspiration. His emphasis on the involvement of the reader in the process of inspiration and revelation is basic to his understanding of the hermeneutical task in relationship both to the work of the Spirit and also to the exegetical and historical work of the interpreter.

It should be understood at this point that Barth sees the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter as taking place within the community of faith, the Church. The subjective reality of revelation is fulfilled in a temporal encounter and decision, for "in Him (Christ) the Church is the wholly concrete area of the subjective reality of revelation." Thus, for Barth, extra ecclesiam nulla salus is a very real truth.² The task of the Church is to proclaim the Word of God, and it has the further task of assuring reasonable certainty that the Word of God which it proclaims and hears is truly the Word of God. At this point he reflects an important concern of Luther.³ Within the context of the

²Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I, 2, G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, trans. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), pp. 219-220; (hereafter Church Dogmatics referred to as CD).

³Herbert Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 41-42; cf. CD I, 1, 212-220.

Church, then, the interpreter proceeds with his task with the aid of his exegetical tools and the Holy Spirit in the confidence that Holy Scripture will become God's Word to him by the Spirit.

Barth's Doctrine of the Inspiration of Scripture

At the beginning of his section on Holy Scripture, Barth presents this synopsis of the "Word of God for the Church:"

The Word of God is God Himself in Holy Scripture. For God once spoke as Lord to Moses and the prophets, to the Evangelists and apostles. And now through their written word He speaks as the same Lord to His Church. Scripture is holy and the Word of God, because by the Holy Spirit it became and will become to the Church a witness to divine revelation.⁴

Scripture as the Witness to Revelation

The concept that Scripture is a witness to revelation necessitates a distinction between revelation and the Bible per se. Barth says:

A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses. This corresponds with the facts upon which the truth of the whole proposition is based. In the Bible we meet with human words written in human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we heard of the lordship of the triune God. Therefore when we have to do with the Bible, we have to do primarily with this means, with these words, with the witness which as such is not itself revelation, but only--and this is the limitation--the witness to it.⁵

⁴CD, I, 2, p. 457.

⁵CD, I, 2, p. 463.

Thus although the Bible and revelation are distinct, they are also a unity because revelation is the basis, content, and object of Scripture. The prophets and apostles who were the direct recipients of revelation mediate it to us through the Bible. Without the witness of these recipients, we could know nothing of God's revelation. The written word, then, enables us to hear and understand revelation; there is an indirect identity between revelation and the Bible, or, as Luther says, "The Bible holdeth God's Word."⁶

This distinction between revelation and the Bible leads to Barth's concept of "indirect revelation." Since the revelation which comes to us by way of the prophets and the apostles is indirect, there must be a way for the "Deus dixit" and the "Paulus dixit" to become one.⁷ This happens in the event of God's Word. Human experience is not constitutive for the divine event. Only in the sovereignty of His grace, Ubi et quando visum est Deo, does God's revelation occur through His Word.⁸

The reception of the Word of God by man in its divinity and humanity is an outgrowth of the witness character of the Bible. Since the Bible as the witness of revelation is

⁶CD, I, 2, pp. 463f; I, 2, p. 508.

⁷Klaas Runia, Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 22, 46.

⁸Ibid.; cf. CD I, 2, p. 470.

given to us as a written word, a word written by men like ourselves, we can read and understand it in the same way that we understand other writings. This demands that it be read and understood "historically" without ignoring its concrete humanity and worldly form. By inquiring into the word that is written, and by exploring its linguistic and factual ramifications, we can understand it.⁹ Hearing God's revelation comes about by perceiving the message of revelation through the words of man. The hermeneutical principles which must be applied for a sound exposition of Scripture are the same linguistic procedures used to understand the significance of any other human word. "There is no such thing as a special biblical hermeneutics," says Barth.¹⁰

The difference between the perception of the Word of God as mediated through human words and speech and any other word of man lies in the content and message beyond the words. As Bromiley says, "It is not possible to expound the Bible simply in the void, or without a knowledge or awareness of the thing revealed."¹¹ One must be gripped by the subject-matter in order to investigate properly even the humanity of the word given to us. If we adhere to the comical doctrine that the true exegete has no presuppositions, we will

⁹CD, I, 2, pp. 463-465.

¹⁰CD, I, 2, p. 466.

¹¹Bromiley, op.cit., p. 69.

completely and effectively deny the sovereign freedom of the subject-matter to impose itself upon us in its truly historical sense.¹² We cannot approach the Bible with the scientific impartiality and detachment with which one studies a scientific or historical text-book, says Barth. The Bible as God's Word, although it is communicated as any other word, grips and masters and instructs the reader who gives himself up to it.¹³

Barth's emphasis at this point is commendable, for he attempts to free Biblical exposition from the impositions of non-Biblical dogmas and presuppositions such as the scholastic aristotelianism or contemporary philosophical and scientific presuppositions. We must seek the historical and plain sense of the Bible in its appropriate context.¹⁴ Such an attempt to arrive at an objective rendering of the text is reminiscent of Luther.

However, Barth's emphasis on the distinctness of the Bible and revelation, and his tendency to reject any ontic quality in the Bible in favor of a purely activistic "witness to revelation" concept is hardly a happy one. Although the New Testament does emphasize the witness function of the apostolate and the disciples, these witnesses are not

¹²CD, I, 2, p. 470.

¹³Bromiley, op.cit., p. 69.

¹⁴Ibid.

altogether separated from the revelation to which they bear witness. Jesus emphasizes that every reaction to their message is the same as a reaction to Himself (Luke 10:16). These witnesses are "revelational witnesses." They "belong to the revelation. Their speaking and writing is revelation," notes Runia.¹⁵ The Holy Spirit in His witness identifies Himself with the human witnesses, so that their witness is included in the revelation and is not just a witness to it.¹⁶ Although Barth emphasizes the concept of the particularity of revelation, he does not satisfactorily solve the dichotomy between the Scripture and revelation.

In the Old Testament as well, the prophets are not simply provided with an impulse by the Holy Spirit, but are actually borne along by Him. The message which they spoke was the message of God, "Thus saith the Lord...."¹⁷ This is not to imply that the Holy Spirit is "locked up" in the Bible so that there results a petrification of His witness and activity. His sovereignty is in no way questioned or diminished, for the initiative always lies with Him.¹⁸ In dynamic relationship with the Word and the human witness,

¹⁵Runia, op.cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 36-37; cf. Ridderbos, Heilsgeschiedenis en Heilige Schrift, p. 119.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 37, 52.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 38.

the Word He once spoke He is still speaking, and the revelation which once occurred is still alive in His activity of communication.

Scripture as the Word of God

In hearing Holy Scripture as a witness to God's revelation, we hear more than the human expression of this witness. We hear the very Word of God. This Word of God is the very Scripture which the church has discovered and acknowledged as canonical Scripture. No man can choose any writing to be the witness to God's revelation except those which have been accepted into the Church's canon. This canon has not been formed by any will of the Church, for it only confirms and establishes that witness which has already been formed and given.¹⁹ Barth recognizes the limitations of the Church's human knowledge in regard to the canon, however. Because the Church is human and fallible, it is possible that its earlier decisions may prove to be wrong. Therefore the history of the canon remains open in view of the limited possibility of the discovery of other canonical books. The self-witness of Scripture itself in the revelation which underlies and controls the Church is the final attestation of the canonicity of these witnesses of revelation.²⁰ Thus, the question of the canon is based upon the

¹⁹CD, I, 2, p. 473.

²⁰CD, I, 2, p. 474; Bromiley, op.cit., pp. 70-71.

witness which it gives to the faith of the Church. It is finally the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, the testimonium, which gives certainty to the canon, as Barth quotes from the Gallic Confession:

Nous cognoissons ces livres estre canoniques et reigletres certaine de nostre foy: non tant le commun accord et consentment de l'eglise, que par le tesmoignage et interieure persuasion du saint esprit, qui les nous faict discerner d'avec les autres livres Ecclesiastiques. Sur lesquels (encores qu'ilz soyent utiles) on ne peut fonder aucun article de foy (Conf. Gallic., 1559, Art.4).²¹

This emphasis on the testimonium in regard to the canon does not, however, preclude the importance of the judgment of the Church. For Barth, any change in the constitution of the canon can legitimately and meaningfully take place only as an action of the Church. An individual must always listen to the judgment of the Church, for it "radically precedes as such the judgment of the individual, even if it is the judgment of quite a number of individuals who have to be reckoned with seriously in the Church."²²

The Scripture with which the Church is concerned in the canon is the witness of both the Old and New Testaments, "the witness of the expectations and the recollection, the witness of the preparation and the accomplishment of the revelation achieved in Jesus Christ."²³ Thus the Scriptures

²¹CD, I, 2, pp. 473f.

²²CD, I, 2, pp. 478f.

²³CD, I, 2, p. 481.

as the living Word of God give to the Church a unity of God's revelation which centers in Jesus Christ from the Old Testament perspective of expectation to the New Testament one of recollection. In this pointing to Christ in both expectation and recollection, the Scriptures create faith and show themselves to be Holy Scripture as well as human words.²⁴

Thus the function of Scripture as seen in the Bible itself is to be a witness to Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God. It bases this incarnational witness upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ as attested by the Holy Spirit. The human words of the Bible as empowered both in writing and understanding by the Spirit thus become the Word of God. The Scripture is therefore seen as the Word of God because of the experience of the apostles and prophets in receiving God's revelation. These men bore witness to this revelation in their writings (I John 1), and these accounts as the true words of Scripture were not drawn from sources in the history of religions, but from the historical revelation of God. These men are thus living documents of God's revelation, and the Church is correct in recognizing only their writings as true Scripture and witnesses to the Word of God.²⁵ Barth further stresses the primary character

²⁴Bromiley, op.cit., p. 71.

²⁵CD, I, 2, pp. 486, 495.

of these prophets and apostles as follows:

They are the witnesses of the Word. To be more precise, they are its primary witnesses, because they are called directly by the Word to be its hearers, and they are appointed for its communication and verification to other men. These men are the biblical witnesses of the Word, the prophetic men of the Old Testament and the apostolic men of the New. They were contemporaries of the history in which God established his covenant with men. In fact, they became contemporary witnesses by virtue of what they saw and heard of this history.²⁶

In their function as witnesses, these men performed a dual role. Passively, they saw and heard God's revelation in a unique way. The unique quality of their experiences is expressed in I John 1:1f, and in Numbers 12:1-16. Actively, they were compelled to proclaim those things which they had seen and heard. The very fact that God speaks to certain men involves a commission that they should in turn speak His words; however, only those who have heard His Word are able to speak it. The content of their words is derived from the content of His Word (II Cor. 3:4f; Rom. 15:18; II Cor. 13:3; I Cor. 9:16). In summary, Barth says, "That is why in the Act and Epistles the preaching of the apostles is often regarded as equivalent to the Word of God itself."²⁷ Thus Barth attempts to overcome the problem of separating the Bible and revelation, but is only partially successful.

²⁶Karl Barth, Evangelical Theology: An Introduction (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), p. 26.

²⁷CD, I, 2, pp. 490f; cf. pp. 495ff.

This is not to say that there is a direct identity between the human word of Scripture and the divine Word of God, for there cannot be a transmutation of the human into the divine. In its function as proclamation, however, Holy Scripture as the word of man becomes the sign of the Word of God, which is the thing itself. In the indirect identity of the sign with the thing signified, the Word of God as the thing itself is present and active in the sign, the word of Scripture.²⁸

Barth likens the identity, yet distinctness, of the Word of God with the Holy Scripture to the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. The dual nature of the Scriptures is an analogue of the incarnation. They are not divine only, nor human only, nor a mixture, nor a tertium quid, although the divine element is primary. "But in its own way and degree it is very God and very man, i.e., a witness of revelation which itself belongs to revelation, and historically a very human literary document."²⁹ Barth's concept of the inspiration of Scripture is quite helpful in elucidating its relationship to the Word of God. He shows that Scripture has been and will be the Word of God on the basis of II Timothy 3:14-17, and II Peter 1:19-21. Still emphasizing the concepts of recollection and expectation, he notes

²⁸CD, I, 2, pp. 499-501; cf. p. 492.

²⁹CD, I, 2, p. 501.

that Paul admonishes Timothy to remember the significance which the Scriptures have had for him in the past, and to rest on the assurance of the meaning they will have for him in the future. Both of these emphases are centered around the clause, "All Scripture, both recollection and expectation, is given and filled by the Spirit of God."³⁰

In the passage from II Peter, Barth again emphasizes the recollection-expectation motif. In the light of the visual witness to the "greatness" of Christ, we look backward at the prophetic word and take heed of the expectation of the dawning of the daystar in our hearts.³¹

Barth concludes that these prophets all spoke as they were "moved by the Holy Ghost," thus:

The decisive center to which the two passages point is in both instances indicated by a reference to the Holy Spirit, and indeed in such a way that He is described as the real author of what is stated or written in Scripture.³²

As witnesses to the revelation, then, these prophets and apostles spoke under the commission of Jesus Christ although they spoke through their own personalities, "they speak as auctores secundarii." Their speaking was...

...placed under the auctoritas primaria, the lordship of God, was surrounded and controlled and impelled by the Holy Spirit, and became an attitude

³⁰CD, I, 2, p. 504.

³¹CD, I, 2, p. 504.

³²CD, I, 2, p. 505.

of obedience in virtue of its direct relationship to divine revelation--that was their theopneustia.³³

Thus the inspiration of these witnesses is based on their obedience to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Their voices have reproduced the voice of God, and we can hear His voice only through their voices. The Holy Spirit is therefore the author of their entire message, and since He inspires them, this theopneustia extends to their writings:

...we cannot make any essential distinction between the thinking and speaking of the prophets and apostles and their writing, either in the sense in which many attempts have been made recently to limit inspiration to their thinking and speaking, or even to the prophetic experience which precedes and underlies their thinking and speaking....³⁴

A further emphasis in Barth's concept of inspiration is the need for a continual repetition of the Holy Spirit's inspiration in the reader of Scripture:

The Bible is not the Word of God on earth in the same way as Jesus Christ, very God and very man, is that Word in heaven...The act in which He became the Word of God in His humanity requires neither repetition nor confirmation...He is revealed only in the sign of His humanity, and especially in the witness of His prophets and apostles. But by nature these signs are not heavenly-human, but earthly--and temporal--human. Therefore the act of their institution as signs requires repetition and confirmation.³⁵

The Holy Spirit thus needs continually to reveal Christ in

³³CD, I, 2, p. 505.

³⁴CD, I, 2, p. 505; cf. Runia, op.cit., p. 138.

³⁵CD, I, 2, p. 513.

the Bible to the Church. The readers and listeners need the same work of the Holy Spirit which was effected in the original witnesses themselves. In this work of the Spirit, the Bible is continually linked to the Word of God. At this point, Barth reflects the emphasis of Luther on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the reader. Like Luther, Barth points out that the Holy Spirit both reveals and interprets Scripture.³⁶

The relationship of the Bible to the Word of God is further elucidated in Barth's emphasis on the three forms of the Word. The perichoresis of the three forms of the Word of God is the true analogy of the Trinity. Revelation, Scripture, and proclamation as special forms of the Word are related to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the first form, revelation, which establishes the other two, and it is mediated to us through Scripture and proclamation. Since proclamation rests upon the recollection of revelation recorded in the Bible, and since as the Bible attests revelation, it is no less the Word of God than revelation itself, both proclamation and Scripture are the Word of God. Both summarizes the mutual relationships of these forms of the Word thus:

The revealed Word of God we know only from the Scripture adopted by Church proclamation, or from Church proclamation based in Scripture.

³⁶ CD, I, 2, p. 513; cf. Bromiley, op.cit., p. 75; CD, I, 2, p. 508.

The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which makes proclamation possible, or through the proclamation made possible by revelation.

The proclaimed Word of God we know only by knowing the revelation attested through Scripture, or by knowing the Scripture which attests revelation.³⁷

In this emphasis, Barth reflects Luther's emphasis on the unity and coherence of the three forms. Barth notes that in the Dictata super Psalterium (1513-1516) Luther says in his comments on Psalm 45:2, "Quod verbum Dei triplici modo dicitur." First, "There is a speaking by God per verbum externum et linguam ad aures hominum," the literal speaking of the Old Testament prophets and patriarchs. Second, there is the Word of God spoken through the Spirit to the saints, namely in His Son. Thirdly, there is the Word which God the Father speaks to Himself and the saints in eternal glory. Although Luther did not fully develop the Trinitarian analogy in regard to these forms, he saw the relationships between them, and taught that inspiration of Scripture was the "freezing up" of the connection between Scripture and revelation.³⁸ Thus the work of the Spirit in the three forms of the Word of God requires that they be understood not separately, but in mutual interrelationship.

³⁷CD, I, 1, p. 136.

³⁸CD, I, 1, pp. 137-139.

In his exposition on II Cor. 3:4-18, Barth points out that the reader of Scripture cannot understand it apart from the Holy Spirit's working in him. In this passage, Paul prefers to the way the Jews read the Old Testament with a veil upon their hearts (v. 15). Paul does not in any way minimize Scripture when he says that "the letter kills but the Spirit gives life." He points to the deadness of the gramma in order to emphasize the ministry of the Spirit. Barth provides here a basis for the similarity to Luther's emphasis on the inner and the outer Word. It is the work of the Spirit to unveil the heart so that the inner Word may be understood. Barth says:

For in 2 Cor. 3 everything depends on the fact that without this work of the Spirit Scripture is veiled, however great its glory may be and whatever its origin.³⁹

In I Corinthians 2:6-16, Barth underlines the fact that Paul testifies that the "hidden wisdom" of which he speaks was first of all revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. Paul shows that such wisdom cannot be known by the ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος for it is foolishness to him. He says:

It is only spiritually, i.e., on the basis of the same Spirit, by which he can know and therefore speak about these benefits, that they can be known and therefore received.⁴⁰

Thus the man who is endowed with the Spirit and enlightened

³⁹CD, I, 2, p. 515.

⁴⁰CD, I, 2, p. 516; cf. Runia, op.cit., p. 140.

and led by the Spirit, the πνευματικός, can hear and understand what the witnesses who were inspired by the same Spirit have said. The same Spirit who originally created the witness now bears witness to those who hear and read the Bible. These two elements, the self-disclosure of God to the witnesses and to the readers, are the theopneustia.⁴¹ Thus the Word of God becomes knowable by making itself knowable through the work of the Holy Spirit in man, and the Word comes to him forever new in the power of the Holy Spirit, illuminating the mind and sanctifying his will.⁴²

In conclusion, we believe that Barth's emphasis on the primacy of the Biblical witnesses and of the inspired nature of their witness is commendable. His emphasis on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the reader is also a sound one, and in harmony with the emphases of both Luther and Calvin. On the other hand, his distinction between the Word of God and Scripture as the witness of revelation is more tenuous. The problem seems to lie in his actualistic concept of Scripture itself. Rather than to allow an ontic relationship to exist between the Word and the Bible, Barth insists on emphasizing the subjective element of the witness character of Scripture to the extent that Scripture becomes the Word of God only at such time as the Holy Spirit

⁴¹CD, I, 2, p. 516.

⁴²Hartwell, op.cit., pp. 65-66; cf. CD, I, 1, pp. 213ff, 259.

completes the circuit of inspiration in the hearer or reader. Inspiration is never a quality of the records of the witnesses in and of themselves, but is predominantly a functional or actualistic relationship. If one pushes this concept further, it would seem that the proclamations of the witnesses are not inspired per se, and thus not the Word of God unless they are heard and understood. If the writings of inspired men accurately portray the experience of the writer, the writings themselves should reflect this reality by an "inspiredness" of their own,⁴³ although obviously not in abstraction or detachment from God.

Furthermore, Barth's equation of inspiration with illumination is hardly justifiable in the light of both biblical and historical usage.⁴⁴ It is quite true to say that the Bible is not the Word of God for me until I am illumined by the Holy Spirit. But my relationship to the Word of God as the Bible does not in any way affect the ontological existence of the Bible as the Word of God given to inspired witnesses. Barth's concept of the Word pro me is in danger of negating the objective meaning of the Word. The concept of pro me for Luther consisted of illuminating the objective meaning of Scripture to the individual heart, and not of any hesitancy of accepting the initial objectivity of the initially inspired Word.

⁴³Bromiley, op.cit., p. 77.

⁴⁴Runia, op.cit., pp. 146ff.

Barth does not, however, detach Scripture from the Holy Spirit and view it independently. He does retain the relationship between Word and Spirit, and does not speculate whether, in the hypothetical sense, Scripture could be ontologically separated from the Spirit. It is in fact not separate, and theology deals with facts, not hypotheses. Although Barth may be weak in his emphasis on the inspired nature of the Bible per se, he does not make an absolute ontological separation between Word and Spirit. He cannot do so in view of his understanding of the threefold nature of the Word of God.

Barth's Concept of the
Subjective Experience of Revelation

Although God speaks to man by the Word of God, the Son, it is only the Holy Spirit who can enable man to hear the Word of God.⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit's work, however, is not to add a second revelation to the primary, objective revelation of God in Jesus Christ to our hearts.⁴⁶ How then, is his work accomplished?

The knowability of the Word of God

Because of man's sin and fallenness, he is incapable of knowing God and the Word of God finds no point of contact in him. Man has no capacity for the Word of God,

⁴⁵CD, I, 1, p. 468.

⁴⁶CD, I, 2, pp. 238ff.

because the image of God in him has been ruined. The humanity and personality of this sinful man has thus no conformity with the Word of God so that man is helpless in his sin.⁴⁷

Only in the event of faith does a real knowledge of the Word of God become possible. This faith, however, is not a possibility which man contributes, but it has its unconditioned origin independent of any innate human characteristics. It has no other source except the Word of God.⁴⁸ In faith, through the initiative of the Word of God itself, man can acknowledge and truly experience the Word, and this reality of faith is lent to man by God solely for this purpose. The result of this faith is a conformity of man with God, "an adaptation of man to the Word of God. By really apprehending the Word of God in faith he is actually made fit to apprehend it."⁴⁹ The image of God in man which constitutes the point of contact for the Word of God is awakened and "restored," and this new rectitudo is now real as man's possibility for the Word of God, and in faith a new point of contact is established. This new "conformity with God" is to be understood as the analogia fidei, "the correspondence of the thing known with the knowing.... of

⁴⁷CD, I, 1, pp. 272f.

⁴⁸CD, I, 1, pp. 261, 263, 271.

⁴⁹CD, I, 1, pp. 272-273.

the word of God with the words of man in thought and in speech." This is not to be confused, however, with the Catholic analogia entis, which is for Barth an analogy surveyed from the subjective standpoint of the onlooker and is primarily anthropocentric.⁵⁰

Thus for man in faith the Word of God is knowable. The image of God is restored in Christ so that man can hear the Word of God. In faith the Word is in man and man in the Word.

In faith man is conformed with God, i.e. capable of apprehending the Word of God, capable in his own decision of so corresponding with God's decision made about him in the Word, that the Word of God is now the Word heard by him, he himself is now the man addressed by this Word... the statement about the indwelling of Christ which takes place in faith may not be converted into an anthropological statement.⁵¹

In the miracle of this mutual involution of the Word and man, man's consciousness is opened up from above by the gift of God, the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon man makes faith real and the analogia fidei possible. Thus the Word of God makes itself knowable by the Holy Spirit, God's miracle on and in us.⁵²

In his magnificent chapter, "God the Holy Spirit," Barth further elaborates on the work of the Holy Spirit in setting man free from the bonds of his spiritual ignorance.

⁵⁰CD, I, 1, pp. 274, 279.

⁵¹CD, I, 1, pp. 275-276.

⁵²CD, I, 1, pp. 281ff., pp. 253ff.

He says:

The one God reveals Himself according to Scripture as the Redeemer, i.e. as the Lord who sets us free. As such He is the Holy Spirit, by receiving whom we become the children of God, because, as the Spirit of the love of God the Father and God the Son, He is so previously in Himself.⁵³

The revelation of the Word of God is manifest objectively in Jesus Christ, and this revelation is communicated subjectively to man through the Holy Spirit. Where the Spirit who is the Lord (II Cor. 3:17) is, there is freedom from the masking of the heart, there is freedom to see and hear.⁵⁴

Through this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then, man is guaranteed personal participation in revelation. The act of the Holy Spirit is God's yea to His Word spoken on our behalf. By this man knows that the revelation is for him. The mystery of the Word of God thus exists for man "in the Holy Spirit." By having the Spirit which "dwelleth in us" (Rom. 8:9, 11), we can testify that we have "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6:5). The Spirit "helpeth our infirmities" and "maketh intercession for us." Therefore, because and insofar as man receives the Holy Spirit, he is a temple of God (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16). Being "in the Spirit" is thus the subjective correlate of the objective relationship of ἐν

⁵³CD, I, 1, p. 513.

⁵⁴CD, I, 1, pp. 515-517.

Χριστῷ.⁵⁵

In the Holy Spirit then, man is free to speak of Christ and to proclaim the Word of God. A new ability and capacity has been added to him as the addressee of revelation, and homo peccator becomes capax verbi divini. In contrast to the deaf ears of the Jews, the believer is free to hear rightly the Word and to have God as his Lord. He is free to be God's child and to have faith by receiving the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶

The Holy Spirit the subjective reality of revelation

Bearing in mind that God is free for man in Jesus Christ, Barth proceeds to give in 16, "The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit," an amplification of the concept that man is free for God in the Holy Spirit. He sees the Holy Spirit as the Lord, the Redeemer, who makes man free for God. His proposition for the paragraph is as follows:

According to Holy Scripture God's revelation occurs in our enlightenment by the Holy Spirit of God to a knowledge of His Word. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is God's revelation. In the reality of this event consists our freedom to be the children of God and to know and love and praise Him in His revelation.⁵⁷

This act of being revealed through the Spirit cannot be separated from the doctrine of the Trinity, for the Holy

⁵⁵CD, I, 1, p. 519.

⁵⁶CD, I, 1, pp. 522ff.

⁵⁷CD, I, 2, p. 203; cf. Hartwell, Ibid., p. 83.

Spirit even in His work within man, the subject of revelation, maintains His essential identity with the Father and the Son. Thus the only answer to the How of God's revealedness of His own presence to man is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This is the "subjective reality of revelation" and in this reality we find the answer as to what freedom of man's enables him to receive God's revelation.⁵⁸

Barth shows that this freedom of man for God must be created by God in the act of His revelation and given to man. This freedom for man originates in God's freedom, for the fact that God's revelation reaches man can never be explained from the human side. Thus the question remains as to how man's freedom becomes real. This question must be answered before we can discuss how this freedom is possible. Barth argues, therefore, from reality to possibility; he assumes the reality of the Spirit's outpouring as attested by Scripture before he inquires into the possibility as to how it occurs.⁵⁹

In explicating the nature of the Holy Spirit as subjective reality of revelation, Barth shows that as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit we have our being through Christ and in the Church, that we are the recipients

⁵⁸CD, I, 2, pp. 203-204.

⁵⁹CD, I, 2, p. 204f; Hartwell, Ibid., p. 83f.

of the divine testimonies, and that as recipients of them, we are the children of God.⁶⁰

First of all, when God acts upon man through His Holy Spirit to make him a recipient of His revelation, He does so in a definite area, in the Church. In the community of those who have heard and confessed that they are God's in Christ, the reception of revelation occurs. God does not speak in isolation, but to those whose oneness in Christ results in oneness with each other. As Luther says:

For firstly He hath a special community in the world, which is the mother that begetteth and supporteth every Christian by the Word of God which He revealeth and plieth, lightening and kindling hearts that they grasp it, adopt it, cling thereto and abide thereby (WA 30:1, 188, 22).

And also:

Therefore thoso would find Christ must first find the Churches. How would we know where Christ and His faith were, if we wot not where His faithful are... for outwith the Christian Church is no truth, no Christ, no blessedness (Pred. ub. Luc. 2:15f., Kirchenpost., 1522, WA 10:1, 140,8).⁶¹

Neither Luther nor Barth means that one must unite with apostasy or with those who come together to form their own doctrines apart from the Word. Neither do they mean extra ecclesiam nulla salus in the Roman Catholic sense. They do mean that the Church has no reality or existence apart from Jesus Christ, and it is in this area and among

⁶⁰CD, I, 2, p. 242.

⁶¹CD, I, 2, pp. 212f; note pp. 210ff.

those whom Christ calls His own that reception of revelation is achieved.⁶² This dependence upon Christ, or life for Jesus Christ's sake, is the reality of the Church and the subjective reality of revelation. There can be no reality of revelation apart from this dependence upon the Word.⁶³ Since the life of the Church is dependent on the Word, it is primarily a life of community centered in the Word, and this congregation is the subjective reality, the context in which the revelation is received. Thus in belonging to Christ we belong to all in Him for His sake and thus we form an indivisible whole.⁶⁴ Furthermore, this life of the Church, the subjective reality of revelation, is divine and human, eternal and temporal, and therefore invisible and visible. It is both divinely centered in Jesus Christ and historically expressed in the world. Thus for Barth:

...extra ecclesiam nulla salus is always an assertion that for every man, at every time and place, the subjective reality of revelation is fulfilled in a temporal encounter and decision, an encounter and decision which can be seen and thought and experienced.⁶⁵

The Church is thus Christ's body in its spatio-temporal form and extension. And it is in Him and through Him that the

⁶²CD, I, 2, pp. 213f.

⁶³CD, I, 2, pp. 215f.

⁶⁴CD, I, 2, p. 217.

⁶⁵CD, I, 2, p. 220.

Church is the concrete area of the subjective reality of revelation. Thus "the Church cannot be thought of otherwise than as the reality of God's revelation for us ..."⁶⁶ Being in the Church, then, involves participating in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, having Him become man in Christ for us, having Him prepare us to listen to the Word and making possible its hearing among us.⁶⁷

In addition to emphasizing our utter dependence upon Christ in the Church, Barth further points out the way in which man becomes a recipient of the objective revelation of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This objective reality is expressed by the means of "signs" or sacraments in order to prepare man's heart for the reception of the subjective reality of revelation. These signs of His revelation are testimonies to His majesty and glory.⁶⁸ Just as the election of Israel and circumcision were signs of the covenant in the Old Testament, so the objective revelation of Christ in the New Testament is expressed through the sacraments which mediate the grace of Christ to the Church and apply it to man. In a very real sense, then, these signs become a "means of grace."⁶⁹ Objective revelation

⁶⁶CD, I, 2, p. 221.

⁶⁷CD, I, 2, p. 221.

⁶⁸CD, I, 2, pp. 223ff.

⁶⁹CD, I, 2, pp. 225-232.

thus reaches man by means of the divine sign-giving, and by the free grace of God the objective revelation is really shown to man so that he really sees it.⁷⁰

In this divine sign-giving, the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments, consists the entirety of the revelational content. The Holy Spirit comes to us only by the Word and its testimonies, and the witness of the Spirit can be checked by our relationship to the divine sign-giving. These signs contain no new revelational content, but only attest to us the one revelation which has taken place for us. Thus with Luther, Barth does not see the Holy Spirit communicating with men except through Scripture. As objective revelation becomes subjective for us, we are taken up into the event of revelation itself and the Holy Spirit reveals to us that we are children of God. This is the subjective reality of revelation, and through the work of the Holy Spirit our blind eyes are opened and we recognize that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." Thus subjective revelation adds no new content, but only impresses and seals objective revelation upon us.⁷¹

In conclusion, the subjective reality of revelation is the secret work of the Holy Spirit who does the work of Jesus Christ in bringing His objective revelation to us.

⁷⁰CD, I, 2, pp. 232f.

⁷¹CD, I, 2, pp. 237-239.

Through the faith which He works in us, the Holy Spirit effects decisively and comprehensively our oneness with Christ. Barth quotes from Calvin:

By the Holy Spirit whom He has given us, we know that the Word, that is Christ, abides with us, and so becomes ours and we His. All other teachers would exert themselves to no purpose, all other light would be offered to the blind in vain, if Christ had not constituted Himself our interior magister by the Spirit...In other words, He himself must give us light to believe the Gospel, which is to make us new creatures, the temples of God.⁷²

The Holy Spirit the subjective
possibility of revelation

The fact that we have our being in Christ and are children of God through the divine testimonies is the work of the Holy Spirit as the subjective reality of revelation. The fact that the Spirit does this work is an established fact, but we must now inquire into these questions: How in the freedom of man is it possible for God's revelation to reach him? To what extent is man free? To what extent is the work of the Holy Spirit, the reality of revelation, the adequate ground of man's freedom, and to what extent has He the power and possibility to do this work? Thus, the problem to be dealt with is this: "In what consists the possibility and power already recognized and acknowledged in reality?"⁷³

We have seen that in the Holy Spirit we are free for

⁷²CD, I, 2, pp. 242; Instit., III, 1.

⁷³CD, I, 2, pp. 242f.

God, and only in Him are we free. He is the Teacher of the Word who instructs us, so that we see the inseparability of the Spirit and the Word. By this work of the Spirit we see the futility of any other possibility, of any other prior knowledge of the Word of God, such as Bultmann's Vorverständnis. Thus to receive the Holy Spirit is an acknowledgment of our helplessness and the impossibility of our being otherwise free for God.⁷⁴

Since there is no other freedom of man for God, we must ask how far the possibility of freedom really exists in the miracle of the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus we now consider the possibility which is proper to God in the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the freedom of man the possibility of God's revelation, as with its reality, can reach him only in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, because in it the Word of God is brought to his hearing. Thus when we ask how a man comes to hear the Word of God, we see that in the subjective possibility of revelation, the work of the Spirit, the Word creates its own hearing and Jesus Christ creates belief in Himself. We see then that the possibility for our hearing is in the love of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit provides us with an adequate basis for our hearing of the Word, for as the Spirit of the Word He enables us to acquire "eyes

⁷⁴CD, I, 2, pp. 243f.

and ears for God," to use Luther's phrase.⁷⁵ Christ Himself, then, the Word of God, brought to man's hearing by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, is the subjective possibility for man's hearing divine revelation.⁷⁶

Furthermore, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible in man's freedom for God's revelation to meet him, for in it he possesses the possibility of being in the Church, the area of revelation, as a hearer and doer of the Word in Christ.⁷⁷ It is only by repentance and a dying to the old life that we can have a freedom for God and freedom for Him, and this can only be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus genuine repentance which opens us up to God and His community is the subjective possibility of revelation, and this is absolutely a divine and not a human possibility.⁷⁸ The subjective reality, then, of man's abiding in the Church, the area of revelation, has its possibility in restoration of communion with God through repentance and forgiveness effected by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the Word itself, Jesus Christ.

Finally, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible for man in his freedom to be met by God's

⁷⁵ CD, I, 2, p. 248.

⁷⁶ CD, I, 2, p. 249.

⁷⁷ CD, I, 2, pp. 257f.

⁷⁸ CD, I, 2, pp. 260ff.

revelation, because in it the Word of God becomes his master. What is the significance of the miracle of the Word actualized in us by the Holy Spirit? This does not mean that we are possessed by a spirit or are left in a trance. In the Holy Spirit the consciousness of identity remains intact. The possibility given to us by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with enthusiastic magic or magical enthusiasm, but is the possibility of a direct confrontation of the whole man by God. Participation in this possibility in no way signifies an abolition of our identity with ourselves, and does not originate in man, but is only God's possibility for us.⁷⁹

The freedom of man for God's revelation, then, exists only where the Word of God or Jesus Christ is unavoidably man's Master, teacher, leader, or lord. The only possibility for man here is to stand under this Master, and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit man cannot withdraw from this Word; it masters him. Man in this relationship of submission is enabled through the Holy Spirit to apprehend revelation. "It is here that the new life of the children of God begins. In this relationship we have ears to hear what is told us by God."⁸⁰ We are thus bound by the Word, and become free and able to hear His revelation through the

⁷⁹CD, I, 2, pp. 265-267.

⁸⁰CD, I, 2, pp. 271f.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This relationship with Christ who is our Master gives direction and leadership to man which leads him into a life that is conformable to Christ. In all his humanity and in Christ he is a child of God, and this directing and integrating into Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit in whom he can hear and receive divine revelation. The ultimate result, then, of the Word of God's having mastery over us by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a singleness of interest in which the Word of God is our own interest and concern. We have no concern other than Christ's concern. The necessity of our worrying about our own situation is set aside, and we decrease in order that He may increase.⁸¹ Although we are limited by His mastery, we are set free from our personal bondages by the Holy Spirit. In and through Him we are free to live and to hear the word of God.

Barth's Hermeneutical Principles
and the Holy Spirit

Barth's emphasis on the necessity of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the hearing of the Word of God in no way precludes his use of sound exegesis, biblical criticism, and proper hermeneutical methods. He realizes fully that the door of the text is after all opened only from within by

⁸¹CD, I, 2, pp. 276-279.

the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in response to faith, but the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit is experienced in conjunction with proper exegetical and historical work. He says in regard to this:

The demand that the Bible should be read and understood and expounded historically is, therefore, obviously justified and can never be taken too seriously. The Bible itself posits this demand: even where it appeals expressly to divine commissionings and promptings, in its actual composition it is everywhere a human word, and this human word is obviously intended to be taken seriously and read and understood and expounded as such...The demand for a "historical" understanding of the Bible necessarily means, in content, that we have to take it for what it undoubtedly is and is meant to be: the human speech uttered by specific men at specific times in a specific situation, in a specific language and with a specific intention...⁸²

Thus Barth reflects Luther's concern for the grammatical and historical understanding of the Bible. For both men, neither subjective enthusiasm nor sterile intellectualism can adequately handle the Scriptures.

Historical and exegetical consideration

The historical work which is to be done for proper biblical interpretation is not, for Barth, the attempt to penetrate past the Biblical texts to the facts which lie behind them. Revelation, he says, is not to be found in these facts as independent of the texts. This attempt to

⁸²CD, I, 2, p. 464.

subject the biblical Canon to the question of truth as formulated by modern historicism views the Bible as a collection of sources. This methodology minimizes the true value of the texts in favor of an "historical" truth and a reconstruction of reality as the scholar sees it rather than as the biblical authors presented it. Thus the real nature and character of the writings has been missed for over a hundred years. Barth says we should leave this curious question of what is behind the texts and turn with all attentiveness, accuracy, and love to the texts as such. One contribution of form-criticism has been to rediscover the objectivity of the biblical witness generally. This task must be continued, and the insights gained in the earlier source-investigation of the Bible cannot be abandoned. The present task of the interpreter is to ask all relevant, historical questions of the biblical texts as they appear in their literary form. The interpreter is not to seek some supra-Scriptural historical truth, but should investigate the texts for their own sake with the understanding that revelation is not to be sought behind or above them, but in them.⁸³ Thus Barth would use all available tools for the critical investigation of the biblical texts, and this includes form-criticism, or any other valid approach. His only condition is that these methods must not claim to be the one and only method for

⁸³CD, I, 2, pp. 492-494.

exegesis.⁸⁴

In his fragment on Baptism, Barth lays down some further hermeneutical principles for consideration. First, he insists on the principle: Scriptura sui ipsius interpres. The expositor focuses his attention primarily on asking how a verse, in its traditional form, may be understood in terms of itself and its narrower and broader context. Although this principle does not rule out the dangers of using non-biblical parallels in exposition, or of critical problems in the text, or of the expositor's being too broad or too restricted in his approach to a text, it does give the text much liberty to say what it has to say. Secondly, the expositor must be aware that even when he interprets scripturam per scripturam he is still interpreting. No expositor or exegetical method is infallible. Certainly it is only relative at any point, and the expositor should work with modesty and humility and be always ready to examine his results afresh and subject them to the scrutiny of others.⁸⁵

Furthermore, Barth says elsewhere, these principles of interpretation are to be used as a hermeneutical model in other areas of human understanding as well. There is no special biblical hermeneutics, for the principles Barth has described apply to the interpretation of all linguistic

⁸⁴Hartwell, op.cit., p. 59.

⁸⁵CD, IV, 4, pp. 110f.

communications. On the other hand, proper hermeneutical rules are to be learned from the Bible, not learned elsewhere and then applied to the Bible. Above all, the Bible teaches us to let a text speak its own message and not to engage in a process of addition, reduction, or abstraction. Revelation is to be heard as the real substance of the Bible; it is not an extraneous Word to be sought behind or beyond or above it.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Thus we see that Barth understands that it is the work of the Word of God to speak to us, and the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to hear the Word. Because of man's sinfulness and the wretched state of the image of God in him, he is himself unable to hear and obey God's Word. Therefore, it is necessary for the Holy Spirit to restore the imago Dei so that man in faith might obtain eyes and ears for God. Although God has spoken in Christ, the Scriptures, and the proclamation of the Word, man cannot in his fallen state hear the Word. Apart from the work of the Spirit in faith, man's rationality cannot plumb the mysteries of God's Word. Thus the Holy Spirit as the subjective reality communicates revelation to the believer. God's objective revelation must become a subjective reality for man before it can

⁸⁶CD, I, 2, pp. 466, 469.

communicate new life. By the means of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God prepares man to receive His Word internally and subjectively in the event of his encounter with the Scriptures. Through the Spirit God's Word becomes more than the gramma; it grips man personally in the new life of the Spirit. Scripture as the witness to or of the revelation which was received by its authors, becomes the Word of God for the believer as the Spirit completes the work of inspiration in him. If a weakness may be seen here in the tendency to minimize the event of the historical inspiration of the written Word, nevertheless Barth does effectively criticize the lack of personal involvement with the Bible which is found in the older Liberalism and orthodoxy. He also stresses the necessity of dealing with the content of Scripture itself, and not just its form and origin. He understands that when God speaks in Christ, this Word must have living communication. He finds this in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which makes man free for God.

Although Barth undoubtedly emphasizes the concept of inspiration of the Scripture, he goes beyond Luther and is at variance with him when he connects the concept of inspiration so closely with the reader. He seems to emphasize the relational, dynamic, existential aspects of inspiration, and he plays down the ontic elements of inspiredness, although he naturally recognizes the ontic element in his

concept of being as act and act as being. In defense of Barth, it may be said that the dynamic element in his concept of inspiration clearly acts as a corrective to the extreme orthodox tendency to emphasize the work of the Spirit in the writing of Scripture, but to ignore His dynamic work in the reader. Barth does not wish to allow Scripture to become a static, abstract entity and not a living Word. He is critical of any ex opere operato tendency, such as is found in some forms of orthodoxy which are permeated by adherence to rationalistic types of absolutes. At the same time, while the dynamic element in inspiration should not be lost, Barth raises a new question when he insists that the Holy Spirit completes the process of inspiration only in the reader or hearer of Scripture. Whereas older Reformation theology has tended to view inspiration as an act completed with the writing of Scripture, and to view the witness of the Spirit as a different work, Barth opposes this kind of distinction, finding a unity of written Word and spoken Word of God analogous to the unity of the Trinity.

Barth reflects many of the hermeneutical principles of Luther and the other Reformers. His many references to Luther and Calvin in this regard show how much he is affected by them. He attempts to let Scripture speak for itself, and he desires to remove any biases which would distort its proper interpretation. As did Luther, Barth sees that if

one is to understand Scripture, he must involve himself with it. The means for this involvement is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit by which the believer is enabled to see beyond the letter to the Spirit. Like the Reformers, he sees the Spirit as the interpreter of Scripture. He believes that Scripture interprets itself, and that all possible exegetical and interpretative tools should be applied to the text. He reflects the concern of Luther and Calvin for sound exegesis. The Spirit will not apply the meaning of the text until it has been exegeted thoroughly in its narrower and broader contexts. On the basis of a sound study of the text, then, the Spirit enables the reader to hear it as the Word of God, or as Luther would say, as the "inner" Word. Barth closely relates Word and Spirit; the exegetical meaning of the text cannot be separated from the Spirit's teaching, or vice-versa. There are not two separate Words, but the Spirit quickens and applies the exegetical meaning to the believer in faith. Thus he would admit that a non-Christian could find the real theme of Scripture and give sound exegesis, but the receiving, believing, and obeying of the Word of God comes by the Spirit alone.

In his hermeneutical methodology, then, Barth reflects Luther's emphases on the clarity of the Scriptures, the legitimacy of individual interpretation within the context of the Church, the roles of the Spirit as Interpreter and Illuminator, the inspiration of the Bible, the

primacy of the literal sense as expounded by sound exegesis, and the principle of scriptura sui ipsius interpres. In contrast, Luther would seem in many passages to see Scripture as being objectively an expression of the Word, apart from the work of the Spirit in the reader. Scripture is the Word whether or not it becomes the "inner" Word for the reader by the illuminating work of the Spirit. Barth works out a different understanding of the relationship between Scripture and the Word and consequently between Scripture and the Spirit. In his own mind he undoubtedly believes that this corresponds, in intention, at least, with Reformation teaching. The question remains, however, whether their difference is not greater than he believes, whether recent theological issues and emphases have not affected his understanding, and whether, in spite of every precaution, he does not open up a chink for the subjectivity which the work of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin firmly precluded.

On the other hand, it has been noted that Barth does not separate Word and Scripture. In fact, he applauds Luther's emphasis on the unity of Christ and the Bible. He quotes Luther appreciatively:

Christ is involved in Scripture through and through, like the body in its clothes. Preaching is the crib in which he lies and is composed, and therefrom we get food and nourishment.⁸⁷

⁸⁷CD, I, 1, p. 139; quoted from Sermon on Luke 2, 1523, Weimar ed., 12, p. 418, 24.

Barth thus rules out some problematic issues at this point, since he does not consider isolating Word and Spirit or Word and Scripture. It was Protestant orthodoxy which raised the issue of whether Word and Spirit were to be separated. In its reaction against the discussion on the variety of forms of the Word, orthodoxy tended to stress the unity of these forms so that the ontology of Scripture and the Word became an issue.⁸⁸ The question remains, then, as Barth has pointed out, whether the problem of the relationship between Scripture and the Word is not epistemological or functional rather than ontological. The function of the Holy Spirit is not to deal with the essential relationship between the Bible and the Word, but with the epistemological issue of knowing the Word through Scripture. The statement that "Scripture becomes the Word of God" may be more a statement of epistemology than of ontology.⁸⁹ The issue with which the Spirit must deal is not so much the ontology of Word and Scripture, but the functional problem of enabling man to have the capacity through faith to receive the Word of God by the means of Scripture.⁹⁰ At this point, Barth may be closer to the Reformers than was orthodoxy.

⁸⁸CD, I, p. 139.

⁸⁹CD, I, 1, p. 282.

⁹⁰CD, I, 1, pp. 224, 261, 268.

CHAPTER VIII

BULTMANN AND THE NEW HERMENEUTIC

Rudolf Bultmann

In any examination of the New Hermeneutic as a theological methodology, one must first note the work of Rudolf Bultmann and his place in the history of interpretation. More specifically, for the purposes of this study, we must determine the validity of his claims that he is the legitimate custodian of the Lutheran heritage. He insists that his program of demythologization is an attempt to apply universally the Reformation principle of pro me. He states his thesis thus:

Radical demythologization is a parallel to the Pauline and Lutheran doctrine of justification without the works of the law, through faith alone. Or rather: demythologization is the consistent application of this doctrine to the realm of cognition. Just like the doctrine of justification, demythologization destroys every specious human certainty and every specious demand for certainty, be this certainty based on man's good works or on his cognitive ability.¹

In addition to observing Bultmann's hermeneutical procedure, we must examine the basic emphases of the New Hermeneutic and the relationship of this approach to the

¹Cited by Gunther Bornkamm, "The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann," The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann, Charles W. Kegley, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 12; Bultmann, Kerygma and Mythos, II, p. 207.

hermeneutic of Martin Luther. We shall pay particular attention to the linguistic emphasis of the New Hermeneutic and to its understanding of history.

Certainly one of the most influential theologians of this century, Bultmann has inspired a new school of theological thought. In contrast to Barth's emphasis on the transcendence of God and the particularity of revelation, Bultmann has made a great effort to interpret the New Testament message for modern man in terms of existentialist philosophy.² In order to appreciate this emphasis, one must view him as a historian, a philosopher, and as a theologian.

The historian

As a historian, Bultmann is concerned with handling the New Testament scientifically by using the techniques of critical historiography. This approach is based on his scientific, naturalistic presupposition that history is a closed system of cause and effect. God cannot enter directly into history. Thus for Bultmann, "the Bible is not an inspired book, the Word of God in any objective sense... (it) is a product of ancient historical and religious influences and must be evaluated exactly like any other ancient religious literature."³ Bultmann says:

²George E. Ladd, Rudolf Bultmann (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), pp. 2f.

³Ibid., p. 3.

The historical method includes the presupposition that history is a unity in the sense of a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect. This does not mean that the process of history is determined by the causal law and that there are no free decisions of men whose actions determine the course of historical happenings. But even a free decision does not happen without cause, without a motive; and the task of the historian is to come to know the motives of actions. All decisions and all deeds have their causes and consequences; and the historical method presupposes that it is possible in principle to exhibit these and their connection and thus to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity.

This closedness means that the continuum of historical happenings cannot be rent by the interference of supernatural, transcendent powers and that therefore there is no 'miracle' in this sense of the word. Such a miracle would be an event whose cause did not lie within history... It is in accordance with such a method as this that the science of history goes to work on all historical documents. And there cannot be any exceptions in the case of biblical texts if the latter are at all to be understood historically.⁴

This naturalistic concept of history excludes all supernatural elements from the New Testament and explains such concepts as reflections of a mythological world-view of the first century. The New Testament cannot, therefore, be understood as presenting any type of historical account of objective events which involve revelation. The Gospels, for example, reflect the faith which the Church came to have about Jesus, but the representation of him as a divine being

⁴Rudolf Bultmann, Existence and Faith, Schubert M. Ogden, ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), pp. 291f.

is unhistorical by definition. There is an element of true history in these accounts, but it is an exacting task to isolate this historical residue from the unhistorical accounts of faith.

The only way to understand what is really historical about Jesus is to compare the New Testament accounts with the religious environment of the first century. This method is known as die religionsgeschichtliche Methode, the "comparative religions method."⁵ In the light of this approach, the first century Jews understood Jesus from the perspective of Jewish apocalyptic dualism, and the Gentiles saw in him a conflation of the pagan mythologies of a dying and rising god and of the Gnostic redemption motif.⁶ In other words, the historical Jesus was nothing more than a Jew proclaiming the end of the world and suffering a martyr's death. Neither his teachings nor his historical person should be objects of faith.⁷

It was the early Church which deified Jesus, but this rise of the Easter faith of the Church was based only on the fact (the Dass) of Jesus. It was only the Dass which started the faith of the Church, and no knowledge which comes from Christ or from faith in him (the Was) has any

⁵Ibid., pp. 4-8.

⁶Ibid., pp. 8-9, 14-16.

⁷Ibid., pp. 11f.

basis in historical factuality.⁸ All notions about the supernatural works or nature of Jesus must be understood as elaborate first-century myth which can no longer be accepted by twentieth-century man with a twentieth-century world-view. One must choose between science and mythology. Bultmann's purpose, then, is to interpret the gospel in terms understandable to the scientific mind.⁹ His method, then, is to "demythologize" the New Testament message, and this is the key to his hermeneutics.

In conclusion, it seems that Bultmann's radical form criticism has left little factual historical basis for his theology. In fact, this is exactly his point, for he wishes to emphasize the fact that faith cannot be dependent upon historical evidence. He wishes to "interpret Christianity in such a way that one can be radically skeptical about the factual content of the gospel narrative and yet continue to believe in the essential message of the New Testament."¹⁰ He thus attempts to connect his emphasis of not relying upon a historical basis for faith with the Lutheran principle of justification by faith alone. He thus reacts against both the liberal quest for the historical Jesus and the New

⁸Daniel P. Fuller, Easter Faith and History (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), p. 116.

⁹Ladd, op.cit., p. 21.

¹⁰John Macquarrie, "Rudolf Bultmann," A Handbook of Christian Theologians, M. E. Marty and D. G. Peerman, eds. (Cleveland: World, 1965), p. 447.

Quest for the historical Jesus.¹¹ For him the desire to verify the events of the Gospels is a feeble attempt to prove that Christianity is true, and this "concern to verify the historicity of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life is another form of trying to save oneself by works."¹² Since he will not base his theology on history, Bultmann must find another frame of reference, and this he does in the existentialism of Martin Heidegger.

The philosopher

In his attempt to make the Gospel understandable for modern man, Bultmann interprets it in terms of contemporary existentialist philosophy. The major influence upon his thought at this point has been the existentialism of the philosopher Martin Heidegger. The basic issue at stake is authentic or inauthentic existence. The concepts of bondage to sin, death, the flesh, etc., are no more than Biblical ways of describing inauthentic existence. Salvation, life in Christ, justification by faith, redemption, etc., are Biblical expressions for authentic existence. Positively, then, Bultmann wishes to interpret the Gospel in terms of authentic existence.¹³ He says in this regard:

At this point we must realize that there will never be a right philosophy in the sense of an absolutely perfect system, a philosophy which could give answers

¹¹Fuller, op.cit., see Chapter V.

¹²Wm. E. Hordern, "Ruldolf Bultmann: Radical Conservative," A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 194

¹³Ladd, op.cit., p. 30.

to all questions and clear up all riddles of human existence. Our question is simply which philosophy today offers the most adequate perspective and conceptions for understanding human existence. Here it seems to me that we should learn from existentialist philosophy, because in this philosophical school human existence is directly the object of attention.¹⁴

The result of this existentialist approach is to make man aware that "he is faced with a twofold possibility--he can live authentically or inauthentically."¹⁵ The basic characteristic of inauthentic life is the failure to accept the responsibility for one's own actions. Man allows himself to be determined by the world of things. He lets the crowd decide for him rather than deciding responsibly for himself. He seeks security in things where can be found no final security. He is a slave to the expectations of the crowd, and he sees others as limitations upon his freedom. He is thus no longer himself, and he finds his security in being a fluctuating variable at the mercy of the whims of others.¹⁶

"In an authentic existence, man lays hold on his potentiality for being and attains the full stature of his selfhood."¹⁷ Here man takes full responsibility for himself, and, as a result, is liberated from the bondage of his past

¹⁴Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 55.

¹⁵Horder, op.cit., p. 198.

¹⁶Ibid.; Ladd, op.cit., pp. 30f.

¹⁷Macquarrie, op.cit., p. 450.

and its self-created securities. He becomes open to the future. He is no longer under the tyranny of things or the crowd. He is released from the pressure of competing with his neighbor, and he is thus "free to love his neighbors instead of resenting the pressure they put on him."¹⁸

Man no longer seeks to avoid responsibility for his present by appealing to the events of the past. He says:

I am responsible for myself; I live the present moment with full personal responsibility. In the same way, I cannot boast of my past, of my good fortune, my successes or personal achievements. I am set free from the past that I may accept the present with full responsibility, because it is God's present.¹⁹

The authentic existence is thus freedom from the past and openness to the future. The future is not man's to secure, it is God's tomorrow, and one is open to all that it may bring because he is open to God. Since the future is in God's hands, one lives for today with complete openness to whatever it holds.²⁰

This freedom from the past and openness to the future is what Bultmann means by "eschatological existence." In the history of doctrine, eschatology has traditionally meant the last events in God's redemptive history. To Bultmann,

¹⁸Hordern, op.cit., pp. 198f.

¹⁹Ladd, op.cit., p. 31.

²⁰Ibid.

however, all such concepts are mythological. For him, eschatological existence is newness of life, freedom from the past. In order to be authentic, man must give up all assurances of a future beyond death. Such assurances place one's security in the future, not in God. Thus Bultmann's philosophical emphasis adapts the Gospel to the existential philosophical analysis of authenticity.²¹ Man's personal existence thus becomes his own personal responsibility, and this enables him to be open to the word of the Bible. It is in the proclamation of the Gospel as it is thus existentially understood that God meets man, challenges him with decision, and brings him into authenticity.²²

The theologian

Bultmann's theological work is an attempt to interpret the New Testament in terms which are understandable and relevant to the twentieth century. Whereas the New Testament, as he sees it from his religionsgeschichtliche Methode perspective, is a reflection of the history of ancient ideas and mythologies, his theological task is to define the Gospel in non-mythological terms and to set forth its true meaning for modern man.²³ The central theological problem which Bultmann faces, then, is that of hermeneutics, the

²¹Ibid., p. 32f.

²²Ibid., pp. 34, 37.

²³Ibid., p. 21.

method of interpreting the text.²⁴ He says:

Reflection on hermeneutics (the method of interpretation) makes it clear that interpretation, that is, exegesis, is always based on principles and conceptions which guide exegesis as presuppositions, although interpreters are often not aware of this fact... every interpreter brings with him certain conceptions, perhaps idealistic or psychological, as presuppositions of his exegesis....²⁵

It is at this point that Bultmann presents his concept of Vorverständnis, or pre-understanding. He points out that all understanding must be based on analogy, or a pre-understanding of a sort which makes new knowledge comprehensible.²⁶ The possibility for understanding is dependent on the fact that I already understand the world to which a particular teaching relates. Thus there must be a continuity between new and old experience; there must be a pre-understanding.²⁷ For example, there must be a pre-understanding of sin and forgiveness if one is to understand these concepts. An individual must learn to see himself as a sinner; he must become aware of what he is to see the relevance of the Gospel for him. Revelation, then, does not communicate new knowledge or content to him, but it enables him to

²⁴Bultmann, op.cit., p. 46.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 46, 48.

²⁶Bultmann, Faith and Understanding I, Louise P. Smith, trans., and Robert W. Fark, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 156ff.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 192, 315.

achieve self-understanding.²⁸ If the Gospel is to be understood by a man when he is confronted by it, he thus must have a pre-understanding of its meaning. To understand something means to understand it in relationship to one's self, and to understand one's self in it.²⁹ The interpreter can therefore establish communication with the text only on the basis of pre-understanding. He thus can ask himself about the text and revise it on the basis of his own self-understanding. Thus the bearing of the interpreter's life upon the meaning conveyed by the text is the condition for all understanding. In order to interpret the text, then, one must understand what it means to him.³⁰

Bultmann notes here that:

A comprehension--an interpretation--is, it follows, constantly oriented to a particular formulation of a question, a particular 'objective'. But included in this, therefore, is the fact that it is never without its own presuppositions; or, to put it more precisely, that it is governed always by a prior understanding of the subject, in accordance with which it investigates the text. The formulation of a question, and an interpretation, is possible at all only on the basis of such a prior understanding.³¹

²⁸Ibid., pp. 192, 209.

²⁹Ibid., p. 315.

³⁰Bornkamm, op.cit., pp. 6, 7.

³¹Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," Essays, Philosophical and Theological (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 239 (*italics* Bultmann's).

Bultmann is thus concerned about what the Kerygma discloses about human nature, self-understanding, and the nature of existence. His emphasis on Vorverständnis grows out of his method of existential interpretation of the New Testament. The Biblical text does not give knowledge of astonishing discoveries, nor does it give new information. It simply discloses new possibilities of one's own self. Bultmann thus detests "spiritual" or pneumatic exegesis, for such a method perverts a true understanding of the text. He cannot tolerate "the Spirit acting as interpreter and whispering the meaning of a text to me." The interpreter is not required to be a spiritual personality, but a scientific exegete. He does not need to receive spiritual illumination from the Spirit nor knowledge of unknown facts from the text.³² He does not need a special "organ" which is responsive to the divine and which provides a point of contact with revelation.³³ For Bultmann, the meaning of faith is not derived from spiritual illumination or historical information, but from the self-understanding of the interpreter in his existential encounter with the text. It is from the nature of this existential faith and the concept of pre-understanding that Bultmann derives the necessity for his method of demythologization.

³²Bultmann, Faith and Understanding, op.cit., pp. 156-158.

³³Ibid., p. 316.

Since one's understanding depends on his understanding the world-view to which a teaching relates, and since the modern, scientific mind cannot relate to the mythological world-view reflected in the New Testament, the message of the Gospels must be reinterpreted in terms of the twentieth-century scientific world-view. The New Testament must be "demythologized." The "mythological" and "supernatural" events portrayed in the New Testament are both unacceptable and unnecessary to the modern critical mind. He says:

It is often said that mythology is a primitive science, the intention of which is to explain phenomena and incidents which are strange, curious, surprising, or frightening, by attributing them to supernatural causes, to gods, or to demons.... Myths express the knowledge that man is not master of the world and his life.... Mythology expresses a certain understanding of human existence. It believes that the world and human life have their ground and their limit in a power which is beyond all that we can control.³⁴

Bultmann's contention, then, is that a deeper existential meaning underlies these mythological conceptions. It is these mythological features which must be reinterpreted, "demythologized," in order to arrive at the true meanings of the text.³⁵ This mythological language must be interpreted in terms of the concepts of a scientific age so that the concept of human existence embodied in the text can be

³⁴Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, op.cit., p. 19.

³⁵Ibid., p. 18.

understood in terms of the twentieth century pre-understanding. Knudsen remarks:

Bultmann holds that there is a biblical message (Kerygma) which need not be jettisoned along with the framework in which it is expressed.... The demythologization program has the purpose of setting free this biblical message which is able to speak to man as he understands himself today.³⁶

Bultmann defines any concept as mythological which involves the invasion of the supernatural or anything which confuses the saving activity of God with a literal event either past or future'. He thus rejects as mythological such concepts as: the pre-existence of Christ, the sinlessness of Christ, sacrificial atonement, intercession of the exalted Christ, the coming judgment of God, the virgin birth, original sin, the creation, the fall, the three-storied universe (heaven, earth, and hell), and any other ideas, such as miracles, which conflict with a naturalistic, scientific understanding of nature and history.³⁷

Bultmann's treatment of the cross and resurrection is illustrative of his demythologization of Biblical concepts. Although the cross was an objective historical event, it had no redemptive significance. Although the New Testament describes it as an event in which the sinless Son of God suffered vicariously and died to atone for man's sin and

³⁶Knudsen, op.cit., p. 135.

³⁷Ibid., p. 158.

deliver him from death, this is mythological language which has no present relevance or meaning. It is the Kerygma which transforms the tragic death of a Jewish apocalyptic teacher into an event of redemption. To believe in the cross today does not mean the acceptance of a past, objective salvation event wrought by God on a hill outside Jerusalem; but it means that when man hears the Gospel today he makes the cross his own, undergoes crucifixion with Christ, dies to the past, and is freed from bondage to sin and fear and death.³⁸

The resurrection is demythologized in the same existential way. It is inconceivable as an historical fact, and even if it did occur, it could tell us nothing about the redemption from death. The bodily resurrection concept must be understood in the context of ancient religious mythology. The New Testament stories of the resurrection were created as a result of the subjective vision, or hallucinations, of the disciples. The existential meaning of the resurrection is the fact of one's rising with Christ. As the Cross is experienced by the believer, he dies to his old life and rises with Christ in newness of life and freedom. The death and resurrection of Christ, therefore, are not simply history and mythology, but are proclamation. They are Kerygma. God meets man in the preaching of the cross and resurrection, and the faith of Easter is no more than faith in the word

³⁸Ladd, op.cit., pp. 27f.

of preaching.³⁹

This brings us to the basic issue of Bultmann's theology, his concept of the relation between faith and history. We have noted above that his form criticism has left little factual historical basis for his theology. In fact, he emphasizes that faith must be entirely independent of history. Not only do we know very little about the historical Jesus, says Bultmann, but we should not even care to know about him, for faith can be neither elicited nor verified by history. By definition, history deals with the objective realm of reality which is verifiable by empirical, scientific methods. It deals with the realm of human events and experience. It is totally unrelated to the realm of the divine or eternal. It is only faith which deals with the realm of God, which stands in opposition to the world and history. God's acts cannot be identified with historical events. The Word of God cannot be established or verified by the historian, for it is that which God says to me here and now. It is of the nature of faith, not of the empirical nature of history. It deals with existence, not with objective historical events. This Word of God, the Kerygma, confronts me with an existential decision; it needs no proof from history, for it is its own self-validation. Bultmann claims to be in the tradition of Paul and Luther here, for they taught that man is justified by faith alone. It is

³⁹Ibid., pp. 28f.

an extension of this principle which, Bultmann says, frees the Kerygma from dependence upon the historian. If belief is in any way related to what the historian has established as verifiable facts about Jesus, then faith is based on the historian, not God, and upon works, not faith. Faith is in God alone, with no historical or human supports. Faith must therefore be independent of history.⁴⁰

Critique

Clark Pinnock sees Bultmann's Vorverständnis concept as a synthesis of deistic, existential, and gnostic elements. It is deistic in its rejection of the miraculous and of any supernatural intervention in history, existential in its view of truth as personal and anthropocentric, and gnostic in its presentation of redemptive history as understandable only to the mind of enlightened faith.⁴¹ In fact, as Geoffrey Bromiley points out, Bultmann's substitution of anthropocentricity for the Biblical Christocentricity or theocentricity of theology is essentially myth-making. It is man who is the true theme of the mythical stories of the gods, and this is Bultmann's emphasis. Bromiley says:

...man is still the center and measure of all things. Man declares the nature of the Bible. Man distinguishes the mythical. Man demythologizes. Man decides the theme. Man is the substance and center

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 23-26.

⁴¹Clark Pinnock, Biblical Revelation (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 219.

of the salvation event. Jesus Christ belongs to the periphery.... In short, man not only controls his theology; he is its primary subject... We cannot follow Bultmann because the presupposition of his demythologizing is a true and devastating mythologization.⁴²

Bultmann has rejected the Biblical concept of a God who is both transcendent and imminent in favor of a God who is Wholly Other. His is a deistic God "who is so qualitatively different from everything in the world that He cannot be conceived of as acting objectively either in nature or history. This is not the God who has revealed Himself in redemptive history and in Jesus Christ."⁴³ Bultmann has thus created a new God who can be accommodated into his own world-view, and in doing so he makes his own myth.

An essential weakness in his entire system is found at this very point of the meaning of myth. He understands myth to be a means of speaking about the powers surrounding man's experience as these powers are personified in terms of the visible world. Myth is speaking of the other world in terms of this world, and of the gods in terms derived from human life. Myth is an expression of man's conviction that the origin and purpose of the world are to be sought beyond it and not within it. Myth expresses man's dependence on these external forces which can deliver him from the forces of the natural world. In a word, myth is imagery which is

⁴²Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "Dare We Follow Bultmann?" Christianity Today, Vol. 5, March 27, 1961, p. 8.

⁴³Ladd, op.cit., p. 42.

used to explain man's understanding of his existence, and Bultmann feels that the imagery of the New Testament obscures the expression of man's understanding of his existence.⁴⁴

Myth correctly understood, however, is not merely symbolic imagery, but is a direct expression of the re-occurrence of a primeval reality. In true myth there is a correspondence, or harmony, between gods and men, nature and man, nature and gods. This harmony is maintained by the re-enactment of the primeval event. In this cultic re-enactment the life of the gods is restored by the restoring of the life of nature, which is ontologically identified with the gods. The present order is then maintained by the re-occurrence of the cultic events. True myth, then, shows the correspondence between the natural and the supernatural, the Urzeit and the Endzeit. Bultmann does not see myth as a view of reality in which man has an influence on the supernatural by the use of the cult, and he does not see myth as an expression of reality. He uses myth simply as a metaphor and laments the fact that this metaphor has come to be mistakenly viewed as reality. In using his deficient idea of myth, then, Bultmann overlooks the deeper implications of myth and he himself unconsciously falls into a mythological world-view and becomes a myth-maker.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, pp. 18ff.

⁴⁵Dennis F. Kinlaw, Course lectures in "Literature of the Ancient Near East," Asbury Theological Seminary, 1966; Cf. also H. Thielicke, Der evangelische Glaube, I (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1968), pp. 67ff.; English trans. Evangelical Faith, G.W. Bromiley, trans. and ed. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1974).

Ironically, Bultmann returns to a pre-Abrahamic mentality by positing a cyclic world-view in relation to the cross and resurrection. He says:

The cross in its redemptive aspect is not an isolated incident.... the cross is not just an event of the past which can be contemplated in detachment, but the eschatological event in and beyond time, for as far as its meaning--that is, its meaning for faith--is concerned, it is an ever-present reality.... The cross becomes a present reality in the sacraments.⁴⁶

This is a mythological view in which the former primal event is re-enacted through the cult. This denies the "once-for-all-ness" of the Gospel. This is myth. The event of salvation is a continuing thing. Knudsen admits:

There is nothing to stop Bultmann from saying that the event of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, happens over and over again in the life of the Church.... In preaching, Jesus comes again. It is as faith is awakened in the Church that Jesus rises from the dead. What has happened in the resurrection occurs in all believers.⁴⁷

Bultmann reflects here the mythical concept of the correspondence between man and the gods. The constant re-enactment of the crucifixion event is similar to the cyclical death-resurrection themes of ancient mythology. "In everyday life the Christians participate not only in the death of Christ but also in his resurrection."⁴⁸ Not only does he posit a cyclic view of life, but he also asserts the existential

⁴⁶Rudolf Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma & Myth*, ed. by H. W. Bartsch (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), ⁴⁷p. 36.

⁴⁷Knudsen, *op.cit.*, pp. 148f.

⁴⁸Bultmann, "N. T. and Mythology," *op.cit.*, p. 40.

identification of the current act with the primal one.

Furthermore, in myth dreams have the same validity as objective reality. Bultmann says that faith does not need an object, but is sufficient in itself. Here again, he makes myth. Myth and ritual in themselves had the power of giving security. The distinction between reality and appearance would have been meaningless to the cultist. In like manner, for Bultmann, all that is necessary is the idea of the resurrection. This refusal to give historical validity to the resurrection is tantamount to the mythical attribution of reality to dreams. It is easy to see why he can say that the disciples' hallucinations of the resurrection were a sufficient basis for faith. Bultmann does not admit the distinction between delusion and reality.

Likewise, his sense of the continual present, the eschatological "now", is cultic. "Through the word of preaching the cross and resurrection are made present: the eschatological 'now' is here," he says.⁴⁹ He seems to use "eschatology" when he should be using "soteriology." "Eschatology" refers to a finality of events, a goal time. Bultmann, however, does not mean an eschatological finality, but a mythological recapitulation of the past era of crucifixion and resurrection. When he uses the "eschatological now" to describe a realization of the resurrection life, he is making

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 42.

myth. He is re-enacting and maintaining the New Testament order by cultic means. This means of cultic maintenance is the proclamation of the Kerygma. "Through the word of preaching the cross and resurrection are made present."⁵⁰

Finally, because Bultmann sees myth merely as metaphor, he thinks that if he removes this imagery, he will be left with the meaning of the New Testament. He has made the mistake of assuming that the supernatural aspects of Scripture are mythical, or purely metaphor. He neglects the possibility that the supernatural could be historical, and he also neglects to consider Barth's emphasis on the particularity of revelation. In the very style and personality of Scripture there is meaning, and the truth of the Gospels cannot be completely divorced from the mode of their expression. Thus, in trying to get at the Gospel, Bultmann makes the same error as the liberals. He throws out the "kernel" of the Kerygma with the "myth." In his disjunction of faith and history he ignores the factual basis of the Gospel, and is left with an unscientific, mythical form of "pre-Copernican" and "pre-Abrahamic" cultic religion.

Thus his demythologization severs the Gospel from genuine history and equates it with human experience. This is completely and incontrovertably alien to Luther's emphasis on the historical and grammatical exegesis of Scripture. The subjectivization of the Gospel removes the Good News

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

from the Kerygma, and completely ignores Luther's dictum that his "conscience is captive to the Word of God." In spite of his stated intentions Bultmann "accomplishes nothing for faith, understanding, preaching, or salvation."⁵¹ He succeeds only in subjecting the New Testament to the criticism and analysis of an existentialist philosophy which is alien to the New Testament and which itself is relevant only to a small portion of mankind and a very limited period in history. "Marriage to the spirit of any age will leave one a widow in the next!"⁵² He thus is "guilty of two hermeneutical sins: he denies the meaning Scripture gives, and imposes meanings on Scripture which are external to itself."⁵³ He thus denies the basic Reformation principles of sola scriptura, the primacy of the sensus literalis, and scriptura sui ipsius interpret. He follows neither the inductive hermeneutical method of Luther nor the humble spirit of the great Reformer. As Bromiley says:

He finally leaves us neither with God nor Christ, neither with kerygma nor faith, neither with true death to sin nor true resurrection to life, but only with man in the existential message and moment of assumed knowledge and self-centered conversion.⁵⁴

Thus the Biblical message that Bultmann derives from this approach "may not rightly be called Christianity. His thought

⁵¹Bromiley, op.cit., p. 8.

⁵²Pinnock, op.cit., p. 219f.

⁵³Ibid., p. 223.

⁵⁴Bromiley, op.cit., p. 8.

is a total reinterpretation of the Gospel in terms of an existentialist-inspired philosophy."⁵⁵

Fuchs and Ebeling

Since we have noted the basic trends in Bultmann's hermeneutics and his stated dependency upon the Lutheran emphasis of total reliance upon faith, it will be important to survey the influence of this Bultmannian emphasis on the Christ of faith. The followers of Bultmann have been unsatisfied with his refusal to ground faith in history, and have attempted to protect faith from being mere myth by launching a new quest for the historical Jesus in order to establish a more firm connection between the Easter faith and the Jesus of history.⁵⁶

Historically, Ernst Käsemann took the lead in what came to be known as the "new quest for the historical Jesus," with the presentation of a paper in 1953. He contended that Bultmann's insistence upon viewing early Christianity entirely in terms of the Easter faith left the historical Jesus with "no constitutive significance."⁵⁷ Such a view, he contended, would leave the door open to a docetism in which God no longer revealed himself in history, but became merely a myth

⁵⁵Knudsen, op.cit., pp. 158f.

⁵⁶Fuller, op.cit., p. 117.

⁵⁷E. Käsemann, "Das Problem des historischen Jesus," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche, 51 (1954), p. 126; cited by Fuller, Ibid.

comprising the Easter faith of the church.⁵⁸ Unless the kerygma speaks of the Jesus of history as being consistent with the Christ of faith, it loses the vitality of its message. Käsemann attempted to use the historical method to make the historical fact of the authority of Jesus relevant for faith.⁵⁹

Käsemann's call to open a new quest was enthusiastically responded to by several scholars, among whom were Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs. Several other important men joined the movement, such as Günther Bornkamm, Hans Conzelmann, James Robinson, and Herbert Braun. And more recently, the Americans Amos Wilder, Robert Funk, and John Dillenberger have contributed to the "new quest." From the standpoint of linguistic analysis and general hermeneutical contributions, the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the critical studies of Emilio Betti and E.D. Hirsch, have enriched the movement.

While we in no way minimize the very important work of all these men, for the purpose at hand we will limit our survey of this movement to the work of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, who in many ways represent the thought of this movement.

Word of God

Fuchs and Ebeling draw heavily upon the Reformation

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 141.

⁵⁹ Fuller, op.cit., pp. 118f.

heritage in their emphasis on the Word of God in the hermeneutical task. Ebeling, in particular, emphasizes the relationship of Luther to the New Hermeneutic.⁶⁰ Both emphasize that the concept of the Word of God conferred upon hermeneutics a new significance in its repudiation of the Catholic view of tradition. In the Catholic view, Scripture could not be correctly understood apart from the tradition of the church. This tradition is interpretative in its character and supplementary in its function. Luther's sola scriptura principle was directed against this Catholic view of tradition, and posited a new hermeneutical option in the face of traditional authoritative hermeneutics. Scripture alone has authority, said Luther; it is sui ipsius interpres. Thus, the Scripture principle of Luther is basically a hermeneutic principle. Scripture is not so obscure that tradition is required to understand it. It possesses claritas, so that it has illuminating power in and of itself, apart from tradition.⁶¹

Although Luther was aware that the principle of "claritas scripturae demands a distinction between the unrestricted clarity of the res of Scripture and a partial obscurity of its verba," the orthodox attempts to safeguard his

⁶⁰ Robert A. Traina, "The 'New Hermeneutic,'" The Asbury Seminary, vol. XXI, April, 1967, p. 26; and Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), pp. 49-50.

⁶¹ Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutics," Word and Faith, James W. Leitch, trans. (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 305-307.

position of claritas led to an identification of Scripture with the Word of God.⁶² According to Ebeling, this jeopardized both the Reformation concept of the Word of God and the claritas scripturae, and led to a minimizing of the Scripture principle again in favor of the method of dogmatics.⁶³ Thus, hermeneutics began to slide back under the domination of dogmatics, and the tension between exegesis and dogmatics tended to disappear, with dire consequences for exegesis.

In order to apprehend properly the Word of God, man must understand that it is subject to the changes of language itself. Therefore when the Word, that is, God's speaking to man in Jesus Christ, is proclaimed, it must be interpreted in terms of contemporary understanding. The text announces the time of God's arrival. In conventional exegesis, it has been the text which has required interpretation. Fuchs, however, reverses this order and says that the text is obscure only because man's situation is obscure. The preaching of the text is not for the purpose of illumining the situation of the early Church, but the situation of contemporary man. Fuch says:

...and it must surely be said that the decisive function for the illumination of our existence belongs to the text itself. The text itself is then (as "language gain") a hermeneuticum, so

⁶² Ibid., p. 307.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 307f.

that exegesis must always be driven on since it comes to its terminus only in the proclamation. Proclamation and linguisticity of existence belong together. What is therefore expositied is actually the present, expositied with the help of the text.⁶⁴

Ebeling says also:

Thus the text by means of the sermon becomes a hermeneutic aid in the understanding of present experience. Where that happens radically, the true word is uttered, and that in fact means God's Word.⁶⁵

This concept of "word" is essentially existential communication. The Word of God here is more a dynamic movement than a stable concept.⁶⁶ The "language-event" of proclamation constitutes the Word of God, says Fuchs.⁶⁷ The Word of God is the "existential communication of God within the text of Scripture," it must be exegeted from the text and formulated in a kerygmatic sermon, and it is received by the hearer as the Word of God when he accepts it by faith.⁶⁸ The primary function of the Word of God in the New Hermeneutic, then, is to expound the existential meaning of man's existence. Even when the Sache of the text is understood, it is not necessarily normative for faith.

⁶⁴Ernst Fuchs, II, 430; cited by Tobert Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 58.

⁶⁵Ebeling, Word and Faith, op.cit., p. 331 (italics his).

⁶⁶Ramm, op.cit., p. 136.

⁶⁷Funk, II, 426; cited by Funk, op.cit., p. 56.

⁶⁸Ramm, op.cit.

"Content criticism" (Sachkritik) makes it possible to remove materials from the text which are alien to the purpose of the existential communication of the Word of God.

This refusal to accept the Sache as binding is, of course, not accepted by Barth, and it is certainly alien to Luther's reverence for the Sache of the text. The concern for using the text to illuminate existence, often to the neglect of a concern for the natural meaning of the text as it signifies the Word of God, is clearly in opposition to Luther's emphasis on the sensus literalis and sensus historicus. In their existential usage of the Word of God, Fuchs and Ebeling are in danger of obscuring the sensus literalis with a new version of an existentialist sensus tropologicus, or even a sensus allegoricus which interprets the text from the doctrinal perspective of the New Hermeneutic. At this point, with their presuppositions, they come to the text not with just a Vorverständnis, but with a Vorurteil in existentialist trappings. While Luther attempted to divest Biblical concepts of their dogmatic and philosophical accretions, Fuchs and Ebeling bring their own interpretations to the Biblical text. In doing so, they negate the Reformation principle of sui ipsius interpres, and deny the claritas of Scripture apart from illumination by the principles of the New Hermeneutic. At the point of the Word of God, it is difficult to conclude that they do reflect

the basic Lutheran concept of the Word of God. For them, the Word of God is a kerygmatic interpretation of existence, while for Luther, it was the revelation of God in Christ. Fuchs and Ebeling state that this is also their concept of the Word, but in practice, this does not seem to be verified.

Language and understanding

The New Hermeneutic accepts Bultmann's hermeneutical principles, but is critical of him for not developing the implications of these insights. Therefore there is a need for formulation of a theory of interpretation that is more comprehensive both theologically and philosophically than anything that has been previously developed. This task has been undertaken by Ernst Fuchs of Marburg and Gerhard Ebeling of Zurich. Along with Schleiermacher and Dilthey, these men see interpretation as much more comprehensive than the philological exegesis of texts. Their concern is the understanding, Verstehen, of existence.⁶⁹ This is no mere technical knowledge, but the deepest level of existential comprehension.

The philosopher Heidegger had grasped this comprehensive function of hermeneutics, and he emphasized that language itself, which he called "the house of being," was interpretation.⁷⁰ From this perspective, Fuchs and Ebeling

⁶⁹Ramm, op.cit., pp. 133f.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 134; Carl E. Braaten, "How New Is the New Hermeneutic?", Theology Today, vol. 22, No. 2, July, 1965, p. 226.

develop the linguistic approach to hermeneutics. Fuchs equates the Word of God with "language-event," Sprachereignis, and Ebeling refers to it as "word-event," Wortgeschehen.⁷¹ Bultmann sees the importance of language as interpretation, but where he intends to go beneath the language of the text in order to understand the concept of existence which it contains, Fuchs and Ebeling wish to shift the emphasis from existential understanding to linguistic event. While Bultmann searches the New Testament texts for concepts of authentic and inauthentic existence, Fuchs and Ebeling seek in the text utterances of authentic or inauthentic language. They believe that man's being comes to expression through language, and the "coming of the Word of God is understood as the coming of true language, the language of love, especially in Jesus' language of love. As such, Jesus can be called the 'language-event.'"⁷² Thus the theological motive for the New Hermeneutic is an attempt to return to the language of faith, the authentic language of Jesus Himself.⁷³ In this respect, the New Hermeneutic reflects a stronger emphasis on the historical Jesus than does Bultmann. Traina says in this regard:

⁷¹Braaten, Ibid.

⁷²Carl E. Braaten, History and Hermeneutics, New Directions in Theology Today, vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 139.

⁷³Ibid.

This relation of hermeneutic to word-event does in fact represent a "new" emphasis by comparison with Bultmann, whose pessimism regarding the quest of the historical Jesus made him reluctant to stress Jesus' message, though he did expound that message in his book, Jesus and the Word. Ebeling breaks with Bultmann's focus on Jesus as speaker-event (Sprachereignis) whose actual words are fundamentally uncertain, for Ebeling's confidence in the new quest of the historical Jesus enables him to consider the word-event as having ultimate hermeneutic significance. Accordingly, Ebeling is bold to affirm what Bultmann would not affirm, namely, that "if the quest of the historical Jesus were in fact to prove that faith in Jesus has no basis in Jesus himself, then that would be the end of Christology."⁷⁴

This movement of linguistic hermeneutics is not only back to the historical Jesus, but forward to a "world come of age." The hermeneutical task here is to translate, or "transculturates," as Braaten describes it, the Word into new words relevant to contemporary culture.⁷⁵ The means by which this is accomplished is language, and the aim of the New Hermeneutic is to "comprehend this movement of the 'word' from the text to the contemporary hearer."⁷⁶ The key to this concept is the theory of language which it represents. Language is man's attempt to interpret verbally his encounter with reality. Achtemeier says:

⁷⁴Robert A. Traina, "The 'New Hermeneutic'," The Asbury Seminary, vol. 21, no. 2, April, 1967, p. 27; see Ebeling, op.cit., p. 205, and the essay, "The Question of the Historical Jesus and the Problem of Christology," Word and Faith, pp. 288-304.

⁷⁵Braaten, History and Hermeneutics, loc.cit.

⁷⁶Pinnock, op.cit., p. 224.

...language is the response to an event by means of which the man who confronts it seeks to understand the event, and to fit it into his world, so that it may continue to function as event, and as reality, for him. Language is thus born in the attempt to understand, to "interpret" (to oneself or to others), the meaning of human life, of existence.⁷⁷

In regard to the New Testament text, then, the New Hermeneutic is not so much interested in the clarification of an obscure text as it is in the text's clarification of human existence. Human existence, not the focal point of the text, is the primary object of interpretation.⁷⁸ This is why Ebeling says the text aids in the interpretation of human existence.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Fuchs points out that in this existential hermeneutic, the text is not the object to be interpreted, as it is for Bultmann, but the text is in motion. It addresses and interprets the reader.⁸⁰ It is in a dynamic, existential relationship with the reader, and may even be interpreted in the opposite way from the writer's intention (contra versionem explicatam). The text seeks to create the same opening in the reader as it did in the writer. What needs to be seen in the text is not what Christ did for our redemption, but the faith he had in "being as

⁷⁷Paul Achtemeier, An Introduction to the New Hermeneutic (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 97.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ebeling, Word and Faith, op.cit., p. 331.

⁸⁰Ernst Fuchs, Hermeneutik, 2nd edition (Bad Cannstatt: R. Muellerschoen, 1958), p. 13.

gracious."⁸¹ Faith arises from an encounter with words, so that the New Hermeneutic is simply a "linguistic mysticism."⁸² Such departures from the historical meaning of the text diminish the hermeneutic value of the New Hermeneutic. Traina says:

Two underlying factors may account for this situation. The first is Ebeling's seeming acceptance of a critical-historical approach based on the principles of scientific positivism. The second factor is the absence of a clear differentiation between present-historical meanings (applicatio) and past-historical meanings (explicatio). The result of such a merger of exposition and exegesis, and of making the unquestionably important movement from text to sermon the starting-point of hermeneutic, may be the weakening of the grammatico-historical approach, which is so indispensable for sound interpretation. The validity of hermeneutic may depend on maintaining a proper sequence, which necessitates beginning with past-historical meanings and moving to present-historical meanings, and on a proper balance between text and sermon. Both of these are lacking in Bultmann, and this lack does not seem to be corrected by the "new hermeneutic."⁸³

Braaten is also critical of the New Hermeneutic and its preoccupation with the linguistic approach, for he thinks that language is not the only valid vehicle of Biblical revelation. The attempt of Ebeling and others to get back to the "Jesus of history" seems to be for the purpose of grasping the "language event" only. It implies that the

⁸¹Pinnock, op.cit., p. 225; cf. Ebeling, Theologie und Verkündigung, p. 90.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Traina, op.cit., pp. 29f.

significance of Jesus lies in the power of his language to affect others. This scarcely does justice to the historical events which convey so much of the meaning of Jesus' life, such as the crucifixion and resurrection. These are not merely "language events," but historic events creative of language and which reveal God only when the historic event and its linguistic vehicle are kept together, with neither aspect being minimized. Language alone can bridge only part of the chasm of centuries between the Christ event and contemporary life. "The hermeneutical power of the Sacraments as vehicles of the self-contemporization of Jesus Christ is not fully explicable as a linguistic phenomenon."⁸⁴

Conclusion

Thus, although Luther certainly was concerned with the proclamation of the Word, as the New Hermeneutic professes to be, his primary concern was to understand the historical meaning of the Biblical text and bring himself into conformity with it. More clearly than the New Hermeneutic, he brought the Word to bear upon man's life in a way which made man "captive to the Word." He did not attempt to re-interpret it according to man's experience. Furthermore, Luther's hermeneutical principles laid a firm foundation for the grammatical-historical approach to interpretation. They

⁸⁴Braaten, History and Hermeneutics, op.cit., p. 140.

cannot be legitimately used as foundational concepts for a linguistic approach that is more concerned with esoteric definitions of the function of language than with the application of the findings of grammatical exegesis to the heart which needs to be spoken to by God.

The New Hermeneutic follows the liberal tradition in its critical methodology and minimizes the understanding of the supernatural to the point that it destroys the Old Testament prophetic significance and exhibits such selectivity in its acceptance of the New Testament message that it threatens the Church with a "new Marcionism." In removing the external and historical bases for faith, with the exception of the historical sayings of Jesus, it effectively removes the soteriological significance of many objective events and elements of the Christian faith in favor of a subjective, existential concept of faith which ostensibly reflects the Lutheran emphasis on justification by faith alone.⁸⁵ It limits redemption to response to a "language-event," when both Luther and the New Testament base salvation on the atoning work of Christ on the cross. It thus leaves man with a truncated and non-historical basis for faith, and a concept of the Word of God as communication without a clear concept of exactly what is communicated in and through it.⁸⁶

⁸⁵Ramm, op.cit., pp. 138f.

⁸⁶Ramm, Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

From the Patristic period to the Reformation, Biblical interpretation was subjected to the authority of ecclesiastic tradition without being allowed to approach the Bible inductively. While Irenaeus saw the importance of the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture, he also saw the Spirit working in tradition in an equally important way. Both Tertullian and Augustine saw the authority of the Church as the basis for arriving at a true interpretation, and Vincent subjected the meaning of Scripture to the concensus of the ecclesiastical authorities. With this growing emphasis on Church tradition as the hermeneutical guide for Biblical interpretation, Origen and the Alexandrian School developed the allegorical approach to Scripture and saw a multiplicity of meanings in it. Jerome objected to the wholesale use of allegory, but did not consistently abandon its use in his own interpretation. He did, however, emphasize that the deeper meanings of Scripture must be based on the literal sense.

With the renewal of interest in the Antiochian School in the later medieval period, the importance of the literal sense and the necessity of seeing the historical

meaning of Scripture were more widely accepted and appreciated. Hugh of St. Victor pointed out that the historical sense must be the basis of exposition, and Aquinas demonstrated the necessity of allowing the literal sense to be primary. The methodology of the Humanists also contributed to the growing awareness of the importance of the literal-historical meaning of the text.

Into this theological atmosphere which was growing more and more aware of the importance of the meaning of the Biblical text in itself and not only in its traditional ecclesiastical interpretation, Luther brought his interpretative principles. In doing so, he created a hermeneutical watershed which changed the direction of the interpretative methodology. In addition to his revolutionary exegetical approach, he saw the necessity of the illumination of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter of Scripture. It is this interaction between the illuminating work of the Spirit and the proper use of sound interpretative procedures which expresses Luther's hermeneutical uniqueness and which continues to be the necessary basis for a viable hermeneutic.

Luther's emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter and the centrality of faith for the interpretative process has much relevance for the contemporary hermeneutical task. In the rigid authoritarianism of traditional Catholic interpretation, no adequate place was

given to the power of the Spirit to work with sound grammatical interpretation in illuminating the text. Also, in the obsession of much modern scholarship for scientific objectivity, much emphasis has been placed on the empirical facts of historical research to the exclusion of a proper emphasis upon the subjective aspects of the presuppositions of the interpreter.¹ In interpretation, the theological and historical interpretations cannot be adequately handled without a recognition of the subjective element. A person's perception of a text and its meaning is influenced by his own point of view, and this element cannot be overlooked. The idea is widely prevalent, especially in America, that complete objectivity in Biblical scholarship should be the ideal.² In attempting to be objective, some scholars bring alien rationalistic presuppositions to Scripture and thus distort its intended meaning. The proud will of the interpreter often leads him to make himself master over the Word without the aid of the Spirit to quicken his spiritual awareness.³

Luther's emphasis on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the interpreter can bring a corrective word to the contemporary hermeneutical scene. When he says that

¹James D. Smart, The Interpretation of Scripture (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 18, 25.

²Ibid., pp. 22, 25.

³Prenter, op.cit., pp. 116f.

one cannot rightly discern the meaning of Scripture apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, but sees only the lex naturae and not the Word which transforms, he strikes a responsive chord with contemporary scholars such as James Smart, who emphasizes that the presuppositions of faith enable one to be more faithful to his subject and to achieve a greater and more valid objectivity than would otherwise be possible.⁴ Both Bultmann and Barth stress that it is impossible for any interpreter of Scripture to be uninfluenced by his theological and philosophical convictions. It is thus crucial that the interpreter approach Scripture inductively, dealing with it according to the presuppositions of faith which are derived from its own text, and not in the spirit of other, alien presuppositions, such as Bultmann insists upon doing. The interpreter is a "whole man," and he must realize that man's relation to God is the substance of Scripture, and there can be no profound disclosure of its meaning except to faith.⁵ Only as the interpreter listens to the Scriptures in faith and has his life laid open to the redemptive work of God's Spirit can he expect to have the Spirit indwell and illuminate him. The Bible must be read in the presence of the same Spirit who who caused it to be written. We must take issue with the

⁴Smart, op.cit., p. 30.

⁵Ibid., pp. 45, 47.

positivist approach of such men as Bultmann and the scholars of the New Hermeneutic who never go beyond the "outside" of Biblical history and who reject "pneumatic exegesis," in contrast to Luther's emphasis on the "inner" Word spoken by the Holy Spirit through the Word.

As Luther's hermeneutical principles are viewed in historical perspective, several of his emphases can be used as canons to examine critically both ancient and modern approaches to the Bible. First, his principle of sola scriptura safeguards Biblical interpretation from being governed by philosophical concensus or subjective experience. Pinnock notes the necessity of maintaining this principle:

The loss of the sola scriptura leads to a new sacerdotalism (the church is the matrix of the tradition), a new clericalism (the scholar applies his existential gnosis to the text on our behalf), and a new mystical agnosticism (a faith tailored to survive even if God is not there).⁶

This principle prevents interpretation from becoming subject to "theological anarchy" or ecclesiastical tyranny. Scripture must be the canon by which all theological opinion is measured. The danger of ecclesiastical authority as the supreme guide to theological truth and of liberalism with its denial of objective authority is that neither of them can be criticized by any other authority. Scripture alone can

⁶Pinnock, op.cit., p. 111.

provide the critical norm of authority which rightfully commands our obedience. Luther's answer to the question of authority is sola scriptura. Tradition is not irrelevant to interpretation, for Luther respectfully, but critically, consults traditional interpretations. Tradition, however, must be tested by Scripture, and not vice-versa.⁷

Another hermeneutical canon of Luther's which should guide any valid interpretation is the sensus literalis. The tyranny of ecclesiastical authority and the agnostic subjectivism of liberalism cannot bear the serious application of the literal sense of Scripture. The conclusions of allegory, existentialism, and historical positivism deny the actual teachings of Scripture by transforming them into myths and symbols. For Luther, God's Word is not above or apart from the text, and the multiplex intelligentia must be rejected in favor of a careful grammatical-historical exegesis which takes the intended meaning of the Bible seriously.⁸ Such a concern for the literal sense would be a safeguard against the enthusiasm of the spiritualists who separate the Spirit from the Word and against the subjectivists who separate the Word from the Bible, and it would deny the validity of violent renderings of the text such as in Bultmann's existentialist interpretations.

⁷Ibid., pp. 118-120.

⁸Ibid., pp. 210f.

The literal sense of Scripture requires one to base his religious certainty upon Scripture, rather than upon Bultmann's unhistorical, existentialist fideism.

Finally, Luther's principle of scriptura sui ipsius interpretes safeguards the unity of Scripture from such assaults as Bultmann's neo-Marcion reduction of the Old Testament. Scripture is a unified theme which grows out of the Christocentric sense of revelation. Since it comes from one Author, it is its own interpreter. It does not need the authoritative interpretations of popes and councils in order to communicate clearly its message.

Although Luther strongly objects to the Roman Catholic Church's exaggerating the obscurity of Scripture so that it needs interpretation by the Church, he does believe that the work of the Word and the Spirit is not effected apart from the Church. It is the "proper work" of the Spirit to make the Church the "community of saints." He says that outside the Church, there is no salvation, because there is no Saviour. Christ is found only in the Christian Church because it is only here that He is preached. It is the proclamation of the Word of Christ that is constitutive of the Church, and it is in the Church that the Spirit works through the Word.⁹ Thus Luther does not mean that scriptura sui ipsius interpretes implies that every man

⁹Watson, op.cit., p. 167; see the Notes on Watson's chapter for extensive documentation of Luther's work on this subject.

is his own interpreter of the Bible in isolation from the Church. Instead, every interpreter must be guided by the "analogy of faith," or as James Wood says, "the interpretation must be congruent with the general norm of the Word of God."¹⁰ This concept of interpretation, then, is not individualistic, even though it is pursued by individuals in the Church, and this is essentially the issue here. The place of the Church in the interpretative task must be defined without endangering the freedom of critical scholarship, and on the other hand without allowing scholarship to bring alien concepts into the Church as "the assured results of scientific Biblical scholarship."¹¹ The Church must not coerce the scholar, and vice-versa, and the scholar must stand in the full stream of the Church's life so as not to lose the historical perspective which the Church gives to his interpretation.¹² All interpretation, then, which is Christian, will be done in the context in which Christ's Spirit works, that is, in the Church.

In conclusion, then, we may say that a study of Luther's hermeneutic in historical perspective underlines the necessity for the spiritual preparation of the interpreter, and a constant interaction of his spirit with the

¹⁰James Wood, op.cit., p. 89.

¹¹Smart, op.cit., p. 59.

¹²Ibid., pp. 60, 62.

Interpreter Spirit as together in a relationship of faith they exegete and interpret the Word of God as it is given through the Holy Scriptures. This work cannot be done in isolation, nor can it be accomplished effectively apart from the sound use of the grammatical-historical method, but it must be done within the fellowship of the Christian community and in the attitude of faith. One must know the Spirit of Christ and be known by Him before he can appreciate the Word of God, which is the expression of this Christ.

ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AH</u>	<u>Against Heresies</u> , Irenaeus
<u>CD</u>	<u>Church Dogmatics</u> , Barth.
<u>CR</u>	<u>Corpus Reformationum</u> .
<u>DB</u>	<u>Deutsche Bibel</u> , Weimarer Ausgabe.
<u>EE</u>	Erlangen edition.
<u>LW</u>	<u>Luther's Works</u> , Pelikan edition.
<u>SL</u>	<u>Sämtliche Schriften</u> , Walch edition.
<u>TR</u>	<u>Tischreden</u> , Weimarer Ausgabe.
<u>WA</u>	Weimarer Ausgabe.

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