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A Historical Study of the Friends Doctrine of Scripture

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A HISTORICAL STUDY
OF THE FRIENDS
DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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The Problem

There are various theological positions taken by modern day Friends. Some Friends are evangelical, others are theologically liberal. In analyzing this situation one of the major reasons proposed to explain the tendency toward liberalism is related to the Friends' basic view of objective authority in general and a view of Scripture in particular. The question arises as to whether the view of Scripture held traditionally by Quakers accounts necessarily for the tendency toward religious liberalism and whether the Friends' view is actually at variance with evangelical thought today or through the course of history. The investigation is concerned with determining the answers to these definitive questions: (1) What was the Friends' view of religious authority and Scripture? (2) Did it differ from other Christian views? (3) If so, in what way did early Friends differ from their contemporaries? (4) Was the Friends' view of Scripture unique with them or was there a basis for their position in the continuity of thought in Church History as a whole? (5) Did the seventeenth century Friends contribute a corrective to the prevailing view of Scripture, and in so doing tend to overstate the matter, or was their stated view a well-balanced one and definable on its own merits?

Justification of the Study

Since the attitude toward Scripture as the authority for Christian faith is basic to the doctrinal structure of any church or individual it appears to be both reasonable and profitable to examine the foundation of this belief against the stream of traditional Christian thought, as well as within the history of one's particular denominational inheritance.

As an evangelical Quaker the writer feels a personal interest in the historical concept of Scripture in attempting a clarification of contradictory opinions concerning the place of the Bible in Quaker theology. Repeatedly in the writings of early Friends attempts were made to clear up the misunderstandings among people who accused them of either "denying or undervaluing" the Scriptures. Yet, as far as this study has revealed, outside of Barclay's Apology and Claridge's, Treatise of the Scriptures, both written by Friends of the seventeenth century, very little has been written in any systematic way concerning the Friends' doctrine of Scripture. Extreme positions have arisen out of what is claimed to be the Friends' view of authority and Scripture. The liberal Quaker boasts that his views are supported by George Fox and an extensive Quaker heritage. Evangelical Friends have either made the same claim or in many cases, are not aware that the historical testimony of the Friends Church is any different from other evangelical persuasions. Therefore, it is important that Evangelical Friends consider their position with all of its implications.

Delimitation

The very large scope of the subject under consideration is recognized and must be limited to a survey-type study which will acquaint the reader briefly with the doctrine of Scripture in the major periods of church history. It is hoped that through this investigation trends will be recognized in the history of the church regarding the problem of authority and the doctrine of Scripture and which will serve as a background for a more exhaustive study in one particular area of the subject in the future. In this study the historical background will serve as a backdrop for the Friends' view.

Procedure

It is the purpose of this study to make a brief survey of Christian thought as it relates to the doctrine of Scripture in three major periods of church history: the Early Church, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation, and then to relate the seventeenth century Friends' concept of Scripture to the views accepted in these periods. Attention is given to major Christian leaders and influential movements in and out of the Church in relation to their contribution to the doctrine of Scripture. Consideration is given to the inspiration, authority and interpretation of Scripture. In Chapters II, III, and IV facts gleaned from research in these areas are stated with very little interpretation. When the Friends' views are stated in Chapter V there is necessarily a deeper analysis and interpretation in order to compare

and relate these concepts to the historical background.

Among the many sources, large reference to primary sources has been made from: The Journal of George Fox, n.d., The Works of George Fox, Vol. III, 1831 (first edition 1659); Barclay's Apology, 1908 and the Treatise of the Scriptures by Richard Claridge, 1893 (first edition, 1724).

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY CHURCH

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A. THE PRE-CHRISTIAN ERA

An insight into the Pre-Christian Era will serve as a background and starting point. It was out of this period that many significant concepts arose which influenced the development of Christian thought.

The Jews had a very high regard and reverential esteem for their sacred writings. Josephus declares that according to the Jewish concept the Scriptures were given to them by the inspiration that comes from God:

Never, although many ages have elapsed, has anyone dared either to take away or to add to, or to transpose in these (twenty-two sacred books) anything whatever; for it is with all the Jews, as it were, an inborn conviction from their earliest infancy to call them God's Teachings, to abide in them, and if necessary to die joyfully in maintaining them.¹

The Masonites or Doctors of Tradition, as they were called, were accredited with much of this preservation of the purity of Jewish Scripture down to the slightest accent.

Following the time of Ezra, the Jews held that every word of the Five Books of Moses was supernaturally communicated and every tittle of the Levitical formalism was of infinite importance. Each letter was considered holy. Hidden meanings were extracted by every conceivable method

¹L. Gaussen, Theopneustia (Kansas City: Gospel Union Publishing Co., 1912), p. 106.

"acrostically, cabbalistically, allegorically, mystically" and by any other means possible. Probably the crudest form of Bibliolatry in history existed during this period.¹

Later, when the Jews, for economic reasons, were attracted to the city of Alexandria, there resulted a fusion of Greek philosophy and Jewish religion. It was out of this situation that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek; this translation, known as the Septuagint, influenced exegesis for centuries. Fables regarding its origin resulted in attributing to it supernatural inspiration. The Septuagint (Greek) is considered the most important of all versions of the Old Testament.²

Though the Jews held to a high view of inspiration, they rested so largely in the allegorical interpretation of it that they did not penetrate the real meaning. The Alexandrian type of allegorical interpretation arose out of the necessity to harmonize Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. This fusion of Greek-Jewish thought reached its culmination in Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus. He held to a rigid view of inspiration calling it "the holy word" and "the sacred oracles"³ and in his opinion inspiration annihilated the activity of the human faculties. This concept may have grown out of the influence of

¹Mildred B. Wynkoop, A Historical and Semantic Analysis of Methods of Biblical Interpretation As They Relate to Views of Inspiration, Unpublished Dissertation, Northern Baptist Seminary, 1955, pp. 39, 40.

²Vergilius Ferm, (ed.) Encyclopedia of Religion (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), p. 811.

³Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 40.

the Eastern Manicheans who regarded all matter, and therefore the human body, as essentially evil. Philo thought that there could be no real intercommunion between the divine and human; thus, God could only reveal Himself to man by sinking him into a trance and thereby absorbing the whole soul. In this way there would be no possibility of error in the message communicated.¹

The common practice of allegorizing, which Philo adopted and systematized, is said to have begun when the Jews found that there were many things in their Scriptures which could not be successfully defended from the taunts of the heathen adversaries. To meet this challenge Philo adopted the method of interpreting every passage in the light of the worthiness of God; however, in cases where the passage did not seem to be "worthy" he would freely allegorize. The same treatment was given to any apparent contradiction in the text. By this method he could ignore the literal story or expression and extract from them some meaning which he termed the "spiritual" or "mystic" sense.²

Although Philo professed a deep respect for the literal sense, he actually considered the literal interpretation a concession to weakness. To him the symbolic exegesis was considered a higher type and the result was sometimes completely wild and absurd.

Farrar states that Philo's theory and his method were adopted by

¹F. W. Farrar, The Bible Its Meaning and Supremacy (London: Green and Co., 1899), p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 65.

many of his countrymen and were inherited by Christian teachers as a disastrous legacy from the Jewish Church. However, this method was later challenged by leaders of the Antiochean school.¹ Seeberg claims that this exegetical method, which became prevalent in the Church, prevented a historical interpretation of the Old Testament for fifteen hundred years.² The influence of Philo's exegesis was especially noted in the Greek Fathers, namely, Barnabas, Justin, Theophilus of Antioch, Clement, Origen and Eusebius, as well as to the Latin Fathers, Ambrose and Jerome.

Though this method of interpretation is frowned upon by sound Bible expositors, today it is well to remember that this method was adopted in an attempt to preserve the authority and integrity of the Scripture before the enemies of the faith. Apparently, not understanding a progressive and historical unfolding of revelation, they were driven to use this symbolic method for this purpose.

In conclusion it seems safe to state that: (1) the Jews believed in an almost magical, supernatural, divine inspiration of Scripture; (2) they reverently accepted the authority of Scripture; and (3) the allegorical method of interpretation was the most generally used.

B. THE POST-APOSTOLIC FATHERS 90-140 A.D.

The significance of the post-Apostolic Fathers lies in the fact

¹Ibid., p. 67.

²Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines, trans. by Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), I, 72.

that they form the connecting link between the time of the Apostles and the Old Catholic Age. The writings of these Fathers are very scant but nevertheless necessary to this study.

The Post-Apostolic Fathers depended upon the Old Testament in its entirety and recognized it as an absolute authority. Whenever they mentioned "The Scripture" or introduced quotations with, "it is written," it is certain that the Fathers were thinking of the Old Testament. They considered the Scriptures to be "the revelation of the past, present and future." Some believed that Christianity had become the true Israel and therefore the only custodian of the Old Testament since the rejection of the Jews. Others, like Barnabas, believed that God never made any revelation to the Jews and that the Old Testament should be interpreted in terms of Christianity and the present. However, Barnabas and the Apostolic Fathers agreed that the Old Testament belonged to the Christians and not only to the Jews, and that Old Testament institutions were to be interpreted as emblematic. This conception and interpretation naturally destroyed any historical insight into the Old Testament. With few exceptions this theory and its application continued to prevail until the Reformation.

The New Testament Canon had not yet been formally concluded but very early the Words of Jesus occupied a high position of authority with the Fathers. Next to the words of Jesus stood those of the Apostles. Clement cites the books of the "prophets and apostles" as doctrinal authorities. Zahn states, and Neve agrees, that "the possibility that

an Apostle could have erred in doctrine and instructions which he directed to the congregations had obviously no place in the circuit of ideas in the Post-Apostolic Age.¹

Investigations have proved that the thirteen Pauline Epistles and the four Gospels were known to the Apostolic Fathers but it remains an open question as to whether or not they considered them as in any sense a closed Canon.²

Neve also says that the formation of the Canon grew out of the normal impulses within Christianity itself and not primarily because of the heresies without. The Church's struggle with heresy simply strengthened the incipient New Testament Canon and brought it to a formal conclusion sooner than would otherwise have been the case.³

It is not the purpose of this study to make a detailed study of the Canon but to simply state the progress of the formulation where it is significant to this topic.

The Apostolic message was received by word of mouth as well as by pen and passed on from one generation to another by public preaching and catechetical instruction. The Apostolic Fathers considered and called the entire and complete message, "Tradition", which in the second century was not regarded in the limited sense we use the term today. It

¹J. L. Neve, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), p. 41.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

meant simply "to hand on" regardless of the form in which it was delivered. Gradually this matter began to take on a more or less fixed form and a noteworthy agreement in essential content. This oral tradition for awhile was quite secure but as opposition and disagreements arose, it became less dependable.

According to most sources consulted it is agreed that the authority of the early Church was the same in content as was the formal Canon of the following centuries. The Church tradition in its early stages was simply the Rule of Faith or teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. The earliest Fathers accepted the belief in divine inspiration, never questioning that the writers of Scripture did not err.

It was a period of struggle to understand the distinction between the letter and the spirit. Since Scripture was not interpreted in the light of progressive revelation, they reconciled the discrepancies between the divinity of Scripture and their seeming imperfections by the use of allegory. Warfield says that "the allegorical interpretation which rioted in the early days of the Church was the daughter of reverence for the biblical word."¹

What then did the Post-Apostolic Fathers contribute to the doctrine of Scripture? They held to the divine inspiration of Scripture, and to its authority and used the allegorical method of interpretation to preserve the Old Testament from its "unchristian" moral teaching.

¹Benjamin Warfield, The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 109.

C. THE APOLOGETIC PERIOD 150-400 A.D.

Irenaeus - School of Asia Minor.

One of the earliest and most influential men of this period was Irenaeus, who, in theology, was typical of the School of Asia Minor. This school was the outcome of John's ministry and was distinguished by its firm grasp of Scripture.

Irenaeus is a key figure in this period of Christian thought. Zahn says, "Irenaeus is the first writer of the Post-Apostolic Age who deserves the name of theologian".¹ Seeberg remarks that the theology of Irenaeus gives a clear view of the heritage bequeathed to the Church by the Apostolic Age. Harnack admits that Irenaeus' theology is a deciding factor in the History of Dogma. Thomasius characterizes his theology as "sound to the core."²

Irenaeus held to a very high estimation of Scripture, including the New Testament. His view of inspiration is noted in his writings as he uses such terms as, "Spirit-bearers," (); "spoken by the Word of God and his Spirit"; "the Spirit through the Apostle;" and "God-inspired" (θεόπνευστος).³

Seeberg remarks that this conception of inspiration is found frequently in Judaism, but it received special meaning only when Christian-

¹Neve, A History of Christian Thought, p. 81.

²Ibid.

³Seeberg, op. cit., p. 136.

ity adopted the conception of the canon, namely, that certain books are holy and every word in them authoritative. But at that time according to Seeberg, the principle of inspiration and authority was attached only to the original Christian documents.¹

Irenaeus held to the commonly accepted Alexandrian legend that the seventy translators of the Septuagint were each led and inspired independently to write the same thing. He believed, with others, that the minds of the seventy translators remained passive during the process of receiving and recording the message of this Old Testament record.

However, concerning the New Testament writers, Irenaeus rejected the theory of passivity. He accepted the theory of verbal inspiration but accounted for the transposition of words in Paul's writings by the "velocity" of his utterance and vehemence of spirit.² He appeared to believe in the supreme authority of Scripture, and he argued that "the church professes to teach the truth concerning God, Christ and salvation. This is attested by the prophets, apostles and all the disciples of Christ." Thus the decisive authority rests with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.³

Since the limits of the New Testament Canon were not completely fixed by the close of the second century, and since heretics were intro-

¹Ibid.

²George P. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 75.

³Seeberg, op. cit., p. 135.

ducing so many "garbled" writings or misinterpreting the genuine, the appeal to the New Testament did not prove sufficient in controversy. This, then, led to a search for a criterion of interpretation.¹

The criterion which both Irenaeus and Tertullian accepted was the ancient baptismal confession or the "canon of truth," which they paraphrased and expanded freely. In other words, the actual content and not the formula, as such, was the criterion.

Irenaeus believed that the historical support for the content of the "canon of truth" could be traced through the unbroken succession of bishops since the days of the apostles and that since the bishops are successors of the apostles, having received the apostolic doctrine, "the sure charisma of Truth," this truth must be learned from them.

Next came the concept of the sure gift of truth ("charisma veritatis") which was peculiar to the bishops. This consisted of both the possession of the traditional faith and the ability to interpret it. Accordingly, not only the confession but also its interpretation, became authoritative.²

At this time, Irenaeus' conception of the church was not as yet hierarchical; to him, the episcopacy was only the bearer of the historical truth. It consisted of "those who believe in God and fear him, and who receive the Spirit of God".³ In other words the unity of the

¹Ibid., p. 136.

²Ibid., p. 137.

³Ibid., p. 138.

Church was based upon the one Spirit, the one truth, and the one confession. Seeberg states that the rise of episcopal authority is historically comprehensible and necessary but it led to an abnormal path in which the episcopacy later became bearer and guarantor of truth and ecclesiastical tradition was raised to a place beside Scriptural authority.¹

Nevertheless Irenaeus still insisted upon the authority of the Scripture, and the ideas of men were always to be attested by the criteria of Scripture and the baptismal confession. He stands out in history as one who was in advance of his day, especially in the wise handling of Scripture; "in Irenaeus we have, for the first time, a consideration, and an understanding of the Scriptures as a whole."² He seemed to have a grasp of the relationship of the Old and New Testament, a concept which was obviously lacking in the majority of men before and after him for many centuries.

Irenaeus avoided the dangers of the extreme positions of Origen's philosophical speculation and Tertullian's one-sided realism which is noted later, "by his sound Biblicism, his sound attitude to tradition, and by his Christocentric theology."³

As Irenaeus approached interpretation of doctrine, he held to certain Christian presuppositions which were believed to be grounded in revelation and not reason. These presuppositions he called the "rule of

¹Seeberg, op. cit., p. 137.

²Neve, op. cit., p. 81.

³Ibid.

faith." This rule included faith in the trinity, the incarnation, the resurrection and ascension and the second coming of Christ. These pre-suppositions were to be accepted by faith and were also to be the basis for allegorical interpretation if necessary.¹

Irenaeus was opposed to every kind of a priori speculation and his theology was therefore a theology of Biblical facts. Therefore God was known to him primarily through revelation and not reason.

Tertullian (150-225) - School of North Africa.

Tertullian represents the School of North Africa and is considered to be the founder of Western Theology. As a systematic theologian Tertullian did not follow in the path of Irenaeus but he did agree with Irenaeus in adopting the Old Testament as well as the new sources of truth and in recognizing the Rule of Faith.

Tertullian held to the concept that all Scripture was inspired and there were no degrees of inspiration but that all parts were on the same level.

He supposed that they (Scripture) contained the total body of all truth and that they contained no contradictory elements. He held as inspired their cosmology, chronology, anthropology, and history.²

He depended, as did Irenaeus and many before him, on the "inspiration of the Seventy." He recognized the work of the Spirit and asked the question, "Whoever found...Christ without the assistance of the Holy Spirit?"³

¹Mildred B. Wynkoop, Class Notes, C.T. 531, 1956.

²Wynkoop, A Historical and Semantic Analysis, p. 50.

³Barclay, p. 28.

He took Irenaeus' concept of apostolic succession and the authority of the episcopacy and carried it out more fully. Consequently he believed that the Scriptures were actually the property of the Church and that heretics must not be allowed to appeal to them. Since the body of doctrines in revelation was given fully to the apostles and passed on to the Churches the Holy Spirit cannot throw any fresh light on it--at least to those outside the visible Church.

Tertullian assumed that tradition is always in accord with Scripture and he required it to be believed without proof. In this he presupposes that the Church has the actual teaching of the Apostles.¹ At this point tradition is elevated to a place equal to Scripture. Through Tertullian's successor, Cyprian, Jerome and Augustine tradition many times overshadowed the Scripture under the guise of being its protector and interpreter.²

Realism was the fundamental principle of Tertullian's interpretation. According to him, all that exists is corporeal even God and the soul. Thus his starting point, from which he argued was the historicity of revelation. He was strongly opposed to philosophical speculations and did not use the arguments of heathen philosophers, as did the Greek apologists, to prove truths of Christianity. His emphasis was upon faith in opposition to reason. He claimed that revelation was given as a sub-

¹H. M. Gwatkin, Early Church History (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1912), p. 196.

²Wynkoop, Dissertation, op. cit., p. 50.

stitute for all other knowledge including science, ethics, and metaphysics. Gilson claims, that reduced to its essentials, Tertullian's position was that, "since God has spoken to us, it is no longer necessary for us to think."¹

Although Tertullian made such strong statements as, "I believe because it is absurd" and "The fact is certain because it is impossible," he also turned right about face and declared that the proof of Christianity lies in its reasonableness and proceeds to use rational methods of proof. In this is recognized his dualism of faith and knowledge. He admitted that reason is of God and explains that, "words have character, not only by their sound, but by their sense, and they are heard not so much by the ear as by the mind."²

In conclusion note that Tertullian agreed with Irenaeus concerning the inspiration of Scripture, that he pushed the concept of episcopal authority in respect to Biblical interpretation farther than Irenaeus seemingly intended and that in his practical realistic position he put greater emphasis upon faith over reason.

Origen - The School of Alexandria.

Origen is considered the greatest among the representatives of the Alexandrian School. This school was noted for its speculative ten-

¹Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation In the Middle Ages. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 6.

²Seeberg, op. cit., p. 135.

dency. It was here that theology was viewed as a science and expressed in terms of philosophical thought.

A large part of Origen's work was in the field of Biblical criticism. His major contribution in this field was his Hexapla, a work consisting of fifty volumes, in which he placed in parallel columns all the then known texts and translations of the Old Testament, indicating the agreements and variations and adding critical remarks. He labored over this for twenty-seven years. Only fragments of this work remain today.

Gwatken's states that Origen was the first to attempt to survey the whole scope of revelation and work out systematically its relation to the whole range of human knowledge. He states, also, that Origen was limited by his slight knowledge of Hebrew and overestimate of the Septuagint as well as his unlimited use of allegory. In spite of these weaknesses, however, he was a pioneer in methods of textual criticism and his works are invaluable.¹

Neve states that a modification of the doctrine of inspiration may be observed in the Alexandrians. Origen ascribed the peculiarity of style in the New Testament authors to their individuality. He even went so far as to speak of a variation in the measure of inspiration of the Bible. Yet, in view of these modifications, he shielded the New Testament from every kind of error.

Until the time of Irenaeus the Fathers held largely to the theory

¹Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 196.

of passivity in inspiration. Irenaeus introduced the idea that Paul's writing was affected by the "velocity" of his utterance and the "vehemence of his spirit." Origen elaborated the idea by a consideration of the style of the individual writers.¹

Though the allegorical method was more or less common to the Church Fathers it was Origen who systematically developed this method of interpretation. The literal sense, says Origen, is intended to conceal the spiritual sense in order that pearls be not cast before swine. Thus he carried this allegorical interpretation completely out of bounds.

According to Origen, the Scriptures have a three-fold meaning. First, he lists the literal sense which is for the simpler souls of the multitude. The second meaning is the psychical or moral sense which refers to the soul and its ethical relationships including its relationship to God. Third, he lists the speculative sense and this he considers to be the real spiritual content of Scripture. The latter is reserved for the mature believer. In some cases the literal sense must be rejected altogether.²

In contrast to Tertullian's concept of reason, Origen considered rational faith superior to simple faith. One can be saved by simple faith but simple faith should be lifted to something higher--"to a vision of mysteries." To both Clement and Origen faith meant faith in God and Jesus Christ in a literal sense. In faith, they said, there is

¹Neve, op. cit., p. 63.

²Ibid., p. 86.

an element of knowledge which is sufficient for salvation.¹

In conclusion, briefly stated, Origen believed in the inspiration of Scripture which took into consideration the human element, he systematized the allegorical method of interpretation and he believed that reason played a definite part in Christian faith.

Cyprian and Jerome (200-258).

Cyprian is considered the greatest Churchman of the third century. He is accredited with developing a "high" doctrine of the Church which insisted that the visible Church was the supreme authority and that there is no salvation outside of it. The term "Church" no longer meant the holy people of God but a group of men belonging to the episcopacy. It is natural, with this view of the Church, that Cyprian should place Scripture in a lesser place than those before him. Although he held a high view of inspiration he appealed to tradition or to the Church for the defense of his position.

Jerome (347-420), an intellectual giant of the later Apologetic period, translated the Scriptures into the Latin (Vulgate) a major step in the spread of the sacred Scriptures into the vernacular.

Jerome's view of inspiration is somewhat contradictory. At one time he exalts the view that each word is mysterious and supernatural and at other times he criticizes the words with complete freedom.

¹Ibid., p. 85.

Until about 391 A.D. Jerome considered the Septuagint as inspired. His study in Hebrew caused him to recognize, however, that the original text only was inspired. The Catholic Encyclopedia says that Jerome probably went too far in reaction against the inspiration of the Septuagint.

Concerning interpretation he felt that the literal sense of Bible interpretation was superior but he fell into the allegorical method whenever he could not explain a passage.

His outstanding contribution was a well developed literal and historic sense which was sometimes offset by his changeableness. He spent only three days translating Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. In some sections he took great liberties and threw all exegetical caution to the winds. He disparaged allegory and then proceeded to use it. He felt that "Scripture narratives are too shocking to be matters of sacred history."¹ Jerome said;

Where the subject matter involves either turpitude or impossibility, we are passed over to higher things; and the paltriness of the letter sends us back to the preciousness of the spiritual sense.²

The Latin Vulgate was finished in 405 A.D. and at first it was used with the "Itala," the old Latin version from the second century. By the ninth century the Vulgate stood alone. It has been directly or indirectly the mother of most of the earlier versions in the European vernacular.

It is obvious today that the Vulgate contains innumerable faults,

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 52.

²Farrar, op. cit., p. 72.

inaccuracies and inconsistencies since Jerome unscrupulously twisted the letter and the history,--and rejected the literal sense whenever a passage seemed unworthy. Yet, in spite of the weakness of this text the Church came to feel that Jerome was preserved from error by the Holy Ghost and today the Vulgate is still considered on an "equality with the original," in Catholic thinking.¹

D. THE CONTRIBUTION OF AUGUSTINE

Augustine (354-420) was probably the most influential figure in Western theology. Many features of Roman Catholicism as well as Protestantism may be traced back to principles and suggestions in his theology.

Augustine was extravagant in claiming a "verbally inspired and inerrant Bible," the inspired version being the Septuagint. He said that the writers were "pens of the Holy Ghost" yet he recognized the human element and explained the Synoptic variations on purely human principles.² He joined the ranks of those who used allegorical interpretation and indulged in most extreme liberties in doing so although he professed that he felt the literal sense was best. For example, he interpreted the fig leaves in the Creation story as representing hypocrisy, the coats of skins as morality, the four rivers of Eden as the four cardinal virtues and the drunkenness of Noah as "a figure of death and the passion of Christ." He claimed, however, that the allegory should be

¹Scheff, op. cit., III, 973.

²Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 55.

based on the strictly historic sense.¹

Concerning the work of the Spirit and immediate contact with God Augustine wrote "It is the inward master that teacheth, it is Christ that teacheth, it is inspiration that teacheth; where this inspiration and unction is wanting it is in vain that words from without are beaten in. Unless he speaketh to us inwardly, it is needless for us to cry out."

Though Augustine developed a comprehensive philosophy of the Church with definite hierarchial conceptions he still maintained the authority of Scriptures above Councils. Shedd states that Augustine never attributed infallibility to any human opinion.

Catholic writers refer to the following statement of his, "I should not believe [have believed] the gospel unless the authority of the Catholic Church moved [had moved] me to." (Protestant writers generally construe the imperfect as the pluperfect in this passage and it would then read as it is inserted in brackets above.)

Augustine stressed the dependence of the believer on the Church universal but not the objective subordination of the Bible itself to this authority. His was not a "passive" acceptance of the Church but and "active" coming to his doctrinal position.²

Concerning the relation of tradition to Scripture, Fisher said that the Fathers of the fourth century often implied that the contents

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 55.

²William G. T. Shedd, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1863), Vol. I,

of the Scriptures and Catholic tradition were essentially coincident. This, Fisher felt, was the general view despite occasional statements by certain Fathers that tradition is a source of supplementary truth. Tradition was used as a support of certain Scripture passages; thus, Scripture was still the touchstone of orthodoxy."¹

It is noted that though Augustine made a distinction between the visible and invisible Church and between the place of tradition and Scripture, the general trend of the fourth century was toward a more powerful and authoritative ecclesiastical hierarchy. Augustine set up a rigid doctrine of the Church, and as a result, the Church councils assumed more and more authority.

In Augustine there is an agreement of natural and revealed knowledge. Begin with faith and go on from Revelation to Reason. He said, "Understanding is the reward of faith." In this school of thought the only conceivable faith is faith in Christian Revelation.² Augustine is not always clear at this point but, in general, he asserts that faith is most important. Faith is not antagonistic to reason, "we believe that we may know."

The same characteristic doctrine of divine, verbal inspiration, the use of allegorical interpretation and the authority of Scripture is evident in Augustine as it was in many of the early Fathers. His

¹ Fisher, op. cit., p. 122.

² Gilson, op. cit., p. 21.

development of the doctrine of the Church, however, may have added impetus to the rise of the hierarchial organization and authority.

E. PERVERSIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

One of the early emphases of this period was the Gnostic movement. This heretical influence was keenly felt in the Church and some of the doctrines, including the doctrine of Scripture, was affected by it in some quarters.

The Gnostics either rejected the Old Testament or interpreted it allegorically. They accepted the Apostolic writings but interpreted them according to their own principles. They emphasized unwritten traditions and teachings and published a number of apocryphal and pseudonymous books to propogate their doctrines.

Marcion was clasified as a Gnostic by some yet he was rather in a class by himself according to Zahn and Harnack. He was not a Christian in the sense of being one of the Church. The canon was, to him, a mutilated Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline writings. He claimed that the twelve Apostles were opposed to Paul and handed down spurious tradition. He also made a clear distinction between the Old and New Testaments and completely repudiated the Old Testament as being sub-Christian, even anti-Christian.

Marcion accepted the Scriptures literally and was unable to see a unity and harmony between the Old and New Testaments and between many New Testament books. Instead of turning to allegory as did many of the Fathers he simply cast out the passages that did not seem worthy.

Another perversion of the early period was that of Montanism. This perversion arose within the Church and was orthodox in some degree. To this group revelation had not ceased and Montanus, the leader, believed that he himself was to be the last word in revelation. He said, "after me there will be no further prophecy."¹ His importance lies in the view which he held that revelation did not end during the Apostolic period but extended beyond it by the ministry of the Spirit. This was one expression of the conviction that revelation somehow must and could be experienced beyond the original Christian period. It was the first revolt against a too formal and mechanical idea of revelation.

F. CONCLUSION

Summing up the doctrine of Scripture during the Apostolic period it is evident that belief in the inspiration of the Scripture was not questioned though it did not mean the same thing to all. Irenaeus held to a passive inspiration of the Old Testament but allowed for the influence of the human element in the New Testament. Tertullian also held to a verbal inspiration with all Scripture on the same level. Origen accepted the theory of inspiration but gave a larger place to the individual style in writing. Augustine would also fit the general pattern of proclaiming a verbally inspired and inerrant Bible (Septuagint) and he too, recognized the human element of the writers.

¹Neve, op. cit., p. 59.

The Apologists of this period were almost unanimously agreed on the allegorical method of interpretation. There were a few exceptions such as in the case of Theodore of Mopsuestia. These were either ignored by the Church or ignored in practice by the person proposing it. Many knew better than they practiced. They believed in verbal inspiration yet interpreted freely, altering, misquoting and allegorizing wildly.

During this period the visible Church was being emphasized as the guardian of the truth. The Church was driven to this because the heretics were claiming apostolic right or authority to interpret Scriptures. The Church was struggling to transmit the Apostolic Tradition in all of its purity and integrity. To meet this problem the thought of Apostolic Succession was forwarded and the church hierarchy gained momentum.

Irenaeus believed that the bishops had a "sure gift of truth" and were possessors of tradition. Cyprian added that the bishops were guided by inspirations and visions. More and more the emphasis was placed upon the visible Church.

For Irenaeus tradition was a tributary line of evidence for the establishment of the religious views of the Church with the truth revealed in Scripture but by the end of this period tradition was placed side by side with Scripture and in reality above Scripture.

Another characteristic of this age was the growing harmony of reason and revelation. Christianity was not irrational though sometimes thought to be supra-rational.

CHAPTER III

THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

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A. INTRODUCTION

By the beginning of the Medieval Period the doctrines of the Church in the West were set and it was impious to doubt them. Both the Christian life and spirit of theological work were quenched by the Mohammedan invasions. Attention was centered in Christianizing emigrants by reviewing the elementary dogmatics of the past. Thus, from Gregory the Great until the time of Charlemagne there was little contributed to the history of doctrine and in particular to the doctrine of Scripture. The dominant theological authority for the early Middle Ages was Augustine. Men gave themselves to a study of his works which resulted in an understanding or misunderstanding of his formulas and not a development of anything new.

During this period the authority of the Scripture faded into the background as the hierarchial conception of the Western Church is extended and modified. The popular Catholic conception of the Church prevailed over the higher ideal of Augustine, although this ideal was still used as a definition until a much later period. The Church was the hierarchy, and the subjects who obeyed the prelates, and the rulers of this hierarchy claimed to have the truth and the keys to the Kingdom. The priestly estate, particularly the bishops, were exalted in unmeasured terms above the laity. Charlemagne wielded supreme authority over the Western

Church and he recognized the primacy of the pope.

Since the doctrines of the Church were established by the Church men were expected to accept them without question. As some doubts did arise concerning this authority, it became the recognized prerogative of the popes to define doctrine. Thus, "Papal authority assumed the place of God, the Book, state, reason and private conscience."¹

The ancient church had dealt largely with basic doctrinal problems. They had worked out a satisfactory Christology and had wrestled with the problems of sin and grace. Now in the Middle Ages the emphasis shifted to the basic problem of authority. Men were continuing in the struggle to translate the Gospel to meet the human need. They were seeking a satisfactory way to experience and express belief. They continued to uphold the traditional view of the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture but the Scriptures held the place of final authority in name only. The Church and the Papacy were sitting in the chair of authority.

In order to understand the thinking of the Middle Ages it seems wise to first consider the contribution of Gregory the Great.

B. THE CONTRIBUTION OF GREGORY THE GREAT(540-604)

Since Gregory the Great's theology ruled dogmatic thought for five hundred years it is important to locate him in reference to the study of Scripture. Gregory's contribution to Christian thought grew

¹Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of Doctrine, II, 40.

largely out of his knowledge and interpretation of Augustine.

Seeberg states that Gregory held to the "strictest theory of inspiration"¹ and believed that the Holy Scriptures were the foundation of divine authority. However, it is noted that in general the authority of the Church was recognized as on a par with that of the Holy Scriptures.

Concerning the value of the Scriptures, Gregory said that through the Scriptures God answers the "open or secret questionings of all men."² He urged that they should be the foundation of all preaching and the reading of them was most urgently commended to all. But, as Seeberg says, "the force of all this was broken by the introduction of the allegorical exegesis as of fundamental authority."³ So with Gregory and others of this period, it became customary to laud the Holy Scriptures, but also to present as scriptural teaching the "ecclesiastical" doctrines.

Gregory is remembered for his emphasis on the external aspects of the institutions of the Church and the extension of the power of the Church. The controlling motive of Gregory was not the peace of heart which finds rest in God, as with Augustine, but "the fear of uncertainty, which seeks to attain security through the institutions of the Church."⁴ Gregory's influence carried over approximately five hundred years into the rise of the scholastic age.

¹Ibid., p. 18, 19.

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 26.

During the Middle Ages papal infallibility and claims of the pope to supremacy over church and state were bolstered up by decree after decree and by the "authority" of the Pseudo-Isidorean Decretals. These rules and regulations were considered to consist of divine law and norms directly revealed by God Himself. These decretals were placed on a par with the decrees of ancient councils despite a general mistrust that lingered about them for a long time,¹ a doubt that was finally confirmed.

During this period there was a confusion of Church and state and the pope assumed more and more authority. Gregory VII is accredited with the statement, "the Roman Church has never erred and never will err."²

The claims and corruptions of the hierarchy gave rise to various reactions. Men were still seeking after certainty and a vital experience. The new piety and mysticism were attempts to find the answer to their search.

C. SCHOLASTICISM

1. The Rise of Scholasticism.

Another attempt to know in order to become inwardly certain of salvation was the scholastic theology. Its beginnings date from about 1100 A.D.; its period ends with the reformation. While the new piety

¹Neve, op. cit., II, 181.

²Seeberg, op. cit., p. 50.

sought for certainty in spiritual experience, scholasticism understood it to be rational understanding.

The term, "scholasticism," is used to designate the theology of the Later Middle Ages. Its peculiarity consists in the logical and dialectical working over of the doctrines inherited from the earlier ages. This period is sometimes referred to as the "eclipse of Bible Scholarship."¹

The belief of the Church was: "first, learn what you are to believe and then go to the Scripture to find it there."² Thus, these schoolmen collected, analyzed, and systematized the Church's dogmas and argued against all objection. They subjected reason to Church authority and, with the rare exception of Abelard, accepted the teachings of the Fathers as accurately reflecting Scriptures. In this study they did not seek out real truth; therefore the result was a "theological corpse."

The schoolmen received most of their dogmatic principles from Augustine and their form from Aristotle.

Students were taught to read literature and study it on three levels. Their first consideration was to be grammar, structure and syntax. Second, they were to determine the meaning of what had been read and third, ascertain the theme or doctrinal content. The doctrinal content was the higher meaning or the "sentence." They made a sharp distinction between "sense" and "sentence." The sentence was then inter-

¹Wynkoop, A Historical and Semantic Analysis, p. 57.

²Ibid., p. 58.

preted in three ways; tropological, allegorical and anagogical. The tropological meaning applied to the individual, the allegorical applied the Old Testament to the Church, and the anagogical is concerned with the heavenly mysteries and is the "sentence of Scripture." It was this latter mystical meaning that was in the mind of Peter Lombard in his work called "Sentences." Later in this study the attitude of Peter Lombard as well as Abelard in regard to the "sentences" is considered.¹

2. The First Period of Scholasticism.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Seeberg says that the title, "Father of Scholasticism," should be given to Abelard rather than to Anselm. Abelard stands out in his era as a rebel against the commonly accepted habit of believing in religious matters without question. Abelard was a skeptic and a rationalist. He did not maintain that one need to fully understand a doctrine before he should accept it but he did maintain that one should at least have some perception of its meaning and should be convinced that it was not irrational, if one were to give it his assent. He did not contend that belief must wait for proof or that a truth need necessarily to be rationally demonstrated. But he was sure that it must be in harmony with reason or it could not be true.

Abelard opposed all compulsion in matters of faith. He believed and proclaimed that belief should be free and no one should be forced

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 59.

to accept what seemed to him untrue or condemned for not accepting it. He was the champion of investigation and discussion.

In Abelard's application of reason to the doctrines of the Christian system he was not a thorough going rationalist, for he believed in divine revelation and recognized the authority of the Scriptures. This he accepted without question.

He strongly opposed the practice of reading into the text all sorts of things that were not there and his own exegesis was a rule uncommonly sober and restrained.¹

McGiffert says that Abelard held to a broad view of inspiration in which he did not confine inspiration to Biblical authors but shared it with philosophers and sages of many lands. This inspiration, he states further, did not consist in external control or imparting truth from without but a man could discover truth for himself as his mind was enlightened. Thus, Biblical writers had this kind of inspiration in larger degrees than others and as a consequence could speak with peculiar authority.²

It seems to be widely agreed that though Abelard quoted from the Fathers decrees and canons freely, he held that the quotations from the Bible were the only absolutely infallible statements. McGiffert says that Abelard recognized that some biblical writers might conceivably

¹Arthur C. McGiffert, A History of Christian Thought (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), II, 206.

²Ibid.

have erred but nowhere treats this possibility as an actuality.¹

Abelard took a distinctly independent attitude toward tradition which was foreign to his age. He disagreed with the Church at large in his estimate of the Fathers whose writings were generally recognized as authoritative and whose opinions were supposed to be binding on the conscience of all Christians. He did use their writings and claimed their support whenever possible but did not regard them as infallible. He was aware of the differences among the Fathers in important matters. He felt that belief in their infallibility destroyed all independence and made the free use of reason impossible. Thus, he made it a point to reveal the conflict and undermine the belief in their infallibility.

His famous work entitles Sic et Non (Yes and No) was compiled to show up the discrepancies and disagreements among the Fathers and Scriptures. He stated in his prologue that many seeming discrepancies may be due to corruption of the text or a misunderstanding of their statements but that after allowing for that, there are still obvious contradictions which remain. He did not accuse the Fathers of sin but of ignorance. Moreover, he added that these mistakes should not cause concern since there is no obligation to follow the Fathers as you should follow the Scriptures.

The work Sic et Non is made up wholly of patristic quotations so arranged to show the disagreements of the Fathers on many topics, theo-

¹Ibid.

logical, ethical, ecclesiastical and historical. The topics are phrased in the form of about one hundred fifty-eight propositions. In some instances the propositions show little or no divergencies or no negative statement at all but in many cases the propositions have to do with the very foundation of the Church and he simply gave the proposition with no attempt of reconciliation. He simply states the "yes" and "no" and the quotations are left to speak for themselves.¹

This work of Abelard's was naturally not well received. He was attacking tradition, poor exegesis and the mystical meaning of the Sentence philosophy. In his work they could see rationalism and a spirit of mockery. It was a wedge to separate the hold tradition had on Scripture.²

The condemnation and harsh treatment of Abelard as a heretic was partly due to his own pride and arrogance but his theological attitude was chiefly responsible for it. It was not his particular heretical doctrinal views but his rationalistic tendency which seemed to threaten the very foundation of the faith held by the Church.

Peter Lombard (1100-1160).

Lombard was a student of Abelard and Hugo. His use of the dialectical method was reflective of Abelard though he used it with a different intention. He, too, listed the quotations of the Fathers for

¹Ibid., II, 208.

²Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 60.

and against the propositions under discussion. He quoted the Fathers, creeds, counciliar decisions and Scripture but he did not leave the propositions to speak for themselves as did Abelard. In most cases Lombard endeavored to reconcile the problems, explain the seeming contradictions and show the richness of the truth. His purpose was to restore confidence in the Fathers' while Abelard's was to create doubt. Hence, the Roman Church holds Peter Lombard in high esteem because of this work.

Lombard used symbolism and allegory to the limit and his influence was widespread. The literal meaning was incidental to the spiritual truths hidden in it. This use of allegory was carried to great lengths until everything had its detailed symbolism. Every portion of the building, the service, the nave, aisles, the choir and the windows all had spiritual significance. Nature was symbolized along with precious stones, plants, and animals. Allegorists vied with one another to discover new meaning in visible things. Mc Giffert says that the allegorical interpretation of the medieval period cannot be exaggerated.¹

Lombard raised another voice in this period, though he did not go as far as Abelard, to proclaim the Scriptures as the highest authority.

Conclusion.

Significant in this period was the rise of a new type of study in relation to the Scripture and the doctrines of the Church. It has been noted that his was to be a method systematizing and proving existing

¹McGiffert, op. cit., p. 252.

doctrines but one man, Abelard, jumped the bounds of the limitations set by the Church and created doubt in regard to the infallibility of the Fathers.

The inspiration of the Scriptures was still believed and the allegorical method of interpretation reached a new excess. The Church as a whole believed that the Church had the final word of authority. Abelard was an exception to the general trend of this age.

3. The Second Period of Scholasticism.

Introduction. The thirteenth century was known as the "Golden Age of Roman Catholicism. The pope was the undisputed sovereign of kings, bishops, church and state and had authority in both temporal and eternal affairs. There never has been a more powerful pope than Innocent III (1198-1216). He was considered lower than God yet higher than man. They actually believed that the expected kingdom of God had materialized on earth.¹

By 1274 at the Council of Lyons official sanction was given to the doctrine set forth by Thomas that the pope be given the place in dogmatics in which he was considered infallible and unrestricted in sovereignty over Church and state. But in spite of the great advance in ecclesiastical power and theology the opposition against the Church became very noticeable during this century. There was restlessness, dis-

¹Neve, A History of Christian Thought, I, 198.

content and a growing skepticism.

During this period many of the sects were appealing to the Scriptures to support their positions and in doing so were showing how far the Church had departed from the teachings of the New Testament. In light of this situation the ecclesiastical authorities sought to stop or bring under strict supervision the reading of the Bible by the common people. Innocent III while commending people for their desire to know the Scriptures insisted that the Scripture be read only under the guidance of competent interpreters. This would keep the simple and ignorant from being led astray. People were forbidden to have unauthorized translations in their possession.

In the fifth century Jerome had translated the Bible into Latin in order for all the people to have access to it and Gregory the Great had urged everyone to a diligent study of it. It was taken for granted that Scripture and the church's teaching were in full agreement. But when this began to be seriously questioned and the Bible was appealed to over against the Church, the ecclesiastical rulers decided that the only alternative was to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people.

According to Walker there was no universal denial of Bible reading during the Middle Ages but they were only to read select portions and all unauthorized translations were denounced.²

¹Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), p. 356, Vol. VI.

²Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), p. 253.

The Waldensians. One of the most influential heretical groups to rise up during this period and the only groups of its kind which survived was the Waldensian movement. It was a protesting group refusing to be bound by the Catholic hierarchy. They emphasized the ethical and moral demands of the Gospel and have been labeled as strict "Biblicists."¹ They leaned heavy on the Scriptures and sought to revive the simple precepts of the Apostolic Age. Schaff says that they were the strictly liberal sect of the middle ages.

They had the Gospels and other parts of the Scriptures translated into the vernacular of the people. It is thought that by the end of the twelfth century parts of their translations of Scripture were in circulation.

They were active in their distribution of the Scriptures. Whittier has based his poem of The Vaudois Teacher upon the account of the so-called anonymous writer of Passau of the fourteenth century. He speaks of the pedlers to the houses of noble families offering first gems and goods and then the richest gem of all, The Word of God.

O lady fair, I have yet a gem which purer
 lustre flings
 Than the diamonds flash of the jewelled
 crown on the lofty brow of kings;
 A wonderful pearl of exceeding price,
 whose virtue shall not decay,
 Whose light shall be as a spell to thee
 And a blessing on thy way!

--Whittier, The Vaudois Teacher

¹Neve, op. cit., p. 201.

The distinguishing principle of the Waldensians could be summed up in the Scripture, "we ought to obey God rather than men."¹ This, of course, meant the refusal to submit to the authority of the popes and prelates. They believed that they had Scriptural grounds for their independence. They clearly believed the Scripture was the final authority.

Even when Bible reading was not forbidden Bibles were not accessible to many. Realizing this problem Waldo, one of their leaders, encouraged the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Of these early Waldensian translations of the Bible in Romaunt, there are extant the New Testament complete plus Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. A German translation at Tepl, Bohemia, may have been of Waldensian origin.

Much stress was put on the study of Scripture by all the members of their group. Some of their layman knew almost the entire New Testament by heart.² It was because of the Waldensian position of obedience to God and dependence on the Scripture alone rather than the ecclesiastical authority they were ruthlessly punished and many martyred for their faith.

Seeberg says that the immediate result of these agitations by the Waldensians and other heretical movements constituted the most energetic assault upon the church since the days of Gnosticism. It added

¹Acts 5:29.

²Schaff, op. cit., V, 502.

impetus to the growing discontent and independence against the church and her institutions.¹

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) and Bonaventura (1221-1274). A study of this period would not be complete without a consideration of Thomas Aquinas and his view of Scripture. The influence of Thomas determined many of the doctrines of the scholastic period, plus the method reaching them.

Though Thomas did not add anything new to the doctrine of Scripture, he clearly defined the Church's position.

The Holy Scriptures are the revelation God, the source and absolute authority of Christian doctrine. But revelation is a doctrine and the lines of thought presented in Scripture must be supplemented and stated in a systematic form. Thus, in the end, the final authority is given to the pope in order to maintain unity.² He presumed, of course, as was the general opinion that papal definition and decrees of councils were always in harmony with the authority of Scripture but in reality the pope stood above Scripture.

In 1274, Thomas assigned the pope a place in dogmatics in which he proclaimed the pope infallible and unrestricted in sovereignty over church and state. This was the finishing touch in rise of ecclesiasti-

¹Seeberg, op. cit., II, 95.

²Ibid., p. 101-102.

³Ibid., p. 101.

cal hierarchy.

According to Seeberg, Thomas did not limit Revelation to the Scripture. Revelation extends to those things which reason might by itself discover but since reason is slow to discern truth revelation is contained in the Holy Scriptures.¹

Bonaventura stated in a similar way that faith may properly be confirmed through the inspired word.

The author of Scripture is God. "By inspiration God imparted to the prophets definite items of knowledge by the way of transient impression."² The inspiration of the Scripture, said Thomas, is confirmed by God in the history of the faith as well as by miracles and signs.

Seeberg makes a note of the moderate view of inspiration taken by these men. They do not hold to a verbal, mechanical theory where God forms the words in their mouths but rather that the Holy Spirit breathes into them the sense and direction.³

Thomas held reason in high esteem though not above revelation. Things mysterious in theology may be above reason, but cannot be against reason. Reason may lead the way but revelation alone can complete it. Reason does not prove faith but throws light on the doctrines which are furnished by revelation.⁴

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), XI, p. 322.

From the discussion of Thomas' view of authority, it is clear that the matter of interpretation of Scripture is left ultimately to the pope and to the church rather than the individual.

In regard to a literal or allegorical method interpretation, Thomas said that "spiritual expositions must be framed on the basis of the literal meaning, which is first to be accepted."¹

With Thomas' contribution to the views of authority the position of the Roman Church was apparently strengthened and safe from attack, but this did not last long. Shortly after the turn of the century whispers of the coming crisis were heard, until within the century protests were shouted by many concerned individuals and the reformation was on the way.

4. The Third Period of Scholasticism.

By the close of the fourteenth century the gradual dissolution of the scholastic theology was evident and the church was face to face with a religious and ecclesiastical crisis. The Golden Age of the Roman Catholic Church was beginning to tarnish.

There were three movements within the church which contributed to the loss of its hold on the life of the time. These movements were humanism, nominalism and mysticism. These three movements had a lasting effect upon the problem of authority and the place of Scripture.²

¹George P. Fisher, History of Christian Doctrine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 237.

²John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 5-8.

Humanism. The interest of Humanistic movement greatly helped to discredit the subtle method of scholasticism and to arouse a new interest in the ancient languages. This new interest in classical learning demanded new and accurate texts of ancient writings. Thus, even some of the writings of the church were criticized and proven to be inaccurate. But in all of their efforts the Humanists did not seek to break with the Church but only to bring about a reform within the Church.¹

Lorenzo Valla (1405-1457) one of the great humanist scholars began to criticize the Donation of Constantine, reputedly a document in which the Emperor Constantine bequeathed his earthly power to the papacy. By analyzing style and content, he showed that this could not possible be a fourth century document and therefore, the temporal or political claims of the papacy had no basis in its contents. This, of course, was a blow to the roots of ecclesiastical authority.² Valla also described as legend the claim that the Apostles' Creed comprised twelve statements, one made by each apostle.³ He advocated the study of the original Greek and Hebrew texts and thus, began to shake confidence in the revered Vulgate as the authoritative version of Scripture.⁴ Though Valla was not a deeply religious man he became interested in the Bible

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 659.

and "was convinced that it should be read and interpreted literally, grammatically and with full understanding of the original languages just as the newly discovered classics were being read."¹ Because of Valla's contribution, he is considered by some to be the chief link between the Renaissance and the Reformation.²

Nicolas V (1447-1455) was the first and best pope of the Renaissance, stated Schaff. He was a liberal supporter of the spirit of humanism and encouraged the translation of the classics, allowing huge sums for that purpose. He was particularly enthusiastic over the Greek translations. Nicolas deserves to be called the founder of the Vatican Library. Among the richest treasures of the Library is the Vatican manuscript of the Greek New Testament. Because of the support of Nicolas the humanist scholars were able to give themselves to translations which have become invaluable.³

Jacque Le Fevre (1455-1536), a French humanist, influenced by Valla, translated the entire Bible into French for the first time.⁵ In 1522 and 1525 appeared his comentaries on the Four Gospels and the Catholic Epistles. The four Gospels were put on the Index by the Sorborne.

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 64.

²Ibid.

³Schaff, op. cit., p. 585.

⁴Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 64.

borne.

Le Fevre had purposed early in his theological interest to offset the Sentences of Lombard by a system of theology giving only what the Scriptures teach. He asserted that the Bible was the authority and urged the Church to go back of the Vulgate to the original sources to be sure of right doctrine.¹

John Reuchlin (1455-1522) and Erasmus (1466-1536) are representative of the humanists who paved the way for the Reformation and the modern study of Greek and Hebrew Scriptures but who remained and died in the Roman Catholic Church.

Reuchlin recommended Melancthon as professor of Greek in the University of Wittenberg and thus, unconsciously aided in the Reformation. His chief distinction, however, is as the pioneer of Hebrew learning among Christians in Northern Europe. In his Hebrew Grammar and Dictionary which he published in 1506 at his own cost, he gave a scientific basis for the study of the language.²

Erasmus (1466-1536) has been called the Prince of the Humanists and he too, was influenced by Valla. Schaff says that what Reuchlin did for Hebrew learning Erasmus did for Greek learning and more. He established the Greek pronunciation which goes by his name, he translated the Greek Church Fathers and he "furnished the key to the critical study

¹Schaff, op. cit., VI, 644.

²Ibid., p. 632.

of the Greek Testament, the magna charta of Christianity."¹

Erasmus desired to take the Christians back to the true source of Christianity. He felt that Christianity had been obscured through scholastic subtlety. His watchword, states McGiffert, was the same as Luther's: "back to the primitive Church."² He believed in immediate inspiration as evidenced in his criticism of some preachers in his day, stating that "they expound the Scriptures from the pulpit, which no man can either rightly understand, or profitably teach, without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."³ All that he meant by this is not clear but surely the Scriptures were more than lifeless words.

He felt that the New Testament should be read by everyone---laymen as well as theologians. This meant, of course, that the Scripture should be put into the vernacular of the people.

Gilson says that Erasmus was a perfect example of the fourteenth century reaction against both scholastic philosophy and scholastic theology. A popular slogan might have been, "Away with philosophy and back to the Gospel."⁴ As a result of his reaction against excessive speculation he abandoned the scholastic method and devoted himself to the study of the Scripture.

¹Ibid.

²McGiffert, op. cit., II, 392.

³Richard Claridge, Tractatus Hierogaphicus; or a Treatise of the Holy Scriptures. (New York: Trow Directory, Printing and Bookbinding Company, 1893), p. 92.

⁴Gilson, op. cit., p. 90.

The Catholic Encyclopedia says that his edition of the Greek original of the New Testament was "no model of text-critical scholarship,"¹ and that in Erasmus' Latin translation he inserted sarcastic slurs on the ecclesiastical conditions in his exegetical comments. Because of this, among other things, he was accused of undermining the traditional authority of Scripture by setting aside the scholastic method.² The scholastic method would have presupposed the authority of the Church.

The Catholic Encyclopedia also accuses him of a cold rationalistic treatment of Biblical narratives which he treated subjectively and figuratively--or as he called it, allegorically. They are particularly concerned about his allegory or figurative approach in relation to the eucharist, plus his belief that fasts, pilgrimages, images, relics and celibacy were unimportant and even perversions brought on by scholasticism.³ Hence, the Roman Church gave him the title of the "intellectual father of the Reformation."⁴ The Church seemed to fear and dislike Erasmus more violently than they did Luther. He was condemned and many of his books were burned. Erasmus has been condemned by both Catholics and Protestants but in spite of all that is said his great contribution in translating was a valuable tool to the Reformers in unloosing the

¹The Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1912), V, 511.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 512.

⁴Ibid.

which had been chained for so long in a dead language.

Nominalism. Another force within the Church which led to the dissolution of scholastic theology and influenced the concept of authority and Scripture was Nominalism.

The classical view held that concepts expressed universal reality. The emphasis was on the church, the society, and mankind as a whole or a universal. Nominalists maintained that names and concepts were only tags which men used to discuss individual things. Man began to feel unique. Man became self-conscious. This, of course, influenced men's understanding of the church. The body of the Church became more than a corporate group or the body of Christendom. The body now referred to and aggregate of individuals.¹ This new concept of the place of the individual as expressed by the nominalists eventually led to the breakdown of the exaggerated ecclesiastical authority of the Church.

John Duns Scotus (1274-1308). Neve states that Scotus marks the turning point in medieval scholasticism.²

The interest of Duns centers, not in the universal, but in the singular and in the individual. Concerning the Scriptures, he believed that all truth necessary to salvation is present in Scripture. The credibility of Scripture is exhaustively proven. He said, "That the

¹Dillenger and Welch, op. cit., p. 67.

²Neve, op. cit., p. 210.

doctrine of canon is true" and "that the Sacred Scriptures sufficiently contain the doctrine necessary to the pilgrim."¹

Duns accepted the infallibility of the Scripture without question but in the final analysis he places the teaching of "the authentic Fathers" and the "Romish Church" alongside of the Scriptures.² He argued that since the "church has decided which belongs to the canon, the requirement of subjection to the Scriptures is equivalent to subjection to the church, which approves and authorizes the books of Scripture."³ In the last resort, the Romish Church is the only authority. Even if a doctrine be deprived of all other authority and arguments of reason, it must be accepted solely upon the authority of the Romish Church.

In spite of Duns emphasis on the authority of the church, he criticized many of the traditional doctrines of the church. Neve compares Duns to Abelard but says that Duns was too shrewd to be open in his criticism and that he hid behind the shield of orthodoxy.⁴

William Occam (1280-1349) is noted for being the first to openly criticize the hierarchial system. Through Occam the Bible became, in theory, the doctrinal authority of the fourteenth century. He believed that "whatever is not contained in the Scriptures, the Christian is not

¹Seeberg, op. cit., II, 149.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Neve, A History of Christian Thought, p. 211.

bound to believe."¹ He said that there is no ground for the teaching of papal infallibility. Popes and councils may err, thus, the Bible is set over against the fallible pope."

A marked emphasis was placed, by Occam, on individual study and discernment in matters of doctrine. He said that "plain layman guided by the Scriptures, may soar beyond the knowledge of the ecclesiastical authorities."³ In his view of the importance of the individual and the authority of Scripture breathes a new conception of the Church. The individual need no longer consult the pope or cardinals to understand what to believe. The individual may interpret for himself.

Seeberg refers to Occam's view of inspiration as strict and states that it falls short of the evangelical view. Occam transferred to the Scriptures the same abstract infallibility which had been ascribed to the pope.⁴ He said that the Scriptures are truth, because they are inspired by God, whether as natural and innate in all men or as revealed in Scripture. Neve states that inspiration is conceived of as a dictation by the Holy Spirit.⁵ God immediately infused the knowledge contained in Scripture into the minds of the Biblical writers as

¹Ibid., p. 212.

²Schaff, op. cit., p. 192.

³Seeberg, op. cit., p. 170

⁴Ibid., p. 169.

⁵Neve, op. cit., p. 212.

the whole."¹ They permit reason to call in question the bold systems of the past. Yet in all their limitations they never lost sight of the idea that the authority of the Scriptures are above the church and her dogmas. They felt, too, that the Christian religion is more than a human system of religious philosophy. It is a clearly marked whole--the historical revelation given by God, which only faith can apprehend.

Mysticism.

In the search for heart satisfaction and certainty, neither humanism nor nominalism could meet the religious need of the times. Thus, again there arose a religious subjectivism in the form of mysticism. The mystics did not intend to undermine the witness of the Church but they grew out of a reaction against the lifeless form in the Church. Their emphasis on the direct personal experience of God actually contradicted the popular notion that God was known and mediated exclusively or primarily through the Church and the sacraments. So although the mystics did not seek to undermine the Church, the very nature of their emphasis helped prepare the way for the Reformation. They reacted against the religious externalism and turned inward in a striving after the direct union of the soul with God.

Rather than to discuss the ideas of individual mystics it seems best to relate the leading features of mysticism in general during the

¹Seeberg, op. cit., II, 55.

fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Schaff summarizes it in this way:

First: They made their appeal to layman as well as clerics. They took a vital interest in the spiritual life of the common layman in his daily activities.

Second: They used the New Testament more than the Old Testament. The German Theology quotes scarcely a single passage which is not found in the New Testament.

Third: In the place of the Church, with its sacraments and priesthood as a saving institution, is put Christ himself as the mediator for all.

Fourth: They made great use of the vernacular in sermon and treatise. In this they were ahead of their times.¹

Schaff says that the movement of mysticism is evidence that God's Spirit may be working in some unthought-of places when the fabric of the Church seems to be hopelessly undermined with formalism, clerical corruption and hierarchial arrogance and worldliness.

Though, as a church movement, the mystics did not depart in any marked way from the teaching and practice of the Church their emphasis was a contributing force in the rise of the reformation at hand.²

The far reaching influence of Humanism, Nominalism and Mysticism is noted in the lives of the "Forerunners of the Reformation." The men

¹Schaff, op. cit., p. 241.

²Ibid., p. 242.

listed under this title are: Wyclif, Huss, Goch, Wesel and Wessel. These men received the stimulus for their positions from trends produced by these three leading movements of this period.

The titles, "Forerunners of the Reformation" and, "Reformers before the Reformation", have been used to distinguish these doctrinal reformers. Seeberg and Neve agree that these titles are not justifiable because they feel that these men still remained under the influence of scholastic definition of grace and a legalistic conception of the Gospel.¹ However, Schaff feels that the titles are "aptly given" in that these men truly anticipated many of the teachings of the Protestant Reformers.

John Wyclif (1320-1384), the English reformer, has been called the "Morning Star of the Reformation".

Wyclif's chief service to his people was assertion of the supreme authority of the Bible for clergy and layman alike and his gift to them of the Bible in their own tongue. In his treatise of eleven thousand pages on the value and authority of the Scriptures, more is said about the Bible as the Church's appointed guide-book than was said by all the medieval theologians together. None of the schoolmen exalted the Bible to such a position of preeminence as he did. The schoolmen limited the authority of Scripture by coordinating it with tradition by Wyclif

¹Neve, op. cit., p. 214.

affirmed that it was above all authorities even the papacy. He emphasizes this conviction over and over.

To Wyclif the Scriptures are the authority for every Catholic tenet. They are the

Law of Christ, the Law of God, the Word of God, the Book of Life. They are the primal rule of human perfection, the primal fountain of the Christian proclamation.¹

He stated concerning the understanding and interpretation of Scripture that the Scriptures are clear and sufficient and that the literal sense gives their plain meaning. The "literal verbal sense", he said, is the true one. Though he sometimes used other senses he was always driven back to lay emphasis upon the etymological meaning of words as final. If the tropological, anagogical and allegorical meanings are drawn at all they must be based upon the literal meaning.² This was a refreshing emphasis in the field of Biblical interpretations.

Regarding the infallibility of Scripture, Wyclif believed that every syllable of the Old and New Testaments was true and that the authors were nothing more than scribes or heralds. If any error seemed to be found in them the error was due to human ignorance or perverseness. Nothing was to be believed that was not founded upon this book and no teaching should be added to it.

In reference to human reason Wyclif states that the sacred writings are rational but that all logic should be tested by Scripture. As

¹Schaff, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

²*Ibid.*, p. 340.

for philosophy whatever is in accord with Scriptures is true.

As to the use of the Bible Wyclif emphasized the right of the laity to read and interpret its meaning. Wyclif stood as a champion of an open Bible. Because it was given to the Church, its teachings are free to everyone, even as is Christ Himself. He felt that to withhold the Scriptures from the laity is a fundamental sin. He emphasized the need of every priest to be familiar with the language of the people. He mentioned that the Friars declared it heresy to translate God's law into English and make it known to laymen and he felt sure that this was wrong. Schaff quotes the following paragraph from Wyclif:

Christian men and women, olde and young, shulden study fast in the New Testament, and no simple man of wit should be aferde unmeasurably to study in the text of holy Writ. Pride and covetise of clerks is the cause of their blyndness and heresie and priveth them fro verie understanding of holy Writ. The New Testament is of ful autorite and open to understanding of simple men, as to the pynts that ben most needful to salvation.¹

Wyclif is probably best noted for his translation of the Bible into English. Opinions differ as to exactly what part Wyclif had in this translation. The Catholic Encyclopedia affirms the genuineness of the authorship but admits that there were portions of the Scripture called Wyclifite in the fifteenth century and that they were sometimes condemned because a Wyclifite preface had been added to a perfectly orthodox translation.² Other authorities agree that Wyclif's part in the translation is uncertain but Schaff states that there can be no doubt

¹Ibid., p. 342.

²Catholic Encyclopedia, op. cit., XV, 724.

that the successful carrying out of this project was due to his initiative.¹

"Of all the reformers who preceded Luther, Wyclif most emphasized the importance of the Scripture."²

John Huss (1369-1415). A chief exponent and defender of Wyclif's doctrines was John Huss of Bohemia. He was a devoted pupil of Wyclif, accepting his doctrines and made them his own. He added nothing new to the doctrine of Scripture but simply propagated more fully the conviction that the Scriptures are the final authority and that popes and councils may err.

John of Goch (1400-1415), John Ruchrath Van Wesel (1419-1498), and Wessel (1420-1489). These three doctrinal reformers were in Northern Germany. All three emphasized the new view that the Scripture is the final authority, the pope is fallible and that there is a distinction between the visible and invisible church.

Conclusions. Certainly the Humanists, Nominalists and Mystics of this later scholastic period did not realize the direction that their trends would take through the doctrinal reformers and ultimately to the Reformation but it was nonetheless formative for that which was to come.

¹Samuel M. Jackson (ed.), The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1908), XII, 460.

²Ibid., p. 463.

RESULTANT VIEWS OF INSPIRATION

During the Middle Ages the authority of the Church had risen to its height and at the same time criticism of the hierarchy had gained momentum and the Church was face to face with reformatory uprisings.

During this period, as in the period of the early Church, the infallibility of the Scripture was never doubted. This concept of an authoritative Bible remained a constant this far in the history of Christendom. But along with this wholesome respect for the authority of Scripture was placed the infallibility of pope and council. As opposition was voiced against certain doctrines of the Church the papacy was given more authority until ultimately the Scriptures were hidden under the blanket of tradition and ecclesiastical dogmas.

The problem of reason and revelation was tossed about in the minds of the theologians of this period and they endeavored to find a correct relationship. Anselm said, "I believe in order to understand." Abelard said, "I understand in order to believe." In most cases a rational system was built upon the presuppositions of the authority of the church, councils and decrees and the confidence that reason would not contradict these. Free inquiry stripped of these presuppositions did not arise in any great degree until the rise of the reformation.

This period included the emphasis of Gregory the Great on the external, authoritative universal church plus the influence of the Nominalists and Humanists on the importance of the individual. In the search for certainty men began turning to the Scripture to see and judge

for themselves. Yet, even the strongest critics, who were pronounced heretical, clung to the Church and were fearful of the revolution which was about to break out.

Little was said about the doctrine of inspiration during this period but it appears that on the whole the theory of inspiration was a rigid, verbal, mechanical theory. Bonaventura accepted every word of Scripture as infallible but proceeded to use comments that were unscriptural. Those who believed in verbal inspiration continued to be extravagant in their use of the allegorical method of interpretation. The words of the text were static and fixed; therefore they used the four-fold method of interpretation in order to meet the need in life situations as well as to confirm the set dogmas of the Church.

Thomas believed that by inspiration God imparted items of knowledge to the writer by way of transcendent impressions.¹

Their particular theory of inspiration was not too important as long as they continued to use the allegorical method of interpretation. They brought out every other meaning but the historical and plain sense intended by biblical authors.

Up to the time of the doctrinal reformers the theologians were limited because they had no conception of the original Hebrew and Greek and the Scripture was actually the "slave of dogma".²

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 61.

²Schaff, op. cit., VI, 716.

In 1528, Tyndale spoke of this medieval system of exegesis:

The papists divide the Scripture into the four senses, the literal, tropological, allegorical and anagogical. The literal sense has become nothing at all, for the pope had taken it clear away and hath made it his possession. He hath partly locked it up with false and counterfeited keys in his traditions, ceremonies and feigned lies...¹

Nicholas Lyra was the only exegete of the early scholastic period who insisted on the use of the literal sense alone. He did, however, use the mystical or typical sense at times.

It is interesting to note the Church's fear of the study of the original Greek and Hebrew languages. After Erasmus' New Testament was published the University of Cologne was especially outraged and Conrad of Hersback wrote:

They have found a language called Greek, at which we must be careful to be on our guard. It is the mother of all heresies. In the hands of many persons I see a book, which they call the New Testament. It is a book full of thorns and poison. As for Hebrew, my brethren, it is certain that those who learn it will sooner or later turn Jews.²

This type of a reaction seems almost too ridiculous to be true but the study of these languages brought up serious questions which were difficult and embarrassing for the church to answer.

Down to the very end of its history, the medieval church gave no official encouragement to the circulation of the Bible among the laity. The church had uniformly set itself against it, says Schaff. The

¹Ibid., p. 718.

²Ibid., p. 722.

article of the Synod of Toulouse, 1229, strictly forbade the Old or New Testaments to be read by laity in either the original text or in the translation. The English archbishop, Arundel, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, forbade the reading of Wyclif's English version and another pronouncement was given against the circulation of the German Bible in 1485. Warnings were given saying that putting the Bible into the hands of laymen was the putting of a knife into the hands of children to cut bread.¹

Carlstad, the older colleague of Luther, confessed that he had been a doctor of divinity before he had seen a complete copy of the Bible.²

Schaff states that in spite of the Catholic sparse evidence to the contrary, that the church made very few appeals for the circulation of the Scriptures between the years 1450 and 1520.³

Gibbons, a Catholic writer, says that the restrictions on circulating the Bible in the fifteenth century in England were occasioned by the conduct of Wyclif and his followers who tried to explain the sacred text, in a new translation in a sense foreign to the "received interpretation of tradition."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 724.

²Ibid., VII, p. 10.

³Ibid.

⁴Gibbons, op. cit., p. 92.

This comment of Gibbons is in harmony with the Catholic position on authority and interpretation of Scripture. A person may reason, may interpret and may read the text of Scripture as long as it is in harmony with church dogma. The authority of the church was asserted constantly throughout the Middle Ages and only a few voices were heard in protest.

Humanism, Mysticism and Nominalism had an influence in the final dissolution of the scholastic system and out of these influences came the doctrinal reformers who violently protested against the authority of the church and dared to declare the final authority of the Scriptures. It was the contribution of the totality of these that led to the Reformation crisis.

CHAPTER IV

THE REFORMATION

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A. INTRODUCTION

The direction of the Reformation had been set by earlier protests especially by the doctrinal reformers of the fifteenth century. Luther built upon the structure of the past but carried out the implications of the doctrinal theories to their logical conclusion in a practical way. Some of the earlier reformers had held to the concept of the authority of Scripture above church and pope but in a large measure they failed to put the theory into practice.

It is well to remember that the constant search throughout the history of the church was to find a satisfactory solution to human need. Men desired to translate theories and doctrines into practical life situations. It was out of this impulse that Martin Luther sought to bring the message of the Word of God to all people, particularly the laity, who had been abused by the Roman Catholic hierarchial system.

It is interesting to note that the emancipation of the individual and loosing of the Scriptures came from within the church. Luther, who had been nurtured by the church, who loved the church, came to his position out of a heart search for personal peace with God.

B. MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)

Much could be said about Luther's contribution to the history of

doctrine but this study must be limited to the discussion of his concept of Scripture.

At the outset note that Luther was an earnest student of Scripture. His Bible has been called his "one fixed star". His fellow monks gave him a red leather-bound Bible when he entered the monastery and he tells us that he became so familiar with it that he knew the contents of every page and where to find any particular text. Even as he read through the eyes of his scholastic theology in his early years something kept bringing him back to the Bible.¹

It was through Luther's personal study of the Scriptures that he came to his position concerning the seat of authority. Forced to choose between the church and the Book, he chose the Book. On this basis he first denied the final authority of the pope and later the infallibility of the church councils.

At the Council of Worms in 1521 Luther made the following statement:

Inasmuch as Your Majesty and Your Highnesses ask for a plain answer, I shall give one without horns (reservations) or teeth (backbiting). Unless I am proved to be wrong by the testimony of Scriptures and by evident reasoning--for I cannot trust the decisions of either popes or councils, since it is plain that they have frequently erred and contradicted one another--I am bound in conscience and held fast in the Word of God by these passages of the Holy Scriptures which I have quoted. Therefore I cannot and will not retract anything, for it is neither safe nor salutary to act against one's conscience....²

¹John N. Thomas and other members of Union Theological Seminary Our Protestant Heritage (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1948), p. 173.

²Ibid., p. 178.

Luther's concept of the authority of the Scripture was not such a new idea since the Church had held to this position in theory but the seriousness of his position appeared as he challenged the authority of pope, councils and the church.

There is something about Luther's concept of Scripture that is warm, vital and refreshing. The words of Scripture are no longer bound by Church dogmas but they speak to a personal heart need. When Luther opened his Bible in his monastery cell, Christ the living Word spoke through its human words. The Bible captured the allegiance of his heart and mind. Where the church sought to impose her authority against the assent, the Bible certified its authority by winning his assent.¹

Luther based the authority of Scripture on its self-authenticating power instead of the church.

John Thomas, in Our Protestant Heritage, says that Luther and the other reformers were careful not to base the authority of Scripture on reason. They did not seek to prove it by rational arguments which would make reason the final court of appeal. For them, he states, "the authority of Scripture was not a matter of academic debate--it was a vital experience."² Thus, Luther's discovery of salvation through the Scripture was likewise the discovery of the authority of Scripture.

Seeberg makes a similar comment when he says that Luther's acknowledgement of the authority of the Scriptures is not based upon their

¹Ibid., p. 179.

²Ibid.

official recognition by the church, but upon the experience of their truth. He quotes Luther's words, "Everyone must believe only because it is God's Word and because he is satisfied in his heart that it is truth....."¹ This conception of the basis of the authority of Scripture is an entirely different view from the presuppositions of the medieval theologians.

There seems to be some difference of opinion in regard to Luther's concept of the Word of God. Dillenberger expresses a representative view when he says that when Luther referred to the Bible as the Word of God he did not imply that the book and revelation were the same. For Luther, he says, there is a "Bible within a Bible". The inner Bible is Christ and the whole Bible is characterized as the cradle in which Christ is laid. Everything in the Bible is to be judged as it centers in Christ.²

Dr. Wynkoop quotes from William Young that Luther "believed in an objective Scripture but he also held Scripture to an a priori test, the "article of faith", which we know from other passages to be Christ, the Living Word."³

The Content of Scripture is Christ and the revelation given through him. Luther says, "If I know what I believe, then I know what stands in the Scriptures, because the Scriptures contain nothing more

¹Seeberg, op. cit., II, 301.

²Dillenberger, op. cit., p. 46.

³Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 71.

than Christ and Christian faith."¹

It is this content in which faith is interested, and which faith verifies by inner experience. To Luther this was the important thing in the Scriptures. He says, "no man can rightly know God or understand the word of God unless he immediately receive it from the Holy Spirit; neither can anyone receive it from the Holy Spirit, except he find it by experience in himself; and in this experience the Holy Ghost teacheth..."²

The testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures is the witness to the great facts of salvation and redemption. This, according to Luther, was the purpose of the inspiration of Scripture and in the proportion that they fulfill this purpose do they substantiate their claim to be regarded as an authority in matters of religion.³

Seeberg states that when Luther was in a controversy he employed the Scripture as "divine law" in contrast with "ecclesiastical law, yet, they were an actual authority for him only as the primitive and original testimony to Christ and his salvation. To Luther the controlling principle is faith and since only the believer can understand the Scriptures, and they exist only to minister to faith, they are subordinate to it. Seeberg calls this a new and profounder conception of the authority of Scriptures."⁴

¹Seeberg, op. cit., II, 292.

²Robert Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1908), p. 30.

³Seeberg, op. cit., p. 302.

⁴Ibid.

There is a new emphasis on the "inwardness" of faith. The truth of Scripture is inwardly attested. The Holy Spirit begets in men an experience of the truth of a doctrine (creed) for in no other way can they be led to faith than by being practically and inwardly convinced. The legalistic use of the Scriptures is abandoned as a principle but Seeberg says that it is obvious that Luther was not always consistent with his theory.¹

The criteria which Luther applied to his religious convictions were that a thing was true that is attested by faith, by his own experience, and by Scripture.²

Dillenger says that Luther believed that the Word is discovered through the Bible, but that it is Word because it is confirmed in the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit. The content of the Bible must be "experienced as the judging, forgiving presence of God in Christ for it to be the Word of God."³ Dillenger tends to favor the Neo-orthodox interpretation of Luther at this point.

According to Neve when Luther spoke of the Word of God he primarily referred to the living Word as preached in the Church. But the truth of this Word is conditioned by its dependency upon the written word.⁴ He brings the message of the Gospel into the hearts and lives

¹Ibid., p. 304.

²Ibid.

³Dillenger, op. cit., p. 46.

⁴Neve, op. cit., I, 236.

of men through the inner Word, which is the historical Jesus active and ever present in the person of the Holy Spirit. It seems to be this emphasis which brings warmth into the Christian life..

The work of the Holy Spirit is that of illumination. Thomas states that according to Luther this inner illumination and witness of the Holy Spirit establishes the truth and authority of the Bible in hearts and minds. On the other hand, the Spirit alone brings men no direct word from heaven. This, Thomas says, is evident from his strong opposition to Thomas Munzer and others who claimed immediate revelation from God without the benefit of Scripture. Luther insisted that the Bible is "the bridge, the narrow way" by which the Spirit comes to individuals. Thus, the authority for Luther and the other Reformers was not strictly in the Scripture alone, and not in the Spirit alone, but in the Scripture accredited by the Spirit.¹

Neve says that the Bible is the only authority for Luther but this does not seem to be justifiable in the light of his emphasis on the attestation of experience and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures Luther certainly believed in a God-inspired record. He spoke of "the writing of the Holy Spirit" and "the Spirit's own writing"² but to Luther "inspiration did not end in the words of the text but in the Living Lord who stood as a criterion of the validity of the written

¹Thomas, op. cit., p. 180.

²Seeberg, op. cit., II, 299.

record."¹ This view gave the Scripture a vital, living quality that had been overlooked for many centuries, perhaps since the early Church.

It was on the basis of Luther's criterion of the content (Christ) in the Scripture that gave rise to his critical approach to the canon. He took a great deal of liberty and boldly stated that the prophets were often in error, that the Kings are more trustworthy than the Chronicles, that the authorship of the Penteteuch is unimportant, that it were better if Esther were not in the canon, that the Synoptics are not of uniform value and that James wrote a "right strawy epistle". These are a few of his critical statements. It is consistent with this concept that historical oversights and errors in the sacred writings disturbed him very little. These details do not affect the real heart of the message.² The living message of Christ was the satisfaction of their souls.

Thomas says that neither Luther nor Calvin argued about the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. This controversy arose after the first generation Reformers were gone and they sought for rational proofs of Scriptural authority. It was then that many began to insist that unless the Bible is inerrant in every detail of history and science that it cannot be trusted. Both sides of the debate claimed the Reformers as their allies.³

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 71.

²Seeberg, op. cit., II, 300.

³Thomas, op. cit., p. 180.

Luther surely believed in an inspired book but this was not equated with inerrancy. "Christ" alone, was to him, without error.¹ His explanation of the divine and human element in Scripture is likened to his idea of the divine and human in Christ.

The problem of interpretation has already been mentioned in regard to the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the criteria upon which to judge the canon but consider further the method Luther used in interpreting the written word which had been verified to his heart.

Notice that the interpretation of Scripture is no longer left up to the pope, councils or even the local priest but each individual may interpret as his mind is illumined by the Spirit. But the illumination of the Spirit is necessary to the understanding of the sense of the text.

Richard Claridge, a Quaker writer of the Eighteenth Century, quoted Luther as saying, "the kind of doctrine which revealeth the Son of God, is neither learnt, nor taught by any wisdom of men, nor is it revealed by the law itself, but by God." And also: "The Scriptures are not to be understood but by the same Spirit, by which they were written."¹

We understand that, according to Luther, it is not the Church, nor is it human reason, but it is the Holy Spirit who is the interpreter of Scripture.

Luther was a student of both Hebrew and Greek and from his study

¹Claridge, op. cit., p. 94.

of these original languages confirmed his faith in the following conclusions:

(1) The Bible is the supreme and final authority--apart from ecclesiastical authority.

(2) The Bible is sufficient, needing no Father to interpret it or to add to the meaning.

(3) The Bible is to be interpreted literally. He rejected the four-fold method of interpretation of the scholastics and also the allegory. He said that "Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt" and "allegories are the scum of Holy Scripture."

(4) The Bible meaning is obvious, clear and simple.

(5) Every man has a right to his own opinion and all the right-minded will come to a uniform understanding.¹

When differences arose and agreement seemed difficult to reach and all claimed Scriptural authority Luther laid out rules for interpreting Scripture.

(1) The need for grammatical knowledge.

(2) The need for knowledge of history.

(3) An acquaintance with the context.

(4) The need for faith and spiritual illumination.

(5) The "analogy of faith" which indicates that Scripture interprets Scripture.

¹Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 68.

(6) That Christ is to be found everywhere in Scripture.¹

These rules, he felt, would be a safeguard to individual interpretation.

Concerning the place of reason in Luther's reformation theology Schaff states that the Reformation took the first step in the emancipation of reason by freeing us from the tyranny of the Church. The reformers protested against human authority and asserted the right of private conscience rousing a spirit of free inquiry for a wider scope for the exercise of reason in religion than the Roman Church. Their use of reason however, did not deny the supernatural or divine testimony and felt that it would be unreasonable to reject it.

Luther witnessed to his use of reason in the contest with church authority. He refused to recant at Worms unless convinced by the testimonies of Scriptures and "cogent arguments." Yet in his conflict of trying to understand the mysteries of certain doctrines he clung to the Scriptures and to faith which believes against reason and hopes against hope. In discussing his favorite Epistle to the Galatians he said "that it wrings the neck of reason and strangles the beast, which else the whole world with all creatures, could not strangle."²

Schaff states further, "that as much as Luther valued reason as a precious gift of God in matters of this world he abused it with un-

¹Ibid., p. 69.

²Ibid., p. 31.

reasonable violence when it dared to set in judgement over matters of faith."¹

Luther called reason, "the mistress of the devil," "the ugly devil's bride," "poisonous beast with many dragons' heads," and "God's bitterest enemy."²

It is difficult to understand the violent reaction Luther had to the use of reason except that his entire concept of the Gospel was spiritual and supernatural and his reaction was against the abuse of reason. In place of the purely human use of reasoning, Luther appealed to the inner illumination and testimony of the Holy Spirit. Yet he reacted increasingly with the years against the mystic doctrine of the inner word and spirit. Though he profited by the influence of mysticism he harshly condemned those who relied on the inner word apart from objective revelation.

Seeberg feels that the influence of mysticism caused Luther to "deepen his doctrine of the word."³ Whether or not "deepen" is an accurate evaluation it is evident that Luther did "change" his position somewhat in order to guard against mystical fanaticism.

Luther guards against extreme mysticism with such statements as, "the Spirit enlightens 'with and through the Word'," the Spirit "comes with and through the word, and goes no further than so far as the word

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Seeberg, op. cit., II, 279.

goes."¹ The words of Scripture became a check to the which would be contrary to the "content" of Scripture.

Luther very clearly emphasized that God operates on the heart through the preaching of the Word of God (Christ), this, of course being Biblical in content.² This does not necessarily limit the working of the Spirit to the written letter but however it is received, it must be in harmony with the Gospel of God which is His Son Jesus Christ. He spoke of God's Word as written but not exclusively. The Word was more often the Christ.

It is difficult to see any real evidence in Luther's concept of Scripture for verbal inerrancy. Though he revered Scripture and had a high view of inspiration he first accepted only those books in the canon which he felt were in harmony with the "content" of Scripture.

Although it is difficult to fully understand all that Luther implied in his concept of Word of God it is acknowledged by Seeberg and others that Luther did distinguish between the "inner" and "outer" word. He abandoned the legalistic use of Scripture. He said, "Be careful not to regard the Holy Spirit as a Lawmaker, but proclaiming to your heart the Gospel of Christ and setting you free from the literal law that not a letter of it remain, except as a medium for preaching the Gospel."³

Luther's doctrine of Scripture emphasized the Living Word, the

¹Ibid., p. 281.

²Ibid., p. 282.

³Ibid.

illumination of the Spirit and experience. Whether or not it would be correct to conclude that this was a type of immediate revelation or not (Luther and others deny that it was immediate) it was revelation made vital and relevant to immediate human need.

It is difficult to locate Luther's exact position in some cases since he did not systematize his own work as the later Reformers did.

C. JOHN CALVIN (1509-1564)

Calvin is widely accepted as the greatest exegete of the Reformation and was the greatest of the Reformed Theologians. He was an outstanding systematizer of the new conception of Christianity. He is particularly remembered for his great systematic work, The Institutes of the Christian Religion.

Both Neve and Seeberg state that the source and norm of Christianity for Calvin as with Luther was the Scriptures alone.¹ The authority of the Scriptures rests upon its inspiration and the testimony of the Spirit working through it. Concerning the inspiration of Scripture Calvin said: "With these came at the same time histories, which are themselves also productions from the pens of the prophets, but composed under the dictation of the Holy Spirit."² Then speaking of the New Testament he said: "They were infallible and authentic amanuenses of the

¹Neve, op. cit., p. 288.

²Seeberg, op. cit., II, 395.

Holy Spirit..."¹

These statements in themselves might be evidence for a strict verbal inspiration theory but in practice Calvin was not a slave of words. He rejected the Greek particle *οὐ* (therefore), in Matthew 7:12, which consequently changes the meaning of the text. He explained that "one often finds superfluous particles". The Romanists he called "syllable-hunters" in their unbending literalism.²

Calvin explained that certain Biblical writers adjusted their writings to the level of man's understanding. Moses, he said, "accommodated himself to the ignorance of the common people." This does not sound like a strict mechanical dictation theory though Calvin did stress, in a greater measure than Luther, that the Bible was a book of laws to be obeyed to the letter.

Thomas says that neither Luther nor Calvin argued about the inerrancy of the Bible. He says that it is impossible to prove satisfactorily that either of them either asserted or denied its absolute inerrancy.³ But whether or not every minute detail was considered inspired they both revered the Scripture as a whole and tried to focus attention on the message of the Living Word.

The authority of the Scriptures is proven through a "directly communicated inner testimony which gives certainty of the Scriptures..."⁴

¹Ibid.

²Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 83.

³Thomas, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴Neve, op. cit., I, 288.

In the Compend of Calvin's theology he made the following statements concerning this inner witness: "The principal proof of the Scripture is everywhere derived from the character of the Divine Speaker."¹ "The certainty of Scripture is founded on internal persuasion."²

This position taken by Luther and then Calvin appears to have been natural position to have taken as they opposed the Medieval concept of authority of the Church and also the purely rationalistic approach. The immediate testimony of the Spirit provides a supernatural emphasis which was needed.

In Calvin's exegesis and formal systematizing of Scriptural truth he stressed the Bible as a book of laws and rules. Neve states that Calvin tended to theorize the Bible as a book while Luther centered his attention on the Word of God.³

Nevertheless Calvin evidently made a distinction between the written word and the Living Word. In his Christological argument he said,

When the Scriptures speak of the Word of God, it certainly were very absurd to imagine it to be only a transient and momentary sound, emitted into the air, and coming forth from God himself; of which nature were the oracles, given to the Fathers, and all the prophecies. It is rather to be understood of the Eternal Wisdom residing in God, whence the oracles, and all the prophecies, proceeded.⁴

It is not easy to interpret Calvin's use of the term Word of God because

¹John Calvin, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1939), p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 17.

³Neve, op. cit., I, 318.

⁴John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by Jn. Allen (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1932), quoted in Wynkoop, op. cit., p. 86.

he uses the term to refer to the written word and also to a much broader concept in the Living Word. The term certainly is not used in the limited sense of the letter only.

Calvin along with Luther strongly opposed the mystics who disregarded the Scriptures. Neve says that Calvin protected himself from the error of the Anabaptists in their theology of the "inner light" by establishing himself on the "verbal" inspiration of the Scriptures.¹ From this study of Calvin's view of inspiration and his exegetical approach to Scripture it seems that the word "verbal" would need to be qualified in such a statement. However, Calvin certainly had deep respect for the inspiration of the Scriptures and the message of the Word.

In Calvin's opposition to the mystics he seemed to be especially concerned because some had "abandoned" the Scriptures and had taught new doctrine not consistent with them. He says that some were "pretending new teachings or doctrines...rejecting all reading saying 'the letter kills'." Then, he added that the Spirit is always consistent with Himself.² He appeared to have been trying to keep a balance between the Medieval Catholic cold rationalistic approach and the radical spiritual emphasis which ignored the "letter". In his argument against one or the other he could be misunderstood. He said that it is dangerous to boast of the Spirit without the Word because "those who boast extravagantly of

¹Neve, op. cit., I, 288.

²Calvin, A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion, p. 18.

the Spirit, the tendency is to sink and bury the Word of God...to make room for falsehood."¹ Calvin's fear appears to be in the total neglect of one or the other. The testimony of the Spirit is essential to establish the Scripture as God's Word and the illumination of the Spirit is necessary for the understanding of the doctrines.

Calvin did not despise the use of reason as Luther did. Neve says that Calvin "rationalized," or "spiritualized the more deeply religious tenets of Luther."² This use of reason in defending his doctrinal position has given the Catholics good grounds for calling him a Scholastic. After building a very solid system through common sense, logic and philosophy he then appealed to a passage of Scripture, often only a proof text or two to prove his position. He also used for support quotations from some pagan philosophers.

Reviewing the life and influence of Calvin it is noted that he gave the visible Church greater authority than did Luther or Zwingli. His ideas concerning the relationship of the church to civil affairs is a study in itself but it is of interest at this point to mention that Calvin was far distant from our modern American conception of tolerance and freedom. An admirer of Calvin described Calvin's regime as "an inquisitorial, harsh, tyrannical system of legally enforced obedience."³

¹Harry Emerson Fosdick, ed., Great Voices of the Reformation An Anthology (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 205.

²Neve, op. cit., I, 289.

³Fosdick, op. cit., p. 205.

His dogmatic intolerance was probably the accepted general opinion of justice in that day but it seems strange as one looks back to see the protestant movement entering into the same intolerant system which characterized the Roman Catholic Church.

D. THE CONFESSIONAL PERIOD

The period immediately following the initial liberation of the Reformation found the protestant groups struggling with the task of formulating correct doctrine. Differences arose among protestant leadership which forced various theological positions to a defense of their belief. Each theological group accepted the Bible as its authority but this did not erase the confusion of doctrinal views. Thus, this period was given over to formulating "correct belief." The warmth and vitality of personal experience was lost in simply giving assent to certain doctrinal statements. Some have called this the period of "Protestant scholasticism" with the exception that the Bible stood in the place of the Church.

When controversies arose and opposing positions found support in Scripture it was necessary to formulate the doctrine of Scripture. For the first time in the history of the Church a doctrine of Scripture came to be defined.

Both the Lutherans and Reformed groups formulated confessions of faith. These confessions were supposed to serve as guides and a protection against heresy but increasingly people were asked to believe the confession and the experience of faith was given second place.

In reaction to the extremes of some of the Anabaptists the later Calvinists and Lutherans considered the Word of God and Scriptures to be identical, thus losing the distinction which Calvin and Luther had made. In the second Helvetic Confession of 1566 it was declared that the "canonical Scriptures are the actual true word of God".¹ This was not a rejection of the Holy Spirit; but the Spirit was now the agent of God's authorship of the biblical record. Little emphasis was placed upon that immediate witness or testimony of the Spirit.

The Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord, and the Catechisms of Luther were assembled and became the Book of Concord. This became the doctrinal standard for Lutheranism in Germany. In this text people sought the resolution of all problems. It was as indispensable as the Bible for being a Christian since it contained the proper approach to and the interpretation of the Bible. Dillenberger states that the Lutherans built a wall around themselves in order to preserve what they considered the purity of Christian concepts.²

In this development they evidently felt that Luther's stress was upon the Spirit working in and through the Bible was too subjective. "The Bible as Bible, understood through the Book of Concord, was synonymous with the Word of God."³ To have faith in revelation meant to assent to statements which had been given in an infallible form in a book.

¹Dillenberger, op. cit., p. 95.

²Ibid., p. 85.

³Ibid.

Scripture was being judged by the creeds. This type of thing was far from the initial warmth and freedom of the early reformer.

The early reformers had sought to keep the Word and Faith in proper balance but the scales were soon tipped in favor of an objective authority only. This emphasis led to a static, wooden Biblicism.

One of the outstanding Lutheran theologians, J. Gerhard, propounded a systematic doctrine of inspiration in 1610. He took the position that the writers of the Scripture are amanuenses and he followed the Reformed Theologian, A. Polanus, "in extending the inspiration of the punctuations in the Hebrew vowels."¹ Neve states that there was an insistence on "verbal" inspiration and on "inerrancy" but that they went too far in establishing principles with regard to purely outward and non-religious matters.²

The emphasis placed upon the external authority of the Scriptures and the rigid acceptance of creeds appears to have been the consequence of a spiritual decline. The early reformers, in the glow of a new spiritual experience frequently witnessed to the sufficiency of the direct relationship of the Holy Spirit to interpret the message of Christ to their hearts, but the vitality of this reformation revival was probably lost in the serious theological struggle to make good their position against the Church of Rome as well as to counteract the apparent danger of the "inner light" movements.

¹Neve, op. cit., I, 320.

²Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FRIENDS

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A. INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century has been likened to the twentieth century in its quest for authority. The Reformation had upset the traditional view of the authority of the church and had put the Bible in first place. The new concept of Biblical authority and the importance of individual response was soon challenged by contradicting opinions which consequently led to the building of creedal walls and a dead orthodoxy. In reaction to the emphasis upon an external authority the Quakers arose, along with other dissenting movements in England, to proclaim the inwardness of religion and religious authority. This has been called the third answer to the question, Where shall a man find religious authority?¹ This evaluation possibly needs some qualifications, yet nevertheless the testimony of an inward witness was strengthened by the seventeenth century spiritual reformers and specifically by the Quakers.

To understand the reaction of the Quakers it is necessary to note the climate of spiritual life in England at the beginning of the ministry of George Fox (1646), the founder of the Quaker movement. From the enforcement of the Reformation by Henry VIII and throughout the seventeenth century in England there was spiritual unrest and an-

¹Rachel King, George Fox and the Light Within, (Philadelphia: Friends Book House, 1940), p. 19.

tagonism between various religious parties. Though the Protestant bodies were all appealing to the authority of the Scriptures, disagreements were violent and the principle of tolerance was practiced very little. Even the Presbyterians, who had fought long for the right of liberty of conscience, when in authority, began to enforce conformity to their own religious views. George Fox began his ministry when the Presbyterians with their strong Calvinistic teaching were in the place of authority. But whether Presbyterians or Independents led in ecclesiastical authority there were attempts to force all of the people to conform to certain articles of faith and practice.

An understanding of two key words, "revelation" and "inspiration", is necessary in order to properly evaluate the Friends witness regarding authority. Their use of these terms reveal a much broader concept of inspiration and revelation than the commonly accepted limited sense.

Conservative theologians today often restrict the term revelation to the "unveiling or disclosing of God's redeeming purpose" in the "Christian Scriptures."¹ Revelation is considered to be the "sum and substance of truth as it is in Jesus; the conclusion of the whole matter of Divine manifestation to man; and as such, it is perfected in the Christian Scriptures, that is the final testimony of Jesus."² The Scriptures are spoken of as the "finished revelation."³ If an attempt

¹William Burt Pope, A Compend of Christian Theology (New York: Phillips and Hunt, n.d.), I, 36

²Ibid., p. 38.

³Ibid.

is made to squeeze Fox's understanding of revelation into these definitions, it would necessarily force him into error. On the other hand, if revelation is thought of in its broadest sense which would include "the whole compass of Divine disclosures...whether by immediate contact of the Eternal Spirit with the human soul or by mediating instrumentalities,"¹ it will provide the basis of a more accurate interpretation of early Quaker testimonies. They did not profess to receive new revelations beyond or above that of the writers of sacred scripture but only an immediate understanding of the truth already recorded in the Bible.

There is a similar problem in the understanding of "inspiration". In the limited sense "inspiration denotes the specific agency of the Holy Ghost in the creation and construction of Scriptures."² Yet, in a certain sense "inspiration may be one with revelation, as meaning the Divine bestowment of knowledge that could not otherwise be acquired."³

The early Friends seemed to use the terms "inspiration" and "revelation" interchangeably denoting the immediate unfolding of truth. With these broader definitions in mind it will be helpful in understanding statements which would otherwise appear very extreme. It seems only fair to try to understand the meaning behind the terms rather than to fit them into the modern use of certain terms with a limited sense.

¹Pope, op. cit., I, 36.

²Ibid., p. 156.

³Ibid.

Looking into the history of the early Friends an attempt will be made to analyze their doctrine of Scripture and begin comparing and relating their view with concepts of Scripture in various periods of Church history.

William Penn relates the birth of the Friends movement to the century preceding in his book, The Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers. He refers to the Reformation as some steps in the right direction, toward truth in doctrine, practice and worship, but that wickedness crept in as the children of the reformers began to use carnal weapons to uphold and carry out that which had begun with spiritual weapons. He stated further that the reformers "were in some things short" and that to avoid one extreme they ran into another. "They owned the Spirit, Inspiration and Revelation, indeed and grounded their separation and reformation upon the sense and understanding they received from it, in the reading of the Scriptures of truth".¹ Yet, Penn says, though they pled for the Scriptures as the text they allowed too much "human invention, tradition and art---of worldly authority and worldly greatness".²

James Cockburn in his Review, evaluated the situation preceding the rise of the Friends in much the same way as did William Penn. He said that the reformation light of the emphasis upon the individual was

¹William Penn, The Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers (Philadelphia: Perkins and Marvin, 1838), p. 13, 14.

²Ibid.

soon interrupted by the reformers rebuilding again those things which had been destroyed. There arose new modification of external ceremony and doctrinal speculations which retarded the progress of the Gospel spirit. Cockburn felt that though the Reformation produced a change in the public mind respecting the externals of religion, that it did not produce the desirable effects of the Spirit of God.¹

It appears to be a general opinion of Quaker writers that the rise of the Friends movement with its stress upon the individual and the work of the Spirit, was the Reformation fulfilled.

Because of the emphasis which George Fox and other seventeenth century Quakers placed upon the "Light within" and immediate testimony of the Spirit, they have been accused of having a false concept of the Scriptures. In England, while the different theological groups were usually in disagreement, all denominations united to persecute Friends and to denounce them for many things including undervaluing the Holy Scriptures.²

B. GEORGE FOX

The Friends' concept of Scripture arose out of another attempt to relate the Gospel message to the individual heart need. Out of the dis-

¹James Cockburn, Cockburn's Review--A Review of the Disorders and Divisions in the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in Philadelphia--With a Review of Primitive Churches- to the Rise of the Society of Friends (Philadelphia: 1829), p. 22.

²Ibid.

tress and hunger of his heart, George Fox, sought an experience of reality that would go beyond the mental acceptance of a creed or the letter of Scripture. It was evident to him that the mere acceptance of creeds did not effect a changed life but instead had generally resulted in a cold, lifeless formalism. Since this did not satisfy his heart he began earnestly seeking an answer to his heart condition. He came to his position in much the same way that Luther did--out of great distress and torment of soul.

Fox related some of the struggle of this period of his life in his Journal. The following passages give an insight into this time:

1647. I fasted much, walked abroad in solitary places many days and often took my Bible and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places til night came on...

.
I kept much as a stranger, seeking heavenly wisdom and getting knowledge from the Lord; and was brought off from outward thing, to rely on the Lord alone...¹

Then after his conversion experience in the field where Christ "spoke to his condition," he testifies:

My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any men, book or writing. For though I read the Scriptures that spake of Christ and of God, yet I knew Him not but by revelation, as He who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to his Son by His Spirit.²

He said further that it was through an "opening" or revelation

¹Thomas Evens, An Exposition of the Faith of the Religious Society of Friends (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1878), p. 28.

²Ibid., p. 29.

of God that he realized that "every man was enlightened by Christ."

This, he understood without the help of any man; for he explained:

neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it. For I saw in that Light and Spirit which were before the Scriptures were given forth, and which led the men of God to give them forth, that all must come to that Spirit, if they would know God or Christ, or the Scriptures aright, which they that gave them forth were led and taught by.¹

George Fox was convinced through his own experience that the Scriptures could not be properly understood without the immediate revelation of the Holy Spirit and furthermore, that the Holy Spirit can speak and reveal truth to a heart without the direct aid of the Scriptures. It is clear that revelation was not limited to the Scriptures alone and that even when the term illumination could be used he chose to speak of revelation.

The idea that the Scriptures could not be understood without the immediate testimony of the Spirit was not new to George Fox since Luther and Calvin both believed this to be true. Luther said: "No man sees one jot or tittle in the Scriptures, unless he has the Spirit of God." "The Scriptures are not to be understood but by the same spirit by which they were written."²

Calvin bore witness to this truth, as well, when he said,

...so will his word not find credit in the hearts of men, until it

¹Ibid., p. 30.

²Thomas Clarkson, A Portraiture of Quakerism (Indianapolis: Merrill and Field, 1870), p. 213.

is sealed by inward testimony of his spirit. It is therefore necessary that the same spirit which spake by the mouth of the prophets, enter into our hearts, to persuade us that they faithfully declared what was commanded by God. The Spirit of God, from whom the doctrine of the Gospel proceeds, is the only true interpreter to open it to us.¹

Though it is not always clear exactly what position Luther and Calvin took on some issues, it appears obvious that they both believed that the message of the Gospel was more than the letter of the Scriptures and more than a mental assent to a system of doctrine. The immediate testimony of the Holy Spirit to the individual heart was necessary to verify the inspired word and likewise to interpret its meaning. It was this inward attestation of truth that George Fox believed and taught.

Although the early reformers did not use the terms "revelation" and "inspiration" as freely as did Fox, it seems that their concept of the "immediate testimony" and "illumination" of the Spirit resulted in a position very near, if not the same as, that of the early Quakers.

When Luther and Calvin opposed the "inner light" theologians it was apparently because these theologians neglected the Scriptures and thus were led to extreme positions which were contrary to the Scriptures.

To clarify the concept that George Fox held concerning immediate revelation, it is necessary to hear his own testimony before that of any of his interpreters. A record of Fox's arguments with his opposers reveals his attitude toward their problem. When his opposer argued that there was no such thing as immediate inspiration, Fox replied:

¹Ibid., p. 214.

So you are as the Jews that could say Moses heard the voice of God, and the prophets heard the Lord's voice. But their own ears were stopped to the voice. For Christ said, "Ye have not heard the voice of God at any time". And ye say ye look not for it. And you deny immediate inspiration, have denied the power of the spirit, for that is immediate, and the ministers of Christ witness it.¹

Since so many of the religious leaders of Fox's time were satisfied with a creed and a fixed system of thought, Fox was desperately trying to emphasize the power of the Gospel which he believed came as a result of the immediate contact with God. When his opposer argued from the Scripture that Timothy had spoken of the "faith once delivered to the saints" and therefore there could be no more revelation, Fox answers:

You shut off the author of every man's faith. What was given once to the saints we must know now...for if they have but words which speak of the saints faith...they have but words as the devil had who stood against the author of faith.²

In this statement it is evident that Fox is opposing the popular concept which resulted in empty words without the "knowing now". Did not Luther do the same?

Fox continued his argument after an opposer said that "the whole mind of Christ is left in the letters". He answered:

The Scriptures says, "It is past finding out; the unsearchable wisdom"... and are revealed by the spirit and no man knows

¹George Fox, The Works of George Fox - The Great Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded; and Antichrists' Kingdom Revealed Unto Destruction (London: 1659; Philadelphia: Marcul T. C. Gould, 1831), III, p. 37.

²Ibid., p. 38.

them but by the spirit. The Gospel is more than the letter; it is the power of God, and the letter kills and may have the form and deny the power.¹

The opposer continued to question Fox about the outward word and Fox replied, "Did not they bring them to Christ the power of God, which is the end of words, which is immediate?" But not being satisfied the opposer said, "The Gospel is an external way!" And Fox answered, "No, the Gospel is a living way!"²

This emphasis is illustrated further as Fox answered the arguments set forth in John Timpson's book, The Quakers Apostacy From the Perfect Rule of the Scriptures Discovered. Fox said this book was full of lies and scandals then he went on to refute the accusations. Timpson had stated that "the holy Scriptures alone are the object of faith" but Fox replied simply, "Christ is." His oponent continued, "Scripture is the rule" and Fox declared, "The Spirit who led them to speak forth the Scriptures is the rule."³ A similar argument is set forth when Fox answered Henock Hower's book entitled, The Quaker Principles Dashed to Pieces by the Standing and Unshaken Truth. Hower had said that the "Scriptures are the hope" and Fox stated his position once more that it is not the words of Scripture but "Christ is the hope."⁴ This concept of Christ and the Scriptures bears a strong resemblance to Luther's

¹Ibid., p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Ibid., p. 58.

⁴Ibid., p. 55.

emphasis upon the content of Scripture which was Christ.

It is noted that George Fox very clearly taught that the immediate revelation of the Spirit is necessary to understand the Gospel message and that this far he was in perfect harmony with the early reformers. If Fox carried out the concept of revelation farther than the reformers, it was probably in his view of the immediate revelation of the Spirit apart from the words of Scripture. According to most of the sources used in this study, Luther limited the work of the Spirit to the words of the Bible. This point of view is not clear in Luther's own testimony nor in his practice. Since he took such liberty in confirming the inspired Scripture and in disregarding the texts which did not harmonize with the "content" of faith it seems only logical that the Holy Spirit had revealed the essential message directly to his own heart without the "bridge" of the text. This would not make the Scriptures the "only" authority for Luther as Neve suggested, nor would it result in a dual authority of the Scripture and the Spirit but would ultimately lead to the primary authority of the Holy Spirit or inward testimony regarding "Christ." Perhaps it is presumptuous of this writer to make a judgment in this regard, but in the face of the evidence at hand, it appears to be at least a possible point of view which has not been suggested by sources referred to in this study.

Nevertheless, George Fox very definitely believed and preached that the Holy Spirit is the primary authority and that the Spirit speaks directly to the heart.

Robert Barclay, the early Quaker theologian, in his Apology, has given a very thorough and systematic presentation of the Friends view of immediate revelation and the Scriptures. He said that the Scriptures are "only the declaration of the fountain, and not the fountain itself" and reasons "that for which a thing is such, that thing itself is more such."¹ He presented a logical argument, beginning first with the ancient testimonies of the church, through the Reformation period and including the Westminster Confession quoting their testimonies in regard to the inner persuasion of their hearts in establishing the canonical books. All of these witnessed to the fact that it was necessary to seek the certainty of the Scriptures from the Spirit. Barclay then asks, "What should have become of Christians, if they had not received that Spirit, and those spiritual senses, by which they know to discern the true from the false?"²

Barclay continued his argument when he claimed that the very nature of the gospel itself declares that the Scripture cannot be the chief rule and authority or else there would be "no difference betwixt the law and the gospel." But he said, they are different in that the law being outwardly written brings condemnation while the gospel has inward power to deliver. Hence, the gospel is called (*εὐαγγέλιον*),

¹Robert Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity Being and Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines (Philadelphia: Friends Book Store, 1908), p. 72.

²Ibid., p. 74, 75.

which is glad tidings. "The law or letter, which is without us, kills; but the gospel, which is the inward spiritual law, gives life, for it consists not so much in words as in virtue."¹ He then quoted Romans 8:2, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Even the Scripture itself, he felt, witnesses to the authority of the Spirit.

When approached about the danger of extremes and uncertainty of immediate revelation, Barclay simply directed attention to the proposition that there is no certainty in tradition, not the Scriptures nor reason. He relates incidents which illustrate the contrary opinions of those who hold to the authority of tradition. He used as one example the Council of Florence, where the chief doctors of the Romish and Greek churches debated the whole session long concerning the interpretation of one sentence of the Council of Ephesus.² Concerning the Scripture he related similar problems, and as an example referred to the Lutherans interpretation of consubstantiation while the Calvinists denied the doctrine, upon the basis of the same Scripture. And as for reason, Barclay said, there have been endless controversies by men who felt that they were following right reason. Yet, the Socinians, in spite of all the errors in reasoning still contend for its authority. Now, regarding extreme practices of those professing immediate revelation, he said, "I confess I do with my whole heart abhor and detest those wild practices

¹Ibid., p. 77.

²Ibid., p. 61.

which are written concerning the Anabaptists of Munster";¹ nevertheless he proclaimed that things just as bad or worse have been committed by those who leaned to tradition, scripture and reason. He, then, refers to the terrible persecution and bloodshed while pretending to have Scriptural grounds for it.

In spite of excesses of false pretenders, Barclay believed that the Holy Spirit is the only infallible guide and that men should trust the Spirit to lead them into all truth. Yet, he stated confidently that "no revelation coming from the Spirit can ever contradict the Scripture's testimony nor right reason..."²

The authority of the Spirit, especially in George Fox's writing, is often referred to as the "Light" or the "Voice within". It was this doctrine which he said was revealed to him at the beginning of his ministry. In contrast to the popular Calvinistic concept of election, Fox taught that according to John 1:9 Christ lighteth every man that cometh into the world, therefore, all men may either accept or reject this light. This light, Fox said, is not to be confused with reason or conscience but "that it is the light of Christ, with which all men see their salvation, with that which lets them see their sin."³ William Penn, a Quaker of considerable stature spoke of this light as that which, first:

¹Ibid., p. 62.

²Ibid., p. 68.

³Fox, The Works of George Fox, p. 48.

gives a sight of sin; second: a sense and godly sorrow for it; and third: ammdement for the time to come, "For of light comes sight."¹ It is evident that neither Fox nor Penn believed this light to be a spark of divinity or a part of human nature but taught that no man was depraved to the point where he could not respond to "light which lighteth every man."

Rachel King, in her scholarly dissertation, on the Light within, states that George Fox's emphasis upon the Light might have led to excesses but that he was saved by his connection with historical Christianity. He often said that the light shows a man Christ, the light leads to Christ, and the light shows Scripture. His central teaching is connected with historical Christianity by his belief that the light showed him that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and by his identification of the light with the pre-existent Christ, who is also the historical Jesus.²

Since George Fox believed that the light never changed, he felt that his personal revelation was fully consistent with the revelation that had come to men in the past.³ Although he witnessed that he was in the same spirit as the Apostles and that he could hear directly from God even as they did, Rachel King states that as far as she knows:

Fox never actually claims that direct inspiration has revealed to

¹Penn, op. cit., p. 21.

²King, op. cit., p. 171.

³Ibid., p. 163.

him any religious beliefs, doctrines, or principles that he thinks are not recorded in the Bible. Certainly Fox never claims that the direct inspiration has revealed anything to him that supersedes the New Testament teaching.¹

It appears that in Fox's theory of inspiration and authority that he was simply releasing himself from the legalistic concept of basing every assertion on a chapter and verse. He believed that he was inspired with certain principles and divine instructions for regulating the daily putting of those principles into practice.

Another way in which Fox was linked with historic Christianity was his use of the Bible. His concept of immediate inspiration did not appear to lessen his high regard for the Scriptures. It has been noted at the beginning of this chapter how Fox took his Bible and spent hours and days alone in reading and meditation. When accused of not accepting the Scriptures, Fox said that he was not "against the Scriptures" but owns them to be inspired of the Holy Spirit.² Not only did he witness to his regard for the Scripture in a most unusual way quoted from it constantly in his writings and couched much of his teaching in its terms and took most of his symbolism from it. "The light, word, see, anointing spirit of truth are all Biblical terms."³ He saturated his mind with the Bible and many of his pronouncements came to him as he waited upon God, were only slight variations of Scripture passages.⁴ In Fox's

¹Ibid., p. 165.

²Fox, The Works of George Fox, p. 41.

³King, op. cit., p. 167.

⁴Ibid., p. 167.

explanations to his ministers he condemned them for "misquoting" or "misapplying" the Scriptures and encouraged them to be "conversant" with and "delight in reading" the Holy Scriptures.¹

Repeatedly in the writings of early Friends their arguments reveal their attempts to silence their adversaries who accuse them of undervaluing the Scriptures. The reason for, what seems to be, a misunderstanding of the Friends view of the Scriptures probably comes as a result of their belief in the primary authority of the Spirit together with the type of worship which they practiced. The lack of Bible reading in their worship services was partially due to the fearful persecution of Charles the Second's reign when unauthorized worship services were banned, as well as being an intense reaction to the forced use of liturgy by the Church of England. Yet in spite of this, it is evident that there was no intentional banishment of the Holy Scriptures from their meetings. For as late as 1703 it is stated that Fox had given a folio Bible to the meeting-house in London, which, no doubt, he intended to have read in meeting.² Only a few examples of the Friends use of Scripture have been given but enough, it is believed, to show that the Bible was a most treasured possession.

Nevertheless, to understand why Friends used the Bible when they held first to immediate revelation, consideration must be given to their

¹Ibid., p. 167.

²Robert Barclay, The Inner Life of the Religious Societies (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), p. 383.

³Ibid., p. 402.

doctrine of inspiration and their evaluation of the purpose of the letter. Their doctrine of inspiration was not clearly set forth but it is certain from George Fox's use of the term that he did not limit his concept of inspiration to the words of Scripture; however he did believe very firmly in the Divine inspiration of the Scripture. He stated: "The Scriptures of truth, given forth from the Spirit of Truth, are the words of God."¹ And again in the declaration of faith issued by George Fox and others to be presented to the Governor of Barbadoes he testified:

Concerning the Holy Scriptures: We believe they were given forth by the Holy Spirit of God through Holy men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost...

So that we call the Holy Scriptures, as Christ, the apostles and holy men of God, called them;...the words of God....²

As far as this study has revealed, Fox did not state clearly his view of the method of inspiration, yet, somewhat of his idea may be understood in the statement given as a rebuke to a professor of religion who said there were contradictions in the letter. Fox answered: "there is no contradiction in it; but in them that are out of the spirit that gave it forth, is the contradiction."³

Yet even though it is true that the Scriptures were inspired, they are only the record of inspiration and not the inspiration itself. He frequently spoke about immediate inspiration coming to his heart.

¹Evans, op. cit., p. 317.

²Ibid.

³Fox, The Works of George Fox, III, 44.

Examples of this have been mentioned in the section dealing with immediate revelation.

Robert Barclay added his testimony in clearly stating his faith in the inspiration of the Scriptures when he said:

...We do acknowledge the scriptures to be very heavenly and divine writings...and that we...give praise to God for his wonderful providence in preserving these writings so pure and uncorrupted as we have them.¹

He did not mean that the translation he possessed was perfect in every detail but that in spite of the errors which may have slipped in there remains a sufficient, clear testimony to all the essentials of the Christian faith.² The problem of verbal inerrancy did not disturb Barclay or Fox because they believed that the Spirit who gave forth the Scriptures and the message of the Scriptures, themselves were in complete unity. If the, they were indwelt by the Spirit they would be led, without question, into all truth. For "there...is a most sweet concord and harmony between the teachings of the Spirit, and the testimony of the Holy Scriptures."³

Although the early Friends witnessed to immediate inspiration, they insisted that the Scriptures were inspired above that of any other book and no immediate inspiration would be contrary to its contents. Barclay affirmed that "without all deceit or equivocation"...the Scriptures are

¹Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, p. 75.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³Richard Claridge, A Treatise of the Holy Scriptures (New York: Trow Directory Printing and Bookbinding Co.), 1893, p. 31 of Introduction.

"the most excellent writings in the world; to which...no other writings are to be preferred" and this, not because of any virtue or power in the writings themselves; but, because we ascribe all to that Spirit from which they proceeded.¹ William Penn added his testimony when he acknowledged that he esteemed the Scriptures to be the best of the writings and sincerely desired to lead the life they exhorted to. He then explained that their expressions are often construed to mean that they lessen the Holy Scriptures but that in all fairness it should be understood that Friends do not speak of the Scriptures as compared with their own "books, or with men, but with Christ, his Light and Spirit, from whence the Scriptures came."² He firmly declared that the Quakers have no expression or thought of their writings equalling the Scriptures.³

In the light of both their testimonies and their practice it may be concluded that the early Quakers most certainly believed that the Scriptures were inspired of the Holy Spirit and esteemed above all other writings. When they spoke of being immediately inspired it was never with the idea of receiving any new doctrine but of an immediate understanding of the same Gospel and directions for adopting the message to their lives. They insisted, however, that the unfolding and receiving of the truth did not necessarily come directly through the written word.

¹Evans, op. cit., p. 319.

²Ibid., p. 325.

³Ibid.

It was at this point that they were severely criticized and many times misunderstood.

At times while trying to persuade men through arguments, George Fox was pushed into a corner and in order to be entirely consistent expressed, what appeared to be, extreme views in regard to understanding the mind of the Spirit through immediate inspiration. In place of an infallible church, or an infallible Bible, he spoke of an infallible word of God in their hearts. He felt, that "as many as are the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God," therefore as long as they had the Spirit within they could make infallible judgements.¹ In this connection Fox appears to give little consideration to human weakness or infirmities. The only safeguard seems to be that any wrong judgement would mean that the individual did not have the Spirit and the infallibility would still be in the Spirit rather than the individual.

How does this view of inspiration compare with Luther's concept of the inner testimony which confirms the message of the written word? How could Luther judge the content of Scripture by an inner testimony unless he stood outside of the written word? Was it the Scripture that witnessed to his heart or was it the Spirit? Luther did not use the term inspiration as freely or perhaps as comprehensibly as did Fox and yet, he expresses a concept close to this, especially in his method of handling the Scripture. The writer does not feel adequate to make a defi-

¹Fox, The Works of George Fox, p. 41.

nite judgement in this relationship but only to point out what appears to be similarities in both the doctrine and practice of the early Friends and Luther.

In spite of the strong, clear witness to immediate inspiration, the Quakers did not separate themselves from the Bible as did some of the "inner light" movements. This has been illustrated by the way that the early Friends made use of the Scripture. They believed that the Scriptures were given for a purpose and they faithfully and earnestly endeavored to be in harmony with that purpose. Fox stated:

...we believe they (the Scriptures) are to be read, believed, and fulfilled, and they are profitable for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all god works...and are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus...¹

Since Fox believed in the unity of the Spirit and the Scriptures he appealed to the Scripture to prove the truth of the Quaker doctrine, particularly in controversies with his opposers. On some occasions when he preached, he took the Bible and showed the congregation chapter and verse references for the Quaker practice and principles. On one occasion, when challenged to give Bible references to refute the opponents, Fox complied as a matter of course.² His teaching was saturated with Scripture and Scriptural language; in fact he reacted strongly against stating Christian teaching in any terms or phrases which were not Scriptural.

Barclay clearly proclaims the Scriptures to be:

¹Evans, op. cit., p. 317.

²King, op. cit., p. 169.

- (1) a faithful historical account of the actings of God's people in divers ages...
- (2) a prophetic account of several things, whereof some are already past, and some yet to come.
- (3) a full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ.¹

Furthermore, said Barclay, the Scriptures are "necessary to the Church of Christ." He comments more fully that the Scriptures contain all the essentials of the Christian faith and likewise:

we do look upon them as the only fit outward judge of the controversies among Christians: and that whatsoever doctrine is contrary unto their testimony, may therefore justly be rejected as false. ...and we are willing that all our doctrines and practices be tried by them.

Whatsoever any do, pretending to the Spirit, which is contrary to the Scriptures, be accounted and reckoned a delusion of the devil...²

This statement appears to make the Scripture the judge or test of any direct teaching of the Spirit but both Barclay and Fox would deny this. The Scripture was a check only as it was understood through the immediate revelation of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit was the primary authority.

William Penn declared that Friends did not "lessen the virtue, use and reputation of the Holy Scriptures" even though they endeavored to vindicate the Holy Spirit in His office of revelation to believers.³ He confirmed the witness of Fox and Barclay concerning the purpose and use of the Scriptures when he said that the Scriptures are useful both historically and doctrinally. Historically they give us a "true narrative of the transactions of those ages of the world..." and doctrinally

¹Barclay, An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, p. 72.

²Ibid., p. 89.

³Evans, op. cit., p. 322.

they present us with a "true account of the principles and doctrines of the people of God."¹ Yet, he said, "The Scriptures are only useful, as unfolded by the inspiration of the Spirit."² They are a declaration of those things most surely believed by the primitive Christians and since they contain the will of God and are his commands to us, they are in that respect his "declaratory word." Therefore, they are obligatory on us, and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.³

George Whitehead, another Quaker leader of the seventeenth century, confessed his love for the Bible in his Journal. He acknowledged the advantage of being familiar with the Bible, saying that "it was a help and an advantage to my secret meditations, when a lively sense and comfort of the Scriptures was in measure given me by the Spirit."⁴ He explained that through the ministry of the Spirit he was the more induced to the serious reading and consideration of what he read in the Holy Scriptures, and furthermore, he said, "I would not have Christian parents remiss in educating and causing their children to read the Holy Scriptures, but to induce them both to learn and frequently read therein." For, he added, a knowledge of the Bible may be of real advantage when they come to have their understanding enlightened, and to know the truth as it

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 326.

⁴Ibid., p. 327.

is in Christ Jesus.¹ Whitehead joined Fox in exhorting Friends to "keep to the words, terms, language and doctrine of Holy Scripture and not be wheedled or drawn from the same...to unscriptural terms or unlearned questions."²

Through the testimonies of these early Quaker leaders it is easy to sense a genuine appreciation of the sacred writings and note the constant use of them in their writings. They believed that by reading the Scriptures man might deduce their divine origin by:

- (1) prophecies being accomplished
- (2) the superiority of their doctrines
- (3) the miraculous preservation
- (4) the harmony of all their parts³

Yet this would simply be historical, literal or outward proof resulting from man's reason or judgement. This would not be the spiritual proof and influence on the heart. Reference is made to Lydia when the Apostle Paul spoke and "the Lord opened her heart that she attended to the things that were spoken by Paul."⁴

Friends believed that by comparing Scripture passages with other passages man could arrive at a knowledge of the literal meaning. By this method man might also obtain some knowledge of the attributes of God, discover a part of God's plan of redemption and collect purer moral truths than from any other source. But "no literal reading of

¹Ibid., p. 328.

²Ibid.

³Clarkson, op. cit., p. 211

⁴Ibid., p. 212.

the Scriptures can give him that spiritual knowledge of divine things which leads to eternal life."¹

They reasoned that if the Scriptures were sufficient of themselves, the knowledge of spiritual things would consist in the knowledge of words. Thus, the most cultivated mind, the most intellectual would be the most proficient in vital religion and this they denied.²

In regard to the method of interpretation and exegesis, they were aware, first of all, of the necessity of being taught immediately by the Spirit. This, above all, is the key to a correct understanding of Scripture. In the actual interpretation of Scripture, Fox did not resort to allegory. It was his policy to take the meaning of Scripture at what he considered to be face value. This was very much in line with his open and direct yea-nay honesty. He made some use of types in the case of Cain, Abel, Sarah, Jacob and some others but in this he stayed close to the literal New Testament figurative use. Rachel King states that Fox's method of interpretation is another mark of his conservatism.³

In the minds of some, no doubt, there would be some question of Fox's spiritualizing of doctrines such as baptism and communion but he must have felt that the spiritual interpretation was the most accurate and consistent.

As a reaction against the contemporary, cold, intellectual ap-

¹Ibid., p. 212.

²Ibid.

³King, op. cit., p. 168.

proach to Bible study, Fox and his followers stressed that the grammatical and historical knowledge of Scripture was unnecessary.

The spiritual emphasis of Fox is far removed from rationalism. It is a thoroughly supernatural view of revelation.¹ As Fox was accused of making the Light of Christ a "corrupt spark of reason", he replied, "there is no corruption in it but it leads to true reason and there is no true reason without it."² Fox repeatedly asserted that the Light is neither reason nor conscience, though reason cannot penetrate the same subjects as the spiritual faculty, it is powerful within its own province. Yet in spite of the distinction between spiritual discernment and reason, they are still connected in that the Spirit can only act upon a reasonable being. Light and the power of sight are distinct things, yet the power of sight is nothing without light and light cannot produce vision.³

The Apology of Robert Barclay, in its use of logic, is an example of the practical use of reason. Both Barclay and William Penn made more use of formal systematizing than did Fox.

Conclusion.

The Friends of the seventeenth century were reacting against a

¹King, op. cit., p. 99.

²Fox, The Works of George Fox, III, 64.

³Clarkson, op. cit., p. 208.

cold formalism in England and their point of view can only be understood in the light of this situation. They had reason to believe that Christ had been lost through forms and legalism; therefore they sought to strip religion of all its unnecessary elements in order to make Christ known to men. They were convinced that the will of God could be immediately revealed to every individual without any external aid, though the Scriptures were held in esteem. Constantly the early Friends were witnessing to "life" and "power" which they experienced through immediate contact with God.

Because Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, Fox believed that with Christ within, they too, could be in the spirit of the Apostles. Yet, since the Light does not change no new revelation could be given to them. Any immediate revelation would then be a confirmation of the inspired Scriptures.

This emphasis of immediate revelation has been considered by some to be the logical carrying out of the Reformation insight that there is no mediator between God and man.¹

¹King, op. cit., p. 92.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

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The purpose of this study was to analyze and compare the Friends' view of Scripture with concept of Scripture in the preceeding periods of Church history. It is evident from the testimony of the early Friends that they believed Quakerism was a return to Apostolic Christianity. As noted by Penn, the Apostles were advised "not to quench the Spirit, but wait for the Spirit, and to speak by the Spirit, and pray by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit..." The Quakers believed that they were returning to the purity of reliance upon the Holy Spirit and thus to the re-establishing of Apostolic Christianity.

Although the Friends often spoke of a return to the spirit of the early Church, they also maintained that throughout all ages of the Church there have been witnesses to the necessity of an inward revelation of the Spirit. Hence, the emphasis they placed upon the Spirit was not professed to be anything new or beyond that which Christians possessed, to some degree, in all periods of Church history, but was simply a return to the purity of the doctrine. Barclay explained that many outstanding, earnest seekers throughout history testified to the inward voice of the Spirit but that they did so under the disadvantage and error of their day. The Reformation was considered by these Friends to be a step in the right direction yet not carried out to the logical conclusion.

The witness of these Friends in regard to their relationship to

the stream of Christianity is evaluated in these concluding remarks.

First, it is noted that the Quakers joined the Christian Church in proclaiming that the Scriptures were inspired of God and furthermore, that they were preserved from any serious error and are, therefore, a clear and sufficient declaration of all doctrines necessary for salvation. The inspiration of the Scriptures appears to be a "constant" in the history of the Church and the Quakers repeatedly affirmed it to be true. Their sincere respect for the Scriptures has been suggested by their constant use of them in establishing principles for doctrine and daily living.

Second, in regard to the interpretation of the Scripture, George Fox accepted the actual record of the Scripture without resorting to allegory. The "method" of interpretation which he used was in harmony with that of the Reformers although the actual "interpretation" of a text would not necessarily be the same, as in the meaning of communion and baptism.

Third, it is certain that the early Quakers were far removed from rationalism. They believed firmly in a thoroughly spiritual and supernatural enlightenment of the Spirit which was beyond human reason alone. The Friends did not "despise" reason as Luther did, nor did they make a game of it as did the scholastics but they seem to have more in common with the spirit of the early church at this point. Revelation meant more than a rational system; it was a vital, living, spiritual contact with Christ.

Fourth, and perhaps the most vital point in the understanding of the Friends' view of Scripture, is the concept of immediate revelation. They did not consider the revelation of Christian truth to be limited to the words of Scripture, but believed that the Holy Spirit could directly reveal a message to man and that every man has a capacity to respond to that message. No immediate revelation would go beyond the truth recorded in Scripture but would always be in complete harmony with it.

It is very difficult to make a general conclusion in respect to the thinking in Church history regarding the immediate work of the Spirit. The testimony of church leaders is often confusing because of inconsistency in their own words or more particularly between their words and their practice.

The necessity of the Spirit's assistance in discerning spiritual truth was acknowledged by many outstanding Christians in history. Tertullian exclaimed, "Whoever found...Christ without the assistance of the Holy Spirit?" "It is the inward master" says Augustine, "that teacheth, it is Christ that teacheth, it is inspiration that teacheth: there this inspiration and unction is wanting, it is in vain that words from without are beaten in." Unless he speaketh to us inwardly, it is needless for us to cry out." Erasmus, in the Middle Ages, spoke of some preachers in his day saying, "They expound the Scriptures from the pulpit, which no man can either rightly understand, or profitably teach, without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Luther adds his testimony that "no man can rightly know God or understand the word of

God, unless he immediately receive it from the Holy Spirit; neither can any one receive it from the Holy Spirit, except he find it by experience in himself; and in this experience the Holy Ghost teacheth..." From these witnesses it is noted that the immediate work of the Spirit is sometimes referred to as inspiration.

Christians through the major periods of Church history have given expression to a belief in immediate revelation, apparently like that of George Fox and the early Quakers, but their voices were usually drowned out by the growing external authority of the hierarchial system. The hunger of men's hearts in every age seemed to lead them to a conviction that the immediate contact with the Spirit was necessary to make religion vital.

The early Quakers were not teaching a new doctrine but were simply reemphasizing a truth which was prized by the early Church but had been buried under centuries of external authority and legalism. In reacting against the extreme confessionalism in England, Fox probably stretched the bounds of his position as far from rigid letter worship as possible; thus, some of his expressions leave one feeling rather uneasy. Nevertheless, Fox was saved from the error of unguarded mysticism by his appreciation and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and his practical common sense.

In this study three concepts of ultimate authority have been discussed. Through the period of the Middle Ages the Church was considered the infallible authority. During the Reformation and particularly

during the Confessional period the Bible was established as the infallible authority. Then, in the seventeenth century the Quakers proclaimed that it was not the letter but the author of the letter, the Holy Spirit, who is the final and infallible authority. Probably no one emphasis was held exclusively of the others in any period of history. The Reformers spoke sometimes of the Bible and other times of the Spirit as the authority. Although Fox stressed so strongly the authority of the Spirit there was always the check of the written word and the testimony of the Church in history.

Finally, this writer has been convinced through this study that the Friends' view of authority and Scripture was not a "new" idea with them, although perhaps they carried the concept to its logical conclusion but there was a basis for their view in the continuity of thought in Church history as a whole. The emphasis upon immediate revelation and the authority of the Spirit appears to be sound and adequate for evangelicals of any generation as long as the checks of the inspired Scriptures, good judgement and the testimony of the Church are not neglected. With a proper understanding of the early Friends' view and a clarification of definitions, there is apparently no real conflict with evangelical thought in any age. There is, of course, a noted difference between the Friends' view of authority as immediate spiritual revelation and those who hold stubbornly to a wooden interpretation of Scripture which ignores the necessity for any immediate witness of the Spirit. All through the centuries of the church there was a struggle for a dis-

inction between the letter and the spirit and the Friends found their answer in the primary authority of the Spirit yet claiming a unity of revelation in that the Scripture and immediate revelation were always in complete harmony. The Spirit gave life to the letter and the letter served as a guard against false doctrine and wrong practices.

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