

Is The Bible The Word of God?

by Ludwig Wiesinger

[A lecture delivered at the conference of church council members of the Free Ev. Lutheran Synod in South Africa in Wittenberg, Natal, June 6, 1970. Prof. Heinrich Vogel prepared the translation from the German original. This article shows the faithful testimony to the inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture brought by our sister church in South Africa.]

The essay toward which I have been asked to formulate our position, was delivered by the head of the Hermansburg College at Natal, Pastor H.G. Luehning, on May 17, 1969, at the meeting of the alumni association. This essay was entitled, "Natural Science and the Christian Faith."

In this essay—especially in the area of the doctrine of Holy Scripture—statements are made and thoughts are expressed which frighten us. We are convinced that they cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Lutheran Church and with a Christian faith based on the Bible.

For the following reasons we feel compelled to take a position in opposition to the aforesaid essay:

- a. Several members of our Synod are alumni of the Hermansburg College and have the right to expect help and direction from their church in the questions raised by this essay.
- b. The thoughts expressed in this essay are nothing new. They are rather expressive of the position held today by a large number of theologians. A statement of our position toward the essay of the head of the Hermansburg College is at the same time a statement of our position on important questions of modern theology.
- c. We are not making a public display of this essay, as it were, by pointing out the doctrinal stance of other churches. We are rather painfully aware that the theological errors that appear in the essay to be discussed threaten us also. Perhaps we are already infected with the disease to which we want to call attention.

There is no point in analyzing the essay of the head of the Hermansburg College step by step, since only a few of you have read it. We intend to formulate our position toward it in such a way, that we make some brief basic statements concerning the doctrine of Holy Scripture and refer to the statements of the essay at the pertinent places. In this manner those who have read the essay will receive an answer to questions that have arisen. Those, however, who have not read it will hopefully derive some benefit from the remarks we shall be making concerning the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

We shall divide our remarks on the doctrine of Holy Scripture into three parts.

Part one answers the question, "What does Holy Scripture want to accomplish?"

Part two answers the question, "What is Holy Scripture?"

Part three will address itself to the question, "How do we use Holy Scripture properly?"

I. What does Holy Scripture want to accomplish?

A clear and comprehensive answer to this question is found in the last verse of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, which refers first of all to the content of the preceding chapter of this gospel, but can also be applied to the content of the entire Holy Scripture: "That ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." The Bible wants to lead us to Christ, to saving and life-giving faith in the Son of God. On this point I cite a remark Luther made on John 5:39, "We must not look for more than testimony of Christ in it, i.e., a doctrine of faith. For Christ is such a remarkable person, God and man at the same time, so that he who does not grasp this from the testimony of the Scripture by faith must be offended at Him" (WA 48, 143).

The whole New Testament teaches faith in Jesus Christ. To prove that will hardly be necessary here.

But also the entire Old Testament wants to lead us to faith in Jesus Christ. We see that in the gospel account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. After these two disciples had told their unknown companion what had happened to Jesus of Nazareth, we read, “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25–27). So the resurrected Lord taught these two disciples on the way to Emmaus, that the entire Old Testament concerned itself with Him and taught faith in Him. Here Luther’s words apply (from “The Last Words of David,” 1543), “God is concerned with the revelation and knowledge of His Son throughout the scriptures of the Old and New Testament: it all concerns His Son.”

And now finally a quotation from our Lutheran Confessions (Apology IV, 87), “In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul discusses this topic especially, and declares that, when we believe that God, for Christ’s sake, is reconciled to us, we are justified freely by faith. And this proposition which contains the statement of the entire discussion, the principal matter of all Epistles, yea, of *the entire Scriptures*, he maintains in the third chapter: We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law, Rom. 3:28.”

This justifying, saving faith in Jesus Christ is worked by the Holy Ghost through the Word of the Scriptures, which we receive as Law and Gospel. In the Apology (XII, 53) we read, “For the two chief works of God in men are these, to terrify, and to justify and quicken those who have been terrified. Into these two works all Scripture has been distributed. The one part is the Law, which shows, reproveth, and condemns sins. The other part is the Gospel, i.e., the promise of grace bestowed in Christ, and this promise is constantly repeated in the whole of Scripture, first having been delivered to Adam.” Let me cite another word of Luther, a remark he made on Psalm 40:8, “This is the book of the Holy Ghost, namely, the Holy Scripture, wherein one must seek and find Christ, not only through the promise, but also through the Law. For the Law too cannot be understood apart from Christ, since no one knows what it wants and how it is to be fulfilled... Therefore with no other book will one find Christ, no matter how good it may be...”

The answer to the question, “What does Holy Scripture want to accomplish?” is this: It wants to testify from beginning to end of Christ. Through the Law and the Gospel it wants to lead us to justifying faith in Him. Through faith in Him it wants to create a new life in us. It wants to show us the only way in which we can stand in the final judgment. It testifies to us, that only he who crushed by the Law permits himself to be led to the realization of his sin and by faith accepts the Gospel of the Savior from sin can be saved.

It is therefore no shortcoming of the Bible that it is not an explicit scientific reference work or a textbook of natural science. It does not want to be that at all. It has an infinitely higher task, to lead us to salvation and to Christ.

II. What is Holy Scripture?

It is first of all a book like every other book. It is printed with the same ink and on the same paper, and is bound in the same manner as other books. More than that, like other books, it was written by mortal sinful human beings. Of this fact it testifies itself.

Let us look into the opening verses of Luke’s gospel. There the evangelist Luke writes, “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed” (Luke 1:1–4). Luke, the author of the gospel named for him and of the Book of Acts, was thus not an eyewitness of the life and resurrection of the Lord. But he had diligently and carefully gathered information from the eyewitnesses on what a Christian needs as a basis for his faith. Then he recorded all this information in its proper order. In writing his gospel Luke accomplished a considerable literary piece of work, of which fact he himself was fully aware.

The same is true of all authors of biblical books. They wrote with the gifts given them by the Holy Ghost. That is what the apostle Peter says of his fellow-apostle Paul, "...even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you" (II Pet. 3:15). The eyewitnesses themselves also wrote what they had seen. John writes, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you... And these things write we unto you" (I John 1:3-4). They wrote *what* they had seen, and we may also add, *how* they had seen everything, with their own understanding. They wrote with their own vocabulary and in their own literary style.

A large number of the most diverse authors participated in the writing of the Holy Scriptures, which extended over a period of many centuries. There was Moses, learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians; Amos, the herdsman; Isaiah, descended from the royal family; Micah, the farmer; Ezekiel, the priest; Ezra, the scribe; Matthew, the publican; Luke, the physician; Peter, the fisherman; Paul, the learned and formerly fanatic Pharisee. They all participated in their own manner in the writing of Holy Scripture.

Hence the first answer to our question, "What is Holy Scripture?" is: It is a book written by men.

The second answer to the question, "What is Holy Scripture?" is: Holy Scripture is the Word of God.

With these words we have made a statement of fundamental importance, yes, a statement that is possible only by faith. The first statement, the Bible is a book written by men, is denied by no one. The short sentence: "The Bible is the Word of God" can be repeated with approval only by someone who has been affected by its message of Law and Gospel and has been brought to justifying faith in the Savior. Anyone who can say, "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord," not only can, but must submit obediently to the Lord and to His Word. For the Bible makes the claim that it is in its entire scope and content the Word of God.

This claim shall be supported with several references:

In the Old Testament we find the expression, "Thus saith the Lord," no less than 485 times. But not only statements introduced in this manner are the Word of God. The books of the prophets in their entirety are God's Word. The same is true of the books of the Law, of the Psalms, and of all the other books of the Old Testament. (Cf. Kittel, TWNT IV, 95,8ff. and 1032,20ff.)

The New Testament confirms this self-evaluation of the Old Testament. Several examples may suffice to show that. In Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14 is quoted: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel." This quotation is introduced with the explanation, "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet..." Isaiah, a human being, spoke—that is true. But through him God spoke. The word of the man Isaiah is at the same time the Word of God. With the same explanation the words of Hosea are quoted in Matthew 2:15, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." In Acts 4:25, 26, Psalm 2:1ff. is quoted, "Lord,... who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said..." Hebrews 3:7 quotes Psalm 95:7-11, introducing the quotation with the words, "as the Holy Ghost saith." The evaluation of the Old Testament as the Word of God we find expressed in the fact that there are 276 direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament. The number of references to Old Testament subject matter in the New Testament have been estimated at 3,578. Indirect references and allusions are innumerable (See the article by Dr. W.M. Oesch in *Luth. Rundblick* 8/3, p. 57, "Die Lehre von der Inspiration"). The Old Testament is in its own opinion and in that of the New Testament the Word of God.

The New Testament too claims to be the Word of God. In I Peter 1:10-12 we read, "Of which salvation *the prophets* have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what, or what manner of time *the Spirit of Christ which was in them* did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, *which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven...*" Here the prophets of the Old Testament and the preachers of the Gospel of the New Testament are placed into the same category. Both are bearers of the Holy Ghost. Both are bearers of divine revelation. The word of both—the spoken and the written word (I John 1:4)—is the Word of the Holy Ghost, the Word of God.

In the Apology (IV,107,108) we read, “Truly it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture....Do they think that the same is repeated so often for no purpose? Do they think that these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?”

If the head of the Hermansburg College in his essay in connection with a logical deduction to which we shall refer later concludes, “The Bible and God’s Word are therefore not identical according to Luther,” we can only determine that such a contention is contrary to Scripture, contrary to Luther, and contrary to our Lutheran Confessions.

Luther, on the other hand, says this in a remark on Psalm 22:7, “Holy Scripture is the Word of God, written and (so to say) spelled out and set forth in letters of the alphabet, just as Christ is the eternal Word of God veiled in humanity.”

Thus Holy Scripture is the Word of God contained in letters of the alphabet, written revelation. The Bible and God’s Word are identical. The Bible is the Word of God.

The third answer to the question, “What is Holy Scripture?” is: It is verbally inspired by the Holy Ghost, given to the writers by the Holy Ghost.

This is also the doctrine of our Synod. The first article of the synodical constitution of our church reads, “Because the entire Holy Scripture is the Word of God inspired by the Holy Ghost, which shows us the way to the triune God and to eternal life, we want to remain steadfast and faithful to the divine Word as the only source and norm of faith and doctrine.”

Here the inspiration of the entire Holy Scripture is confessed as the doctrinal basis of our Synod. When we confess the inspiration of the *entire* Holy Scripture, that includes that not only were the writers of Holy Scripture enlightened by the Holy Ghost, not only were the contents revealed to them, but that also the *words* of Holy Scripture were inspired by the Holy Ghost. (Compare the “*Einigungssätze*” of 1948). That is why we speak of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture.

This doctrine of the verbal inspiration the head of the Hermansburg College—as for that matter the greater part of modern theologians—cannot reject and decline enough. He claims that this doctrine was “born of insecurity and the fear that natural science could become dangerous to faith” (page 5). Then he continues, “This attitude believes that it must defend God and His Word. What a pious pride is revealed here! What kind of a God is that, who needs to be defended and protected by us? Basically this is not defense, but rather destruction. God becomes an idol, faith is dissolved, the Bible becomes undeserving of belief and thus the message of the Gospel is given a deathblow” (page 6).

To these monstrous reproaches of the head of the Hermansburg College made against our Synod and all the churches which stand firmly on the Bible as the Word of God we can in all calmness and certainty only answer, that we have not thought out this doctrine of the verbal inspiration, but that this is the doctrine of the Bible itself. Our concern is, whether we humbly submit to the doctrine of Holy Scripture, or whether we in haughty presumption elevate ourselves above it.

The doctrine of verbal inspiration has no intention of explaining to us how it is possible that the word of a human author can at the same time be the Word of God. How should we be able to understand the working of the Holy Ghost? How could we understand how regeneration occurs in holy Baptism through the working of the Holy Ghost? How could we comprehend how God bestows the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and the Sacraments? Just as little can we understand and explain, how the Holy Ghost has brought it about that the authors of the Bible, of whose humanity we spoke in the first part of this essay, spoke and wrote the Word of God.

The doctrine of verbal inspiration does not intend to explain anything. It does not teach either, as the author of the essay we are discussing maintains (page 8), that the Bible fell from heaven, was written immediately by God or dictated to the authors by the Holy Ghost with the elimination of their personality, their independence, and their will (page 10). It wants to testify of and to confirm this miracle. The biblical writings, which were written by men at a given time, in a given situation, with given gifts and powers, and in their own literary style and vocabulary, are inspired by the Holy Ghost. They are the Word of God (See the “*Einigungssätze*”).

These assertions cannot be established empirically. Neither can it be established empirically that God created the world and that Christ died for us. These are articles of faith. In the same manner the doctrine of verbal inspiration is an article of faith.

To the Scripture passages concerning inspiration mentioned in the foregoing section these can be added. In II Peter 1:21 we read, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were *moved by the Holy Ghost*.” Yet they spoke in words, therefore the words that were inspired by the Holy Ghost, hence verbal inspiration is taught here. In John 14:26 the Lord says, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.” The Lord too spoke in words. Therefore the Holy Ghost teaches the words of the Lord and brings them to remembrance. This promise is most certainly valid concerning the authors of the writings of the New Testament. Hence this too is verbally inspired.

That this is also the teaching of Luther and of the Lutheran Confessions must have become clear on the basis of the passages already quoted.

The scriptural doctrine of verbal inspiration testifies to us that the entire Holy Scripture is the Word of God.

In the following portion of our essay we wish to enter in upon some of the thoughts of the head of the Hermansburg College.

We have already cited the sentence in the aforementioned essay, “The Bible and God’s Word are therefore not identical according to Luther,” and then quoted the words of Luther which say the very opposite, “Holy Scripture is the Word of God.”

But how does the head of the Hermansburg College arrive at his conclusion? He develops the matter thus: “Luther says, ‘Whatever promotes Christ is the Word of God.’ It is certainly not difficult to see that this is a very critical evaluation of Scripture. According to that principle, not everything that is found in Scripture is self-evidently the Word of God. Luther also practiced this very consistently. The Bible and God’s Word are therefore according to Luther not identical” (page 8).

Luther actually said something that resembles this statement. He said, “Whatever promotes Christ is apostolic.”

But we must consider the context in which this statement was made. In the introduction to the Epistles of James and Jude we read, “This is the true touchstone, by which all books are to be tested, to see whether they promote Christ or not. Since all Scripture manifests Christ (Romans 3), and St. Paul determined not to know any thing save Jesus Christ (I Cor. 2), whatever does not teach Christ, is not apostolic, even though it be taught by St. Peter or Paul. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even though Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod did it.”

This statement of Luther pertains to the Epistle of James, which he did not wish to include among the “principal books” of Holy Scripture. Luther doubted whether the Epistle of James belonged to the biblical canon.

Here we must briefly enter in upon the question, what is the canon? “Canon” means as much as “collection,” “selection,” “rule,” “norm.” We use the term to designate a collection of writings, which are combined in the Bible as the normative Word of God.

The collection of the writings of the Old Testament was completed and decided at the end of the second century B.C. The early Christian church took over the Old Testament in its present form as the Word of God from the Synagogue as self-evident.

But what about the canon of the New Testament? In a document (Fragment M) from about 150 A.D. all the New Testament books are enumerated with the exception of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Epistle of James, the third Epistle of John, and the two Epistles of Peter. These books were designated as the so-called “Antilegomena” or books against which objections had been raised. About the year 200 A.D. the New Testament canon, as we have it today, was firmly established, and at the Council of Hippo in 393 A.D. it was officially established.

Christendom recognized in these writings—including the Epistle of James—the voice of the Good Shepherd according to the words of the Lord, “My sheep hear my voice” (John 10:27). With the recognition of the canon they submitted to the voice of the Lord.

In Luther’s mind the question whether the “Antilegomena” belonged to the canon arose again. With the expression, “Whatever promotes Christ,” he wanted to establish a sign or token, whereby the canonical books could be recognized. That the other books of the New Testament were the Word of God he never doubted. It is therefore highly irrelevant to use these words of Luther, which were intended to serve as a mark of recognition for the limits of the canon, as proof for Luther’s “critical understanding of Scripture.” Luther should be read in context, and individual words should not be torn out of context senselessly.

Luther did not remove the Epistle of James from the Bible, and the Lutheran Church later joined the early Church in its decision and its belief that also in the “Antilegomena” the voice of the Good Shepherd is to be heard.

Utterly confusing is the further deduction of the head of the Hermansburg College, that the Bible is to be compared with the gold mines of our country, out of the rock of which gold can be extracted, so that the Bible is not the Word of God, but only contains the Word of God, which must then also be extracted from it by a critical process.

If he believes that we must regain this realization “with Luther,” we can only quote some of Luther’s words to him: “God forbid, if the Christian Church had the power to change or to give up God’s Word, we would have no certain Word of God any more. For this is clear, that if it can change one Word of God, then it can also change every other Word of God, even that through which the Christian Church itself was founded and is preserved” (WA 30 III, 340)

In the year 1541 Luther wrote, “To the church nothing except the sure pure and only Word of God must be preached. Where that is lacking, there is no church any more, but the school of the Devil” (WA 51, 518).

In a remark on Proverbs 30:5f, penciled on the margin of his Bible in 1542, Luther writes, “The greatest danger of all is to be foolhardy in regard to God’s Word and mingle one’s own interpretations with it. The greatest security of all is to be God-fearing and humbly to hear and read God’s Word” (WA 48, 93).

A further comparison from the above-mentioned essay, that according to a Luther quotation which is unknown to me the Word of God in the Bible is like the Christ-child in its diapers, that the diapers must be washed again and again because they are not clean, borders on blasphemy. We find in our Bible no obnoxious excrement or anything like that. It is both as to its content and as to its wording in its entirety God’s inviolable Word.

May the Lord preserve us from the folly that it is left to our judgment to determine what is God’s Word in Holy Scripture and what is not. It is God’s Word.

A further reason for denying the doctrine of verbal inspiration is seen by the head of the Hermansburg College in the fact that we do not possess the original manuscript of a single author of the biblical writings. We have only a large number of copies with an abundance of scribal errors, and for that reason we cannot maintain that the Bible—no doubt he means the editions of the Bible we have today—is identical with the Word of God.

In reply the following must be said: It is true that the original manuscript of no biblical book is extant. It is true that the existing copies contain some corruptions, variants, and differing readings and the like. But this should not be exaggerated.

The Old Testament has been transmitted to us by the Jewish Masoretic scholars with extreme faithfulness and conscientiousness. The manuscripts found since 1947 in the region of the Dead Sea that permit us to extend the history of the text approximately 1000 years farther back have proved the faithfulness of the transmission of the Old Testament text.

Of the New Testament we possess no less than 2600 manuscripts, parchments, and papyri today.

The reliability of the transmission of the New Testament text became evident when, for example, in 1934 the English research scholar C.H. Roberts deciphered a papyrus fragment called Papyrus 52. It dates back to about 125 A.D. and contains on one side John 18:31–33, and on the other side John 18:37,38. The text agrees

exactly with that transmitted to us from medieval times. It reveals only one slight difference. In our Greek text we read, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness of the truth.” Papyrus 52 omits the words, “for this cause.” Because this omission occurs nowhere else, scholars conclude that the copyist made a copying mistake here.

Here and in similar instances the task of text criticism enters into the picture. It does not criticize the content of Holy Scripture, but attempts to establish the original text. It has already made considerable progress. Seven-eighths of the New Testament text is recognized today by all scholars as undoubtedly free of errors and firmly established.

The head of the Hermansburg College says so himself, “Indeed theological research today is in a position to say on the basis of the many manuscripts and copies with their variants by means of text critical studies, what must have been the reading of the original manuscripts” (page 9). The question is, what the absence of the original manuscripts means in regard to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, if we possess the original text reliable to a great extent as a result of the work of the text critics. Luther did not have the text before him that we possess today. At that time not as many ancient manuscripts were available as today. Yet we have not been induced by the discovery of new texts to change or remove one point of doctrine of the ancient church or of the Reformation.

The discovery of new texts and the work of the text critics—which we welcome very much—has proved to us that the Church at all times, even in Luther’s time, had a biblical text on which it could base its faith confidently. God’s providence has watched over the preservation of the biblical text visibly. In His high priestly prayer the Lord Christ prayed, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20). This prayer God has heard. He has preserved for us the word of the first witnesses, His Word, so that we can base our faith and our salvation on it.

We can confidently say, “We have God’s holy Word inspired by the Holy Ghost.”

Naturally this doctrine of verbal inspiration applies only to the original manuscripts written in Hebrew and Greek. All translations participate in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, as they in word and content agree with the original manuscripts.

Yet we have in Luther’s translation a Bible with which no modern German translation of the Bible can compare in literary perfection and inherent power.

Luther once said, “Indeed, translating is not every man’s skill...it requires a real pious, faithful, diligent, timid, Christian, learned, experienced, and skillful heart” (WA 30 II, 640). We are persuaded, that Luther had such a heart, and that his translation did not result without the assistance of the Holy Ghost.

A further objection against the doctrine of verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture is seen by the head of the Hermansburg College in the fact that in the Bible many incidents are reported differently, so that they vary from one another in some details, and that these differences have been produced by the differences in the human ability to observe and remember. For example, it is not possible to construct one continued narrative from the four gospels that would combine these varying details without contradiction.

He mentions particularly the first two chapters of Holy Scripture and sees in Genesis 1–2:4a and 2:4b–25 two contradictory accounts of creation.

He says, “If we regard these scientific statements in the two accounts as the Word of God, we get into serious difficulty. For then God created the world once in this manner and again in that manner. To maintain that would be pure nonsense. We should not insult God. We should think more highly of the Bible than to attribute such nonsense to it” (page 10).

The Hermansburg professor proceeds from the following assumption. If the Holy Ghost had verbally inspired Holy Scripture, the consequence would have to be, that all parts and reports of Holy Scripture would permit themselves to be seamlessly connected like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. He believes, therefore, that inspiration must prove itself to us by presenting itself to our human reason as a perspicuous whole. Thus he wants to make human reason, our human intelligence, the judge of the inspiration of Holy Scripture.

In reply to that we can only reiterate that the doctrine of verbal inspiration is an *article of faith*, revealed to us by Holy Scripture itself.

The certainty that Holy Scripture is God's Word does not arise through this that our human reason is satisfied by it. This certainty has an entirely different source. It arises through this that the Holy Ghost leads us to justifying faith through the preaching of Law and Gospel, through the preaching of Christ. It arises through this that we certainly know and realize that here the living God speaks with us, and when we through the Word of Holy Scripture are brought into contact with the living God, then we affirm its claim to be God's own Word.

Then we also know in faith, in ever-increasing degree, how clear and perspicuous Holy Scripture is.

Luther says, "No clearer book has been written on earth than Holy Scripture; compared with all other books it is as the sun compared with all other sources of light... It is a serious disgrace and dishonor to Holy Scripture and to all Christendom to say that Holy Scripture is obscure and not so clear that everyone may understand it, to teach and to prove his faith to him. Take note of this, would it not be a great disgrace for me and for you to be called a Christian and not know what I believe? But if I know what I believe, then I know what is written in Scripture, because Scripture contains nothing more than Christ and the Christian faith. Therefore if faith only listens to Scripture, it is so clear and lucid to him, that it says without any comments of the fathers and teachers, 'That is right, that I also believe'" (WA 8, p. 236).

Scripture proves its clarity to faith, and to the degree that reason is enlightened by the Holy Ghost, it may also know something about its unity and inner conformity.

An interpreter of Holy Scripture who stands firm in his faith will take no pleasure in the method of interpretation used by many modern theologians, who with passionate zeal hunt for inconsistencies and contradictions in Holy Scripture. Where many modern theologians believe that they see contradictions, he will be given insights into connections and contexts that remain hidden to them.

Whenever he thinks that he is faced with insoluble problems, he will wait until they are resolved either in this world or in the next. He will not have the impudence to make his reason the judge over God's Word. With the Psalmist he will abide by the confession, "Thy word is true from the beginning" (Ps. 119:160).

And if in this world many questions remain unanswered and many problems remain unresolved, he stands until the final solution of all problems on an unshakable rock with his confession: The Bible is the Word of God.

The head of the Hermannsburg College believes that it is necessary to listen to all the findings and results of theology, "which are also a science that must be taken seriously. It must be regarded as a cancerous injury to the church, when the results of theological research assured a long time ago are withheld from the members of our congregations" (page 7).

The question is, "What theology does he mean?"

Does he mean a theology that is pursued by humble men who have a high regard for the Word of God, who with Luther always say, "Teach me, teach me, teach me. The Spirit resists the proud..." (WA Tr. IV, 5017)? Then we agree.

Apparently he means a theology that he himself represents, which contests the assertion that the Bible is identical with the Word of God. Yes, we want to inform our congregation of this theology too. We want to tell them what it teaches, what consequences it has. We want to warn our congregations against it.

Whether this theology is a "science that must be taken seriously" does not interest us. We are interested only in the question, "By whom is it taken seriously?" It may be that such a theology is highly regarded in the eyes of the world and is designated as "modern," but that as the second Psalm says, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." We do not want to run after the idol of modernism; we would much rather stand before the Lord of Scripture and be taken seriously with our theology by Him.

We maintain that those who stand under the Lord and His Word interpret Scripture as it wants to be interpreted. We also maintain with the Smalcald Articles that it is enthusiasm if someone boasts "that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure, as Muenzer did, and many still do at the present day, who wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare" (*Trigl.*, p. 495). A great portion of today's theology assumes that it can judge and interpret Scripture with nothing more than human reason. That is

a modern form of enthusiasm by which the Christian church of our day is unfortunately contaminated to a considerable extent. This is actually a spreading cancer in the church!

We want to call the attention of the members of our congregations to the fact that the results of the theological research mentioned by the Hermansburg professor are neither as modern nor as certain as he presumes.

The distinction of the various sources in the Pentateuch, e.g., which is closely connected with the supposedly contradictory accounts of creation is not so new at all. Such hypotheses were set up already in the 18th century. The proponents of these hypotheses are by no means agreed among themselves to this day. One believes that three, another that four, and a third that five different writers were at work on these five books, that these men had drawn from various sources and that their products were again gathered and summarized by others. These results are by no means of such a nature that anyone could maintain that we know anything “exactly” concerning them.

The old Jewish and Christian tradition has seen Moses himself as the author of the greatest part of the Pentateuch. It is indisputable that Moses too may have had sources available. But we cannot trace these sources any more. If the setting up of the various hypotheses has accomplished anything, it is this that we cannot trace the sources any more.

That is of no interest to us either. For we see God’s Word in the five books of Moses also. Also in their authorship the Holy Spirit worked the miracle of inspiration. And if the Holy Spirit was at work here too, it is impossible for us to maintain that in the two accounts of creation contradictory statements were made. Interpreters who stand under Scripture find rather that the two accounts supplement each other.

Herewith we have answered the objections of the head of the Hermansburg College to the doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Scripture. It must have become clear that they have been unable to accomplish anything against the biblical doctrine of the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

We close this second portion of our position paper with the answer to the question, “What is Holy Scripture?”

It is a book written by men.

It is the Word of God.

It is verbally inspired by the Holy Ghost.

III. How do we use Holy Scripture properly?

In answer to this question much of importance has already been said in the foregoing portion of this paper. This we shall briefly summarize here. A few things will still have to be added.

If we believe that in the Bible we have the Word of God before us, we must also approach it with corresponding reverence.

Luther says on Isaiah 55:11 (*Bibeleinzeichnung*, WA 48,102), “What a comforting passage that is, if we can believe that God speaks with us and that it is the Word of God that we read and hear in the Bible...But damnable unbelief and our miserable flesh do not permit us to see nor consider that God speaks with us in Scripture or that this is the Word of God, but think it is the word of Isaiah, Paul or some other ordinary man who has not created heaven and earth. Therefore it is not God’s Word and does not produce its results until it is recognized by us as God’s Word.”

We use Holy Scripture properly, when we humbly submit ourselves to it as the Word of God. It is presumption to want to master or judge Scripture with our own reason. God’s Spirit must illumine us through the Word.

Therefore the proper beginning of Scripture reading is the prayer for the Holy Spirit. Luther says, “...kneel down in your chamber and pray with genuine humility and earnestness to God, that through His Son He would give you His Holy Spirit who will enlighten you, guide you, and give you understanding” (1539. WA 50,658).

Then it comes to pass that the Holy Ghost opens our eyes as he opened the understanding of the disciples at Emmaus for the Scriptures (Luke 24:13–35), and as the knowledge of the Gospel in the Old Testament was given to the eunuch from Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–40).

If we use Holy Scripture properly, we shall seek nothing else in it but Christ, communion with Him, deliverance from judgment, and eternal salvation. For that purpose it was given to us. To that goal it wants to lead us.

We can only seek and find Christ and eternal salvation if we submit to the Law and expect everything from the gracious promises of the Gospel. Only he can understand God's Word properly who permits himself to be made penitently contrite by the Law and permits himself to be gratefully comforted by the Gospel. Many a misunderstanding of Scripture has its cause in a lack of willingness to repent.

He who has found Christ, he who as a sinner has grasped justification by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, he has also by the grace of God found the proper prerequisite for the understanding of the entire Holy Scriptures.

He recognizes in the many voices of Holy Scripture not contradictory theologies, but always the wonderful unanimity of the many witnesses, who want to do nothing more than to confess with John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). He recognizes the unity of Holy Scripture, which was written by men, yet is the Word of God. He trusts its testimony that it was word for word inspired by the Holy Ghost.

He finds the best interpretation of Holy Scripture not in learned commentaries, but in the Holy Scriptures themselves according to the principle of the Reformation that Scripture interprets Scripture. In this manner words that appear to be obscure are illuminated and explained by other words of Scripture.

We use Holy Scripture properly when we permit ourselves to be led to faith in Christ by it. This faith in Christ rests on Holy Scripture. It is produced by God's Word and is preserved only through God's Word.

Faith knows that God's Word speaks the truth and testifies to reality.

Faith knows that although the assertions of Holy Scripture can be known and appropriated with blessing only by a believer, they nevertheless retain their validity also for the unbeliever.

The believer knows that God has created the world and him himself. If the unbeliever does not want to acknowledge that, the world, and the unbeliever himself, are nevertheless created by God.

If the unbeliever does not want to admit that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born of the virgin Mary through the Holy Ghost, that He died and rose from the dead, the believer knows nevertheless that it truly and actually was so.

And if the unbeliever does not believe in the coming judgment and the final decision concerning damnation or salvation, the believer knows that the unbeliever too must appear and be arraigned in the final judgment.

And if a scientist wants to make us believe that there can be no resurrection from the dead, then we know by faith, that God's Word inspired by the Holy Ghost, which can neither err nor deceive, says that it is so, and the scientist errs, even though he may find a thousand good reasons and proofs that it cannot happen.

Here we finally come to the theme, "Natural Science and the Christian Faith," to which the lecture of the head of the Hermannsburg College was really devoted, although he used a considerable portion of his lecture to contest the statement that the Bible is the Word of God and verbally inspired by the Holy Ghost.

He maintains that faith in "the Bible as the literal Word of God in the sense of verbal inspiration" involves a "denial of modern science on the basis of biblical assertions." He maintains thereby that our faith is opposed to science in a hostile manner.

We maintain, on the other hand, that our faith in the Bible as the Word of God *cannot* be in opposition to properly conducted scientific investigation. On the contrary, it wants to render a valuable service to science. Christian faith wants to protect the scientist—in so far as he is a Christian believer and is ready to hear God's Word—from the false ways of human pride and arrogance.

We have gained the knowledge that it is the aim of Holy Scripture to lead us to Christ. This knowledge does not permit us to make a distinction in Scripture between permanently valid assertions of faith and

supposed concepts of its human writers which have been superseded by science, and to separate the latter from Scripture as one takes a diaper off a child.

The entire Bible is the errorless Word of God, also those assertions that touch on historical and scientific matters. With this determination no unnecessary shackles are applied to the scientist. With it he receives definite help.

First of all for the personal life of the scientist who is a believer: By testifying to him as it does to every man that the Bible is the Word of God, his Christian faith shows him the basis on which he can and must build his own faith securely.

For the scientist, too, is a man who is born in sin without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with evil lust, doomed to damnation and eternal death (See Article II of the Augsburg Confession), if he is not reborn through baptism and the Holy Ghost, and if he does not persevere in the faith founded on the Word of the Holy Ghost.

His Christian faith will help the scientist to understand the work of his calling as a divine command and to serve God with his work. It calls his attention to the fact that by his scientific work he contributes to the dominion that God wants man to have over creation (Gen. 1:28), but also to the fact that he can do this work properly only if he is constantly conscious of the responsibility which God has given man for all of creation.

Christian faith based on Scripture makes the scientist aware of the fact that he is and remains a sinner, and that the same striving remains in him that is in all men, a striving which proved so disastrous for our progenitors, to be like God: the desire to have no authority exercised over him and to exalt himself and his reason over everything else.

Christian faith reminds the scientist that human knowledge is never complete, and that its results may therefore never and under no circumstances claim unconditional validity.

Yet the Word of the Holy Ghost does claim unconditional validity under all circumstances and at all times.

On this Word faith is based, or it has no basis at all. Faith is certain of the truth of Holy Scripture, or it falls with the doubt of it.

“Remove the firm certainties, and you have put an end to Christianity,” Luther says (Clemen, *Luthers Werke*, III, p. 98, 14f.).

Concerning the truth of assertions of Holy Scripture there dare be no doubt for the Christian. The thought dare not arise, much less dare there be a discussion of the question whether the Bible wants to deceive us. It does not want to deceive us, and it actually does not deceive us. It is the Word of Him who has said concerning Himself, “I am the Truth” (John 14:6).

At the very beginning of the Fall is the question of doubt, “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1). Faith says, God *has* said exactly what His Word records, and His words do not perish in all eternity. The believing scientist dare not elevate himself over the words of Holy Scripture.

But when he thinks that he has found something that seems to contradict Holy Scripture, and he does not succeed in harmonizing these contradictions, he must direct his criticism against himself and against his own results and methods. He may in no case call the authority of the divine Word into question.

The same is true of the interpreter of Holy Scripture who thinks that he has found contradictions in Scripture. He too must hold to the authority of the divine Word and may be confident that the truth of Holy Scripture will prove itself either in this world or in the next.

Of special importance in this connection is the theory of evolution. Christian faith testifies to the scientist that acceptance of the theory of evolution is fundamentally opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture. Whereas the theory of evolution claims that man has developed from primitive and subhuman conditions to his present cultural and civilizational level, the Bible teaches that contrariwise the image of God in the state of innocence which existed intact in the human race at the beginning of time, has through man’s fall into sin involved man ever more deeply in guilt as history progressed, and that this downward development will continue to the end of time and the final judgment.

Christian faith does not want to be a guardian for the scientist. It wants to show him—in as far as he wants to be a Christian—the place from which he can carry out his divinely assigned task with blessing. For him, too, that place is under God and His Word.

Christian faith is found not only among theologians. Gratefully we can state that many scientists testify to the authority of Holy Scripture and sometimes put so-called theologians to shame in this respect. Christian faith is not dependent on the results of science. It can, however, be helpful to some, if representatives of science expose the error that this science stands in the way of biblical faith.

Let me cite at this point just one quotation from Dr. A.E. Wilder-Smith, professor at the Medical Center at the University of Illinois in Chicago, U.S.A. It is found in the preface of his book, *The Origin and Destiny of Man (Herkunft und Zukunft des Menschen)*, Brunnen - Verlag: Geissen und Basel, 1966), in which he proves the scientific impossibility of the theory of evolution. Professor A.E. Wilder-Smith writes: “I confess that it is my conviction also as a scientist that Jesus, also in respect to his biblical cosmogony, is the Truth, and that science never has and never will outdistance Him. All things were created through Him and for Him. He certainly ought to know” (p. vi).

It is mortifying that modern theologians, like Professor Bultmann and his followers, oppose the authority of Holy Scripture and the possibility of miracles with reasons that they have taken from physical science as it was taught in the 19th century. They have not yet comprehended—to say it only by way of suggestion—that natural laws according to the view of modern physics are no longer understood to be laws that cannot be broken, laws which determine the reality of nature, but merely as methodical rules by means of which an understanding may be gained of natural phenomena. In other words, Professor Bultmann and his followers have not yet understood that modern physical science can no longer exclude the possibility of miracles and of the direct intervention of God in the process of earthly events.

As Christians who stand squarely on the Bible as the Word of God we are happy over such insight on the part of scientists. But we must be aware of this fact that science can easily come to the exactly opposite conclusion at some other time. We base our faith not on human wisdom, but on God’s Word.

This portion of our essay was to answer the question, “How do we use Holy Scripture properly?”

The answer is: When we use it in its entirety as the Word of God inspired by the Holy Ghost. When we humbly submit ourselves to it. When we pray the Holy Spirit to lead us to the true knowledge of our Savior and Redeemer Jesus Christ and to justifying and saving faith through His Word.

When individual theologians or entire church bodies contest the fact that Holy Scripture is identical with God’s Word, when the statement is made that the Bible contains God’s Word and is not itself God’s Word, then man makes himself the judge over Holy Scripture. Then man places himself above God’s Word and thereby above God Himself.

Then he destroys permanently the doctrine of original sin, of the total inability of man to achieve salvation. Then it hurts his pride to depend entirely on the grace of God. Then he must ascribe something to himself and to his own works. Whoever contests the fact that the entire Bible is the Word of God loses the Gospel of the Savior from sin.

This we can plainly see today in a theology that has left the foundation of the Scriptures and concerns itself almost exclusively with social and political matters.

It has little to say any more about saving grace. Yes, among its consistent exponents it has arrived at the “God is dead” theology.

This makes it clear to us that wherever the authority of Holy Scripture as the Word of God is denied, the way has been entered upon which must consistently end in atheism.

For such Christians who have exposed themselves to the influence of this Bible-destroying theology we can only hope and pray that their eyes may yet be opened to the fact that this way leads into the abyss. May they return betimes and be saved!

May the Lord grant us to remain with that doctrine which is confessed in our synodical constitution.

May we proclaim the doctrine, the comfort, and the admonition of Scripture in the worship service, in trials, at deathbeds, or wherever it may be, and accept it in the full certainty that God’s Word says so.

When we can no longer say that, we have lost all solid ground under our feet.

May the Lord preserve us in the prayer: “Establish thy word unto thy servant, who is devoted to thy fear” (Ps. 119:38). May the Lord preserve us in the confession: “Thy word is true from the beginning; and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Ps. 119:160).