

Scripture and Interpretation

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PREFACE

To whom these presents may come, greetings.

The following essays are an attempt to sum up my reading and my experience in the field of Biblical interpretation, surely the noblest and the most difficult area in the “noble and difficult art of reading” (Schlatter). They are herewith offered in the hope that they may be of some service to students.

The first essay, *Revelation—Scripture—Interpretation*, is an attempt at a theological introduction to the whole area. The following series of *Essays in Hermeneutics* is a simple introduction to the techniques of interpretation. The final essay, *The Posture of the Interpreter*, is an elaboration of the “third circle” mentioned in the *Essays in Hermeneutics*.

The essays were written at various times over a considerable span of years; but there is in them, I believe, an inner consistency that warrants their appearance together. The author of the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* claimed that he wrote them “Amore Pauli”; these essays were written “Amore Sacrae Scripturae.” If they succeed in kindling, or intensifying, a like love in those who read them, I shall deem myself richly rewarded by my Lord.

Martin H. Franzmann

September 26, 1960

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with gratitude that we are able to present in one volume this group of essays on Hermeneutics by Dr. Martin Franzmann for the use of our students in the classroom. The collection represents the only statement of length on Biblical Hermeneutics in our own Lutheran circles since Fuerbringer’s *Hermeneutik*.

Hermeneutics has taken the center of the stage in theological discussions today. Principles of interpretation are the point of departure for all men who interpret the Bible. The only sure road to travel is that of a truly Biblical Hermeneutic. These present essays point the way. In our day not only our students, but also all leaders and teachers in the church can read them with profit.

The first essay (Part I) is the most recent. It was written for the Counselors and Fiscal Conference held at Valparaiso University in September of 1960 when over eight hundred leaders of our church heard and discussed this vital subject. Part II is a group of essays Franzmann wrote for his own students which appeared in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* in 1947 and 1948. Dr. Dorn of Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, has kindly allowed us to reproduce these essays on our campus. The final essay (Part III) was presented before the *Conclave Theologicum* in Oakland, California, in connection with the convention of the Missouri Synod in San Francisco in 1959.

In recent years Dr. Franzmann has emerged as one of our leading Lutheran theologians. This is not only because of his sound Biblical approach to theology but because of the lucid and penetrating presentation of his material. He is called upon much to serve his church as teacher, essayist, author and preacher. He is head of the Exegetical Department of Concordia Seminary St. Louis where he has been a professor of New Testament since 1946. Previous to this he was a member of the faculty of Northwestern College, Watertown, Wisconsin, for ten years. He is a member of the Committee on Doctrinal Unity of Synod, and in this connection has represented our Missouri Synod at theological conferences in England, Germany and France. He has been a leading voice in the theological discussions of the Lutheran Synodical Conference. Besides essays and contributions to theological journals, he is the author of a number of books. His latest book, “Discipleship According to St Matthew” will appear shortly. An Introduction to the New Testament and a commentary on Romans are in preparation.

Finally, a word of thanks to the Concordia Bookstore for its efforts in making these essays available. May they prove a blessing to all of us in our study of the precious Word.

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REVELATION—SCRIPTURE—INTERPRETATION

(Editor’s Note: For the sake of brevity and classroom use, the first section of the essay is printed only in summary form. The summaries were written by Dr. Franzmann himself.)

The topic assigned to me is “Scripture, with Due Attention to Current Issues.” But if we are to deal profitably with the subject of the Scripture, we must begin with the subject of revelation. For we are dealing with Sacred Scripture, with the Holy Bible and its use in the church, with the one book that can be called the “believed book.” And what makes it holy, sacred, “believed” is the fact that here we meet God’s revelation; here He speaks to us and deals with us. We cannot therefore speak of Scripture without speaking of revelation, all the more so since current discussions of Scripture center in the relationship between Scripture and revelation.

I. REVELATION

A. REVELATION IS GOD’S FREE, PERSONAL ACT

Revelation is God’s act. God discloses Himself to man and deals with man personally. Both in the revelation of His wrath and in the revelation of His grace He enters into man’s life and determines man’s life. This action is wholly God’s action, and it is His alone. Man contributes nothing toward it and cannot in any way control it. The line of action runs always from God to man, never from man to God. Matt. 16:13-27; 11:25-30; 13:11; Rom. 1:19; Rev. 1:1; Gal. 1:11-16; 1 Cor. 2:9, 10; Eph. 1:17, 18.

B. REVELATION IS A CONSTANT ACTION OF GOD

No man ever escapes from God the Revealer. God’s hand holds man fast, either in sin, under wrath, unto death; or in Christ, under grace, unto life eternal. Revelation, whether as Law or as Gospel, is a constant reality in the life of man. Rom. 1:18-32; Rom. 3:21 with 1:17; the perfect tense in 1 Cor. 15:4 and Gal. 3:1; 1 Thess. 2:13; Paul’s use of “in Christ.”

C. GOD’S REVELATION CULMINATES IN CHRIST

The revelation under which and by which the church lives and works is the culminating revelation of God in Christ (Heb. 1:1, 2). In this revelation God discloses Himself fully as Father and effectually calls man into communion with Himself (Luke 15:11-32; John 1:12; Matt. 11: 25-30), a communion which shall be fully known and enjoyed at the return of the Son of Man and the close of the age (Matt. 25:34, cf. v. 41; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 21:22; 22:3-5). This crowning revelation in Jesus Christ does not cancel or annul God’s other and earlier revelation but confirms it. What God willed in manifesting Himself in His works since the creation of the

world, namely, that men should glorify Him as God and give thanks to Him, is fulfilled in Jesus and in the new people of God who call Jesus Lord (Rom. 1: 21; 1 Peter 2:9). The Gospel makes the Law to stand (Matt. 5:17 f.; Rom. 3:31) by affirming the Law's verdict on man (Rom. 3:20), by accepting its witness (Rom. 3:21), and by asserting its good and holy will (Rom. 8:4). And the Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's yea to all His promises (2 Cor. 1:19,20). Man comes to the revelation of God as Father from the revelation of God as Judge. His life or repentance and faith in the church is a continual flight from God the Judge to God the Father (Phil. 3:8-14). The verdict of the Law is the constant presupposition of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16,17); and the Gospel is the presupposition and motivation for the church's glad assent to the good will of God in the Law. (Rom. 7:12, 22, 25; 8: 3, 4; Gal. 5:13, 14).

D. THE CONTENT OF REVELATION

God's revelation has a concrete historical content God's significant revelatory action and God's effectual revelatory speaking in His dealings with His people for the salvation of mankind. God's action and God's speaking, in organic unity, constitute His revelation to man. Matt. 1:1-17; Acts 13:16-41; James 1:18 with 1 Peter 1:3.

CURRENT PROBLEM: One-sided emphasis on deeds of God as instruments of revelation. False antithesis between truth as personal encounter with the Revealer and informational truth. John 6:69; 8:24; 20:31; Rom. 10:9; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 John 5:1,5; 1Cor. 15:1-4.

There can be no doubt of the fact that God reveals Himself by His deeds and that these deeds constitute an essential part of His revelation. Fifty-eight percent of the New Testament is narrative, the record of what Jesus taught and did, in person and through His apostles. Moreover, all the New Testament documents center in history, and all of them are historically occasioned and historically conditioned.

To take a concrete example: when Matthew sums up, or recapitulates, all that led up to the coming of the Christ, the whole previous revelation of God which prepared for this crowning revelation, he does so in the clipped, sparse, condensed, and baldly factual recital of the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17). Similarly Paul in his sermon in the synagog at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16-41) employs a very factual recital of the deeds of God to prepare for his proclamation of Jesus as the promised Christ.

But these deeds, as every reader of the Old Testament knew, were not dumb deeds; they were no silent shadow play but were accompanied and interpreted by the Word of God.

The readers of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew would recall how the word of the Lord came to Abraham, how the Lord spoke to David through the prophet Nathan, how the Lord spoke through David himself by His Spirit, how the captivity in Babylon had been foretold by the prophets and had been interpreted by them as God's judgment upon His apostate people, how the coming of the Messiah had been held up to the hope of Israel by the successive voices of prophecy. And Paul's hearers in the synagog knew that the history of Israel, from the patriarchs to Jesus, had been a history in which God's Word continually rang. (cf. Ex. 14:13,31; 15:2,18)

It should be remembered, moreover, that in Biblical usage the line between word and deed, particularly the divine word and the divine deed, is less sharp than in our usage. "Word" can be used, in fact, to designate a deed or thing (Luke 1:37). The history, the recital of word and deed, can be summed up in a formulation. The very shape which the recital takes is already a formulation. Consider the examples previously alluded to, the genealogy in Matthew and Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch.

Matthew's recital is anything but a mere chronicle. He arranges the genealogy symmetrically, in groupings of fourteen generations each, and thereby indicates that the history from Abraham to Jesus moves on measured paths of providence, that a divine purpose is working itself out toward a foreseen end. He is furthermore selective in his recounting of the ancestors of Jesus. And, startlingly enough, four women appear in the Messianic line. These are not the famous four to whom Judaic pride loved to point (Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel); rather, Gentile women and sinful women—an incestuous woman, a harlot, and an adulteress appear at key points in this history. Matthew is indicating that Israel's failure as a nation cries for a Messiah who will

save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), not merely from their enemies. The Messiah comes as a shoot from the stump of Jesse, from the judged and ruined house of David. (Is. 11:1)

Time will hardly permit a complete analysis of Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch, but even a cursory reading of the sermon will show that it is shaped by a threefold purpose: Paul wills to show first that this history is God in action, that God is dealing in might and mercy with His people. His recital is theocentric in character. Secondly, he emphasizes the fact that this history is a portrayal of God moving toward His goal. His recital is teleological. And thirdly, Paul is at pains to show that God is acting in this history for the salvation of His people. His recital is soteriological in character.

If the recital is, as we have seen, formulated history, the formulations found in the Scripture are crystallized history. These formulations present history in its once-for-all meaning or significance for us now. They are not less than the actual record of the revelatory deed and word but more; the recorded word and deed are pointed up, contoured, and directed toward us by the formulation.

We do the same thing constantly in our daily lives. We crystallize a history in a formulation. Statements like "He is a good neighbor, a good father, a kind man, a patient man, a faithful husband" are resumes of history, crystallizations of history. They cannot be separated from history and should not be put in antithesis to history.

We find both in Scripture—revelatory recital and revelatory formulation. Genesis recounts the fall of man with its tragic upshot: "He drove out the man" (Gen. 3:1-24). Paul crystallizes that whole history in a single sentence, a formulation: "Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and thus death spread to all men" (Rom. 5:12; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22,49). And so it is not surprising to find that New Testament writers can employ either the revelatory act itself or the formulation that conveys that act. Peter proclaims that God has begotten us again by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). James asserts that God has brought us forth by the Word of truth. (James 1:18)

CURRENT PROBLEM: Present day discussions of revelation emphasize the fact that "God reveals Himself in action," that He has "spoken through events." (Baillie)

There can be no quarrel with this emphasis as such. The festival half of our church year recalls and celebrates the mighty deeds of God; our preaching on both Old Testament and New Testament texts is rich in the recital of God's wondrous acts for us men and for our salvation. We have always brought up our children on both the Catechism and the Bible history. And our hymnody and the other sacred arts certainly proclaim the arm of the Lord laid bare.

But where is the Biblical warrant for an exclusive emphasis on the deed in antithesis to the Word? Jesus in His dispute with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead appeals, not to a recorded action of God's (such as the translation of Enoch or Elijah) but to a recorded word of God: "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and proceeds to reduce even that to a formulation: "God is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Matt. 22:32). When Paul seeks the light of divine revelation on Abraham's status before God (Rom. 4:1-3), he appeals, not to a deed but to the verbal record (Gen. 15:6) and finds in the words the mind and will of God.

If the deed is so exclusively significant, why is the Son of God, God's ultimate revelation, called the Word? Are we to retranslate the first verse of the fourth Gospel as Goethe's Faust did and make bold to say, "In the beginning was the deed"? In the last analysis even the modern theologians who one-sidedly emphasize the revelatory deed find that they cannot get along without the revelatory Word and therefore bring in by the back door what they have thrown out the front. (Cf. Baillie, pages 64,65)

Closely related to this one-sided emphasis on the deeds of God is the false antithesis between truth as personal encounter with the Revealer and informational or propositional truth. Granted that the essential content of all revelation is nothing less than God Himself offering Himself to man for personal communion; does this make truth about God or formulations concerning Him a matter of secondary importance? In fact, can the one exist without the other? Is truth as encounter possible without truth as plain propositional fact? Is it possible to

believe *in* a Person without believing *that* He is so and so, that He has acted thus and thus and will act thus and thus in the future?

Young people in love believe in each other, or want to, and it is for this very reason that they spend hours telling each other about themselves, their families, their childhood. Certainly faith is faith *in* a person, but such a faith never exists in abstraction; it always exists in organic connection with the belief *that*, as a glance at our New Testament should suffice to show. Passages like John 6:69; 8:24; 20:31; Rom. 10:9; 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 John 5:1 and 5:5 show how powerful and necessary the facts of faith are for the life of faith. The Gospel which Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians (and Paul's conception of faith was certainly a personal one) created faith in the Corinthians by means of the propositions *that* Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, *that* He was buried, and *that* He was raised again from the dead according to the Scriptures.

As C. K. Barrett has pointed out in his commentary on the Gospel according to St. John, "Knowing and believing are not set over against one another but correlated. . . . Knowledge has also an objective, factual side. . . . Saving knowledge is rooted in knowledge of a historical person; it is, therefore, objective and at the same time a personal relation."

If we recall what was said above about formulations as crystallized history, we need not apologize for the much-maligned expression "revealed truth," And we need not concede that propositions are any less personal and powerful than the acts of God themselves. After all, is the "I believe *that*" of Luther's explanation of the Creed any less personal than the "I believe in" of the Creed itself?

II. SCRIPTURE

A. SCRIPTURE AS RECITAL, THE RECORD OF GOD'S REVELATION

Scripture is recital, a record of the revelatory deeds and words of God. Scripture recounts the active and eloquent self-disclosure of God in creation, the fall, the flood, the lives of the patriarchs, the exodus, the wilderness years, the taking of the promised land, the history of the Judges and kings of Israel, the captivity, the restoration, the witness of John the Baptist, the words and works and death and resurrection of Jesus, the creation of the apostolate and the apostolic church, the apostolic witness to the Christ unto the ends of the earth.

CURRENT PROBLEM: The meaning and the theological significance of inerrancy.

That Scripture is recital, the record of God's revelation, hardly needs demonstrations. All who read their Bibles know their Bible to be a record; and, of course, they know it to be much more than a mere record. But it is here, where we are dealing with it as record, that the question of inerrancy is relevant and becomes acute.

1. WHY INERRANCY MATTERS

Revelation is both encounter with the Revealer and the receiving of information from the Revealer. Faith is both faith *in* and belief *that*, in organic unity; that is, faith in a Person is possible only on the basis of believing that the Person is a certain kind of person and has acted in a certain way. Therefore the record of God's revelatory deeds and words is essential to the birth of faith and to the life of faith.

Now the value of a record is entirely dependent on its truth, its veracity, its factuality, in a word, on its inerrancy. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" is recital, is crystallized history. Its value as revelation depends entirely on the truth of the fact that God is what the Old Testament proclaims Him to be, the living God, the Lord of history and manifested in history; it depends on the truth of the fact that God did deal effectually, graciously, and faithfully with the patriarchs. If He did not in fact thus deal with them, the record is worthless as a medium of revelation.

The New Testament is conscious of this. Jesus, for all His freedom over against the Old Testament Law, a freedom that seemed blasphemous to His scrupulous contemporaries, nowhere doubts or calls into question any event recorded in the Old Testament. He argues from the factuality of the Old Testament event, not about it. He argues from what God said about man and woman at creation, not about it. He argues from the fact that the men of Nineveh listened to the word of Jonah, not about it. Even when the Old Testament record is used by others to embarrass and contradict Him, as when the Jews point out that Moses commanded the bill of

divorcement (Matt. 19:7,8), Jesus does indeed correct their misquotation of the record (“Moses *permitted*”), but He does not question the accuracy of the record; He does not operate critically on the record. And the apostles follow their Lord in this as in all else. Neither Paul nor James argues about the record of Abraham and his faith; both argue from it.

As with the Old Testament record, so with the New Testament. Paul stakes his whole apostolate and the faith and the hope of the church on the bare fact that the resurrection of Jesus Christ did take place. Everything depends on these things being so; and Paul cites more than 500 witnesses in proof (1 Cor. 15:1-19). Peter protests vigorously against the idea that any humanly devised myth can serve as the vehicle of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ and emphasizes the eyewitness character of the apostolic proclamation (2 Peter 1:16-18). Inerrancy matters.

2. THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

God is sovereign, free in His self-disclosure and in the instruments which He uses for His self-disclosure. We should beware lest we invade that freedom and attempt to determine a priori what God’s inerrancy must be like? Let us not seek to impose our ideas of inerrancy on God. Let us rather permit God Himself in His word to tell us what kind of inerrancy He has chosen for the record of His deeds and words. We can only accept what God has given us in faith, in the believing conviction that His idea of inerrancy is better than ours.

We can assume therefore that the Old Testament writings in which Jesus heard His Father’s voice and the apostles found the mind and will of God, do the work of God inerrantly, that they are arrows of God which will inerrantly find their mark. We cannot dictate to God how such arrows must be constructed. We cannot even assume that there is one universally valid kind of inerrancy, a best kind which God must inevitably employ.

In history, for example, an account may be inerrant in half a dozen ways, each completely valid in its way and for its purpose. Since we know God to be a God of prodigal variety, we may assume that He has at His disposal many modes of inerrancy. To illustrate: here are six accounts of one event:

1. A said to B in the presence of their common friends, “You are a fool and a coward.”
2. A degraded and discredited B in the eyes of his contemporaries.
3. A revealed himself as a harsh and unfeeling judge of men.
4. By his harsh words A put an end forever to a friendship which he and B had cherished for twenty years.
5. A broke B’s heart with his cruel words.
6. A by his harsh words to B shocked and estranged their common friends.

To argue that any one of these six forms, the first for example, is in itself more precise or accurate, more completely inerrant than the other five, is obviously nonsense. A police portrait, front and profile, does not necessarily tell us more about its subject than an artist’s portrait of the same man. A mosaic is not necessarily less accurate than a line drawing, nor is an impressionistic painting less precise than a realistic one. An interpreted history can do its work more inerrantly than a merely factual chronicle. The Bible, the Word of God, is intended to move men; it is not surprising therefore that the inerrancy we find in it is a various one.

Inerrancy is a matter of faith, and for faith the inerrancy of God’s word is a matter of course, an axiom. This determines what kind of questions we may ask concerning Scripture and what kind we may not ask. It has pleased Almighty God to give us four Gospels, four accounts of His climactic revelation of Himself in His Son. The question for us as believing readers and interpreters of the Bible is not: Can we work up all that they record concerning Jesus of Nazareth into one consistent chronicle, with no gaps, no loose ends, and no overlapping? The one valid question is rather: Do the four Gospels in harmonious inerrancy set one Jesus the Christ before the eyes of the believing and worshipping church?

Faith will also dictate the kind of question we may ask concerning details in the Gospels. We have two accounts of the Lord’s Prayer, in Matthew and in Luke (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Obviously they do not agree verbatim. If we use Matthew as the standard, we find that Luke, besides differing in verbal details, omits

the “who art in heaven” in the address and the third and seventh petitions. Is there a problem in the fact that we do not have a word-for-word correspondence in the account of our Lord’s teaching concerning the prayer of His disciples, certainly a matter of prime religious importance?

There is a problem only if we consider the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke chronicles of a rabbi Jesus of Nazareth or photographs of a great religious teacher. There is no problem for faith; faith takes the Gospels of Matthew and Luke for what they claim to be; faith understands them on their own terms, as proclamations of the Christ. Faith knows how to answer the question: Are we getting a prayer formula from a great teacher, a religious genius, or do we behold the Christ molding the will of His disciples with Messianic authority? Faith will ask: Are Matthew and Luke both Christologically inerrant? And faith will confidently answer, Yes. If the Gospels distort the image of the Christ, they are errant in the one sense that counts. If they have muffled the voice of the Good Shepherd, they are errant in the one sense that concerns the church. This does not mean, of course, that inerrancy in historical or geographical matters is a matter of indifference. It is a matter of great importance; for the Christ came, as the Revealer of the Father’s grace and truth, in the flesh, in time and space, “under Pontius Pilate.” It does mean that these things matter as they relate to the Christ; inerrancy concerning the census of Augustus matters because God used that census to fulfill His promise concerning great David’s greater Son. It matters Christologically. (It is hardly necessary to add that none of these statements is to be construed as a contradiction or a restrictive qualification of our Church’s public statements on inerrancy.)

Both the careful harmonizers of the Gospels and the confident critics of the Gospels forget this cardinal point, that of Christological inerrancy. Why is it that a harmony of the four Gospels, to say nothing of a critical reconstruction of the four Gospels, is always somehow less powerful than the individual Gospels? Is it not because each Gospel is functionally, Christologically inerrant, is a power of God unto salvation on its own terms, in its own inerrant way? One marvels at the futility of these pious labors. It is as if the church had been given four luminous and speaking portraits of the Christ, and both the poor deluded harmonizer and the poor deluded critic think to improve on God’s handiwork by somehow blending them or superimposing them on one another.

3. THE NONDEMONSTRABLE CHARACTER OF BIBLICAL INERRANCY

We shall never be able to prove the inerrancy of the Bible to any skeptic’s satisfaction. Such proof is always attended by a twofold difficulty. The first difficulty is historical. We simply do not know all the facts in every case. The five arguments used by Strauss a century ago to prove that the account of our Savior’s birth in Luke could not be taken seriously as history have all been pretty well exploded by the increase of historical knowledge. Increasing knowledge will solve other difficulties, too, but probably never all of them. And faith, overwhelmed by the power and the grace of the Christ, is not dependent on historical proof.

The other difficulty is theological. We can prove according to the testimony of the oldest, the most immediate, and the least prejudiced witnesses that Jesus did perform miracles; but we cannot prove that these miracles are “signs,” that is, that they are the works of the Servant of the Lord who took our diseases and bore our infirmities (Matt. 8:17), that they are the revelation of the arm of the Lord (John 12:38). We can prove, that is, we can make it historically probable, that Jesus of Nazareth was executed under Pontius Pilate. We cannot prove historically that which only faith can affirm, namely, that the Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was delivered up for our transgressions and was raised again for our justification.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves whether we have not, by letting the question of inerrancy become our sole or prime concern, run the risk of losing sight of the power of Scripture. We are the generation upon whom the ends of the world have come—how much time have we for disproving the errancy of Scripture or for proving its inerrancy? Finally, whatever we may prove or disprove, all Christendom must repeat Peter’s question: “To whom, Lord, shall we go?” It is the Bible or nothing. We hear God speak and speak inerrantly in the words of His prophets as recorded in Scripture or we do not hear Him at all. We hear the voice of the Good Shepherd in the written words of His apostles, or we do not hear it at all. We have no alternative: we hear God’s

judgment upon us in the Law in this written form which He has willed, and we hear God's acquittal in the written Gospel which it has pleased God to give us, or we do not hear it at all.

B. SCRIPTURE AS POWER, THE CONTINUATION OF GOD'S REVELATION

This record is not a set of stories that can be told or left untold at will. What this record contains is not subject to the progressive devaluation which attaches to all things past; these deeds and words are not remote and inert because they are past. For this record is a prophetically interpretive record; this record is inspired (1 Cor. 2:1-16). Inspiration means that mighty condescension of God whereby He in living, personal, and dynamic presence among and in men spoke His word in the words of men whom He chose, shaped, and endowed. This act of God's makes men's words His very own, the potent and inescapable medium of His revelation. These inspired words do not merely inform concerning God's past action and past speaking. They convey God's word and action now (2 Tim. 3:14-17). The fact that God created man in His image determines my attitude toward my fellow man now (James 3:9). God's "Very good" at creation determines my relation to meat and drink now (1 Tim. 4:3-5). How God joined man to woman at creation determines my marriage now (Matt. 19:4-6). Adam's past fall is my present guilt (Rom. 5:12,18,19). Abraham's faith is significant for the men of Galatia (Gal. 3:6-10), for the men of Rome and Spain (Rom. 4), and for the man of today. Jesus' death is my death to sin, made mine by Baptism now (Rom. 6:3-10). His resurrection is the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15). His victory is the present power of my victorious faith (Rev. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:57,58; Rom. 6:8,9; 8:37 with 33-36). Scripture is the record of God's revelation and is the continuation of it. Scripture is the Word of God.

CURRENT PROBLEM: The relationship between revelation and Scripture. Verbal inspiration.

Inerrancy is important and has rightly loomed large in our thinking and teaching on Scripture. Inerrancy is intimately related to the inspiration of Scripture; but inerrancy is not the decisive aspect of inspiration. That aspect is power; the inerrancy of Scripture is incidental to the power of inspired Scripture. Inerrancy by itself—the demonstrable veracity of an account or record—still falls within the area of human means of persuasion; it can be an element in the "persuasive words of wisdom." "the wisdom of men," which Paul disclaims for his apostolic proclamation (1 Cor. 2:4,5). Such persuasive wisdom can lead men to adopt certain views or to undertake certain actions. But only "the demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor. 2:4) can victoriously invade men's life to create the saving faith that rests triumphantly on the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5)—or to doom men in their willful unbelief. (2 Cor. 2:15,16) It is only natural, therefore, that Scripture does not speak often or expressly of its inerrancy (that is constantly presupposed) but does speak often and eloquently of inspiration and power.

The classic passage on the inspiration of the Old Testament is, of course, 2 Tim. 3:14-17. The context in which Paul's words on inspiration are set is noteworthy. These words are preceded by an appeal to Timothy to remain faithful to Paul and his teaching in spite of suffering and discouragement, in times that shall grow steadily worse (2 Tim. 3:10-13). They are followed by Paul's adjuration to Timothy to be mindful of his responsibility to the returning Lord when he proclaims the Word, to do the work of an evangelist faithfully, powerfully, patiently, and soberly, even though he must proclaim it to men who have no ears for it and must therefore suffer for that proclamation. Paul is pointing Timothy to a source of power for his ministry.

The first thing he says about the sacred writings, which Timothy has known from childhood, is that they have *power*—power to make him wise for salvation. Scripture has power because the Spirit of God is in it and works creatively by it. It creates nothing less than faith in Christ Jesus. "Every passage of Scripture," Paul says, "stems from the Spirit of God." Therefore Scripture can do for man what man's reason cannot do: it can teach him, in the full Biblical sense of that word, that is, it can shape and mold man by telling him of God's will and work. Scripture confronts man with God. Therefore its Word is a Word that convicts man of his sin and makes him bow before the righteous God.

This again is something that only the Spirit of God can do, for our own mind will always excuse our sin and seek to conceal it. But if this powerful Word brings us low, it does so in order to raise us up again; here, too, the power of the inspired Word is evident: it alone can make fallen man capable of standing before God.

This mighty Word takes us in hand and puts our whole life in order under the reign of God's righteousness. It creates a man of God, a man able to meet all demands, fitted out for every good work.

Paul links the Old Testament Word with Christ Jesus, as the whole New Testament does, and he sets it in parallel with his own apostolic Word. He is strongly implying that his Word, too, is a powerful and inspired Word.

What St. Paul here implies is clearly declared elsewhere in the New Testament. The Fourth Gospel records more fully than any other Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit to His own. Jesus, according to John, stakes the whole future of His work and His church on the inspiration of His apostles. Future generations shall come to faith through their Word (John 17:20). Their witness to Him will be an inspired witness (John 15:26,27). Through them the Holy Spirit will convict, that is, confront the world with the ultimate issues, the issues of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit through the Word of these men will confront men with the living reality of the incarnate Christ and thus bring them to repentance (John 16:7-11). And through their Word the Holy Spirit will bring men to faith; He will lead the disciples into all truth and bring home to them the full glory of the Christ whom they have seen and known (John 16:12-15). Their Word will therefore have in it the whole majesty and mercy of the Christ, their Word will have the power to do what only God Himself can do, the power to remit and retain sins. (John 20:20-23).

The apostles experienced the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the Spirit as a reality in their lives. Paul claims that God has given him revelation through the Spirit and that he utters this revelation in words taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-13). There is no reason to restrict this inspiration to the spoken Word of the apostles or to deny it to their written Word. Paul in 2 Thess. 2:2 parallels his written letters with his spoken Word and connects both with the working of the Spirit. Indeed, Paul's opponents deemed his letters to be more weighty and powerful than his speech, which they called contemptible. (2 Cor. 10:10)

Similarly, John parallels his written and his spoken Word without making any distinction between them (1 John 1:3,4) and says of his written Word that through it men may have faith in Jesus Christ and thus have eternal life in His name (John 20:31). And the warning cry in the Book of Revelation, "He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," refers quite patently to the written Word of the seer.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE

Current discussions of revelation and Scripture weaken the link between revelation and Scripture and confine inspiration to God's action in illumining the minds of prophets and apostles so as to enable them to interpret God's mighty acts correctly. Most modern theologians protest against "any simple identification of the Christian revelation with the contents of the Bible" (Baillie, p. 109) and speak of Scripture as the human, fallible witness to the revelation. Karl Barth's statement is typical: Revelation has to do with Jesus Christ who was to come and who finally, when the time was fulfilled, did come—and so with the actual, literal Word spoken now really and directly by God Himself. Whereas in the Bible we have to do in all cases with human attempts to repeat and reproduce this Word of God in human thoughts and words with reference to particular human situations. . . . In the one case *Deus dixit* but in the other *Paulus dixit*; and these are two different things. (Quoted by Baillie, p. 35)

It is difficult to see how such an attitude can be squared with our Lord's own attitude and that of His apostles toward the Old Testament, which is uniformly one of absolute submission as to a divine authority. As for the New Testament, one may well ask: Do the apostles anywhere indicate any consciousness of being *fallible* witnesses to the revelation which they have received? Do they not rather claim the power of the Spirit for both the content and the word of their witness? Is Paul merely speaking figuratively when he speaks of Christ speaking in him (II Cor. 13:3) or when he calls the Word that he gave to the Thessalonians the very Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13)? If Paul's Word is merely a human and fallible word, how can he expect men to be responsible over against it? How can he say, "Your blood be upon your own heads," to men who have refused it? (Acts 18:6)

VERBAL INSPIRATION

The idea of verbal inspiration today enjoys a somewhat higher degree of respectability than it once did. Even a man like Baillie admits that it is hard to conceive of an inspiration that does not extend to the words. He is willing to accept verbal inspiration. Although he balks at plenary inspiration, since that would necessarily mean inerrancy. There never was, and there is not now, any reason for being apologetic about the formulation “verbal inspiration.” And in the light of the present-day depreciatory attitude toward the written Word, the formulation underscores two important truths.

First, it makes unmistakably plain that there is no point at which one may say of Scripture, “Here the Word of God ends, and the word of man begins.” It makes impossible any cleavage between the human and the divine. It underscores both the human and the divine character of the word; it takes seriously God’s condescension in adopting our human speech, so that men moved by the Holy Spirit speak from God. (2 Peter 1:21)

Secondly, the formula “verbal inspiration” keeps the idea of inspiration personal. Communication by means of *verba* is *personal* communication. God deals personally with the men whom He inspires, and He sets them to work personally. They are equipped for communication, for ministry to their fellow men by verbal inspiration. If inspiration is not verbal, it fails at the very point where it is essential; for the prophets and apostles never received revelation for themselves alone but for ministry to the people of God and to mankind. It is difficult to see why this personal, ministerial verbal inspiration should be called mechanical or artificial—especially when we see how God in the process does not destroy human personality but honors it and uses it.

III. THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

A. INTERPRETATION AS THE UNDERSTANDING OF RECITAL

God’s revelation, recorded and continued in Scripture, does not lie in some vague region beyond the recital of His words and deeds. It is given in and with the recital itself. It must therefore be apprehended and appropriated as such in the linguistic and historical forms in which God has caused it to be recorded. The “humanity” of Scripture is not merely to be borne as a burden and a hindrance; it is to be welcomed as God’s gift to us, as His free condescension to us in our frailty, as a help to us in apprehending His holy and gracious will for us. Just as in the case of profane documents, so in the case of Scripture: the interpreter must scrutinize the linguistic and historical facts as presented by the text; he must survey them in relation to one another and to the whole; he must immerse himself wholly and sympathetically in the documents and strive to become contemporary with the original revelatory situation. We must hear what the words and deeds recorded in the documents said in their time and place if we are to hear them as revelation for us here and now.

The Bible is not a lazy man’s book, nor is it a dreamer’s book. We should thank God for that; we should be grateful for the fact that the form of God’s written revelation does not give scope to our fancies but shuts them out. Just because it is so human in form, it calls for sober, thinking, wide-awake work, not for speculations and daydreams. It comes to us in the languages and the forms of certain times and places. It invites us by its nearness to our humanity and challenges us by its remoteness from our time. It remains always fresh and timely, not because it formulates timeless truths but because it tells an ageless story, a story that concerns all mankind so long as mankind shall live.

We must, then, as our traditional hermeneutics has always stressed, study the Bible linguistically and historically. Those of us who have only English or German as our linguistic equipment shall behold great things in God’s Word if we use our English or German Bibles diligently and faithfully. Those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, however slight that knowledge may be, have been given five talents by our Lord and had better work with them, lest our returning Lord find cause to rebuke us for our infidelity. It is our business to hear our Lord as He has spoken, in the languages which He has chosen. We are to hear Him only, and we are to hear Him out; the interpretation of Scripture involves both the scrutiny of the individual part and the survey of the parts in their relation to one another and to the whole. *Sola Scriptura* means *tota Scriptura*.

It has pleased God to address us in certain languages; it has pleased Him also to speak to us at certain times and in certain places. Our study of His word must therefore be historical as well as linguistic. We have not, for instance, heard God speak to us in the story of the tribute money (Matt. 22:15-22) unless we have taken seriously the historical setting of the question put to Jesus, unless we have realized that there is a Messianic challenge in the question of the Pharisees and a Messianic revelation in the answer of Jesus. We have not fully heard “the clearest Gospel” of the Epistle to the Romans until we have realized that this Epistle is a missionary document, designed to further the progress of the Gospel in triumphant power to the Western world. We have not used this Word of God fully if it has not both deepened our doctrine and heightened our missionary zeal.

If we thus study our Bible, we shall not be tempted to obscure its native meaning by embroidering upon it with farfetched and alien fancies of our own. The meaning of the text itself will stand out in such bold relief as to be unmistakable; that meaning will be so richly suggestive as to make virtually impossible any play of our fancies. The one intended sense will emerge.

We are to study our Bible linguistically and historically as we would study a profane document such as the works of Homer or Shakespeare. But this does not mean that the Bible ever becomes for us, in any stage of our study, another profane document. Much of modern Biblical study from the eighteenth century onward is a terrifying example of what can happen when Biblical study becomes secularized.

THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD

The almost universally practiced historical-critical method starts from the valid assumption that since the Christian faith rests on a particular event in history, “the Christian religion is not merely open to historical investigation but demands it” (Hoskyns and Davey). Conservative proponents of the method claim for it that it is only a method and does not involve question of faith or of dogma.

But what are we to say of utterances such as the following, chosen from among the more conservative practitioners of the method? Conzelmann in discussing eschatology says: “Jesus connects redemptive revelation with His own person insofar as He sees the Kingdom active in His own deeds and understands His preaching as God’s last word before the end; but He does not make His person the express content of His teaching, e.g., by portraying His being, or nature, in Messianic titles. The application of such titles to Him (Son of Man, Messiah, Son of God) is probably the work of the church and therefore took place after His resurrection.” Is this merely methodology? Does not this involve both a historical judgment on the validity of the Gospel record and a theological judgment on the Christ portrayed in our Gospels? And are not both judgments highly dubious ones?

Once it is granted, as faith must grant, that the life of Jesus is a wholly unique life, the life of the incarnate Son of God, how is one to judge historically what is probable in that life and what is not? What analogies can one employ when one has to do with a life without all analogies in the history of humankind? And where does one get the right, theologically, to the opinion that the Christ of the Gospels is in some part the creation of the church? This is no longer historical investigation but a prejudging of the history that concerns the church, on the basis of analogies which do not fit that history.

A British scholar, Blackmann, in his *Biblical Interpretation* pleads for a wider acceptance of the historical-critical method and deprecates the idea that there is anything basically negative or irreverent about it. We have learned, he says, that we can remove the Bible from the glass case in which the piety of earlier generations has enshrined it, examine it and deal with it critically, and be none the worse off for it religiously.

In another figure he compares the work of the critic with that of the surgeon, who does not mutilate the body he deals with but must remove dead tissue. We may cite his treatment of the miracles of Jesus as an example of such careful surgery (pp. 189-192). He does not reject all miracles—the greatest miracle of all, the incarnation, stands firmly established for Christian faith, he says—but he does reserve the right to sift critically the accounts of the miracles in our Gospels. Concerning three miracles—Christ stilling the storm, the coin found in the fish’s mouth, the opening of the graves and the rending of the temple veil at the death of Christ—he maintains: Reason cannot accept them as having happened, and piety need not protest the verdict of reason.

It was the first-century mentality of Jesus' credulous followers that produced these stories; still, though they are not true stories, they have religious value, for they show us what an overpowering effect the person of Jesus had on His contemporaries.

Blackmann has a further objection to the miracle of the coin found in the fish's mouth. It contradicts, he says, the consistent New Testament picture of Jesus' use of His miraculous powers; according to our Gospels Jesus always uses His power to serve others. In this case He uses it to serve Himself. But according to Matthew's account of the incident (Matt. 17:24-27) it is not even certain that we have to do with a miracle. Matthew does not say that what Jesus commanded did take place—the sea became calm, the leper was cleansed, etc. The silence of Matthew in this case is therefore significant; we have to do, not with a miracle, but with one of Jesus' drastic expressions, which assures the disciple that his heavenly Father will provide him with the money to pay the temple tax. And "reason" need not object to a drastic expression

But what of the other two miracles? Is there any just cause why reason should boggle at these two while accepting others? Blackman does not show just cause; he simply asserts that reason cannot accept them. If Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God in person (1 Cor. 1:24), there is no limit to His mighty works; reason has no criterion by which to distinguish between those miracles which are 'possible' for Him and those which are not. A judgment like Blackmann's is in the last analysis not a historical judgment at all (at least not if we leave God in history); it sounds more like a concession, and a rather arbitrary one, to modern prejudice.

After what has been said, we need only touch briefly on another example. Percy, not the most radical practitioner of the method, decides in his *Die Botschaft Jesu* (pp. 244,245) that the ransom saying which Matthew and Mark attribute to Jesus (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45) cannot be a genuine saying of Jesus. He gives two reasons for his view: first, the saying views the mission of Jesus as a whole, from the vantage point of its completion, and is therefore rather the fruit of the church's reflection on Jesus than something which Jesus might have said in the midst of His mission; secondly, the transition from the idea of ministry to that of giving one's life as a ransom for many is a harsh one, a passing from one figure of speech to another without mediation.

One finds it difficult to take such reasoning seriously. The first argument begs the whole question of what Jesus was and knew Himself to be. Every account that we have of Jesus shows Him going His way to the cross and beyond the cross to the Father with set, conscious purpose: He knows what He must do and will do. If we are to accept Percy's judgment, we are forced to say that every evangelist has distorted the picture of Jesus and made of Him something that He in His life was not (which is, in fact, what much historical criticism says concerning the evangelists or of the "traditions" which the evangelists used). The second argument of Percy forgets—or ignores—the fact that Jesus' word is recalling the Servant of the Lord portrayed by Isaiah: the prophecy of Isaiah pictures the Servant as crowning a life of ministry by going voluntarily into death for the deliverance of "the many." That prophecy found its fulfillment in Jesus, and this fulfillment makes the ransom saying completely natural on His lips.

DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

In a way, Bultmann's demand that the New Testament must not merely be critically handled and selectively appropriated after the manner of the historical-critical method but must be radically reinterpreted and stripped of its "mythological" dress is the logical outcome of the historical-critical method. Bultmann in demythologizing the New Testament is doing thoroughly and consistently what that method did piecemeal and rather arbitrarily. He is making the full concession to modern man.

We need not, indeed, we cannot here go fully into a discussion of his views. Two points may suffice to indicate his trend. For modern man, Bultmann says, it is self-evident and axiomatic that the human personality is something closed and self-contained; it cannot be invaded from without by forces either demonic or divine. It is also self-evident for modern man that history runs its course according to immutable, unchanging laws. You cannot, therefore, Bultmann argues, reach modern man with a message, like that of the New Testament, which speaks of the invasion of the personality by demonic or divine powers and of the intervention of supernatural

powers in history. These “mythological” features must be stripped off from the message of the New Testament if that message is to reach and move modern man.

Bultmann believes that these features can be stripped away without loss to the essential message of the New Testament; they are, he says, the transient and outmoded dress of the message, not an essential part of the message itself. They are part of the world picture which the men of the New Testament shared with their contemporaries, which *must* indeed be sloughed off if we are to get at the heart of the New Testament.

But note what Bultmann has done. He has stripped away, not the first-century conception of man and of history but two conceptions that underlie the whole message of the Bible, without which the message of the Bible simply ceases to have its peculiar meaning. According to the Bible, man is created in the image of God, for converse and communion with God. Man is designed to be “invaded” by God. If man refuses to give God room in his life, his life does not remain empty. It is invaded by the powers of Satan, whether man believes it or not, whether man consciously knows it or not. The life which will not be filled by God becomes the empty, swept, and garnished house which invites the hosts of Satan. (Matt. 12:43-45)

And history, for the Bible, far from running its course according to unalterable laws, is always in the hand of God, under the governance of God. It is the scene of His revelation. The God of the Bible is the God of history, the living God who acts and reacts, who in the incarnation goes deep into the history and the life of man. Bultmann has broken, not with the world picture of the Bible but with the God of the Bible as He deals with man.

B. INTERPRETATION AS OBEDIENT RESPONSE TO REVELATION

1. Since the inspired recital is revelation, is the Word of God, is personal confrontation with the living God as a present actuality in my life, the interpretation of Scripture is a personal act. It is an act of repentance, faith, and obedience, performed by the interpreter as a baptized and worshipping member of the church. It involves the grace of complete self-subjection to the Word, the grace of a determination to hear the Word out on its own terms, the grace of a resolute refusal to apply to it *alien* norms. It means letting Scripture interpret itself.

2. Since revelation is God’s action, personal and present in my life, the problem of applying Scripture in a given case is not merely or even primarily an intellectual one. The example of the man Jesus is instructive: His sovereign certainty in the application of Scripture at His temptation is due, not to the fact that He is *the* Son of God but to the fact that He is Son, simply, a Son for whom sonship spells obedience (Matt. 4:1-11). The native clarity of Scripture becomes clarity for man in a given situation, not merely by way of an intellectually painstaking interpretation of relevant texts and a careful analysis of the situation but rather by way of a life of repentance which makes us submissive sons of God. Our interpretation, too, must be evangelical; it must be an expression of that free sonship which values its freedom as freedom from sin and as freedom for ministry to God and man in the unbroken inclusiveness of love. Paul’s prayer is an intercession for interpreters: “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and discernment.” (Phil. 1:9)

We have anticipated much of what should be said here in the previous section, in our discussion of the historical-critical method and of demythologization. We need only point up the positive side of what was said there a bit more, and we have done. We have seen what happens when men no longer take off their shoes when they enter upon the holy ground of Scripture, when men are no longer filled with holy awe at the speech of God. And we all know that our church is not immune to this seductive mode of thought; we know that these bitter and secular waters are breaking on our shores.

What should our reaction be? Shall we become “anti” something—anticritical, anti-intellectual? Shall we seal ourselves off from all current problems and current developments? We should not, and we cannot. We cannot, for these waters will be breaking still upon our shores, whatever dikes we build. We should not, for we shall not be entering upon our heritage that way. The God of history has given our church this great gift, that for us total submission to the Scriptures is something self-evident, natural, axiomatic. Such submission is not something that happens of itself; it is not automatic and cannot be automatically transferred from generation to

generation. It must be ever and again revived and won anew in repentance and faith if it is to be had and transmitted.

That is why we have emphasized the *personal* character of interpretation as response to revelation. It is personal, not in the sense that it is individualistic, self-willed, arbitrary; Scripture itself warns us against such an attitude in interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). It is personal in the sense that it involves the whole person of the baptized man. The attitude of the interpreter is the attitude of the man who has gone into death in Christ and has emerged into the newness of a life lived wholly to God, the man who in proud humility wears the kindly yoke of the Son of God. The whole person of the baptized man includes his intellect, the intellect that God the Creator gave him, the brains that God the Redeemer has redeemed.

Interpretation as a personal act of the baptized, worshipping man of the church will not be anti-anything, not anti-intellectual (that way is the way of murky enthusiasm), not even anti-critical. It will be “critical” in the true sense of that much-misused word, critical not in the sense of standing in judgment over Scripture but in the sense of being under Scripture in an intelligently active appropriation of Scripture on its own terms. Critical interpretation will mean simply that we reverently and submissively employ disciplined judgment in determining historical and theological relationships within Scripture, tracing the great contours of the Biblical picture and seeing details in their relationship to the dominant lines. (The Reformation’s distinction between Law and Gospel is a supreme example of genuinely “critical” interpretation.) Then we shall have and keep a genuinely Biblical theology and shall be sovereignly free in appropriating all that is good and true in the work of all interpreters.

If our interpretation of Scripture is thus truly personal, we shall develop a sure touch in the application of Scripture. When Jesus overcame Satan (we, too, are always overcoming Satan when we apply Scripture to our needs in this world), He was doing what any Israelite might do, what any son of God can do. He was hearing His Father’s voice in the Old Testament and obeying it.

If, after doing the necessary linguistic and historical work, we still find Scripture hard to understand and to apply, there is one great, fearful question which we must ask ourselves. That question is: do we want to understand it—or are we afraid to understand it, lest, having understood, we must obey it? The Son has set us free; interpretation is the exercise of that free sonship. It therefore grows on the soil of repentance and works by love.

What is the way to certitude? The way of the interpreter is always through *tentatio*; he never reaches the stage where he has left all problems behind him. But if he gives himself to Scripture and lets the Spirit take over, he shall again and again leave his problems and his questions below him. He will rise on wings of adoration and thanksgiving to those high regions where God’s larks are singing and the whining of the gnats of doubt is heard no more.

[Note: References to “Baillie” are to: John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1956.]

ESSAYS IN HERMENEUTICS

NOTE: This and the succeeding articles are designed to serve as guidelines for the writer’s course in Hermeneutics at Concordia Seminary. They are to be viewed, therefore, merely as a summation of time-honored and time-tested hermeneutical materials. They are, of course, to be supplemented by lectures and by practice. I should like to express especial indebtedness to L. Fuerbringer’s *Theological Hermeneutics*, Terry’s *Biblical Hermeneutics*, and Torm’s *Hermeneutik des Neuen Testaments*. My debt to Luther is so great and so obvious in what follows that it need hardly receive special notice. Since these articles are to be the first steps toward a textbook on Hermeneutics, it was thought that they might interest a wider circle and might benefit from the suggestions and criticisms of our brethren, which are herewith invited.

INTRODUCTORY

Hermeneutics is that branch of theology which sets forth the principles that are to guide us in the interpretation of Scripture; in other words, it is the theory of exegesis, or interpretation.

For the Lutheran theologian hermeneutical questions are anything but academic questions. Our life as Christians and as a Church depends on the Word; and since the Word is the ultimate authority, the Church of the *Sola Scriptura* dare not be indifferent to the manner of its interpretation. “We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with all teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119:105: ‘Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a Light unto my path.’ And St. Paul: ‘Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed.’ Gal. 1:8.” As long as these solemn and stately words of the Formula of Concord are taken seriously in the Lutheran Church, there should be little need to vindicate the place of Hermeneutics in the theological curriculum.

In thus asserting the sole authority and power of Scripture, our Confessions are but reverting to the convictions of the Church catholic, which confesses in the Nicene Creed: “And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, *who spake by the Prophets.*” And the Confessions are also speaking the distinct accents of Luther, whose utterances on the sole authority and sole power of the Word are a veritable *florilegium* of fresh and bracing theological thought on this point. For him the Word and the Word alone is the place where, and the means by which, man meets God: “*Wo Gottes Wort nicht ist, wohnt Gott nicht, man baue ihm ein Haus, so gross man wolle.*” Man cannot see Him outside the Word: “*Gottes Wort muss uns zu Huelfe kommen, um Gott recht zu treffen, dass man ihn hoeren, sehen, greifen, fassen und erkennen moege.*” “*Allein durch das Wort kann Gott ergriffen werden; stellt man sich recht zum Worte, dass man es liebt, und meint es von Herzen, so wird Gott auch geliebt.*” Without the Word there is no road to heaven; to essay to establish a private road thither is insolence: “*Es soll sich niemand unterstehen, mit Gott zu handeln ohne das Wort, oder sich einen sonderlichen Weg gen Himmel zu bauen.*” For there and only there, in God’s Word, is Christ to be found: “*Gott hat uns kein ander Mittel gegeben als sein goettliches Wort, d’arin man allein Christum hoert.*” By it and it alone is the Holy Spirit given: “*Gott will den Heiligen Geist geben durch das Wort; ohne das Wort will er es nicht tun.*” Over against the claim of this Word neither the “harlot Reason” nor “experience” has any claim whatsoever; that is the will of the Holy Ghost who by that Word does His work: “*Der Heilige Geist will die Wahrheit so angebunden haben, dass man Vernunft und alle eigene Gedanken und Fuehlen hintenansetze und allein an dem Worte hange.*” There is indeed no choice: “*Das Wort Gottes reisst uns von allen Dingen, das nicht Gott ist.*” There is the same sharp either-or here as in all God’s dealings with man: “*Wenn bei uns Gottes Wort nicht ist, so sind wir im Reiche des Teufels und sind junge Teufel und Teufelskinder. Also sagt der Herr Christus auch zu Petro, da er widerriet, dass er nicht in Judaeam ziehen sollte: Hindere mich nicht, du Teufel. Aber wer Gottes Wort hat, der ist ein junger Gott.*”

“*Wer Gottes Wort hat, der ist ein junger Gott.*” The Church that has the Word is impregnable; the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And it is the sole business of Hermeneutics to see to it that we really have the Word that spells our life. Positively, Hermeneutics is to lead us into Scripture in such a way that its perpetually fresh and infinite life may be constantly open to us and in progressive abundance be ours. (Luther: *Dass man das Wort studiert und lernt, soll nicht allein ein oder zwei Jahre waehren, denn es ist Gottes Wort, welches unendlich ist.*) Negatively, Hermeneutics can provide a defense against the two gravest dangers that ever threaten the Church of the Word: satiety and the perversion of Scripture. Satiety can arise when Exegesis is permitted to degenerate into a sort of Dogmatics in reverse, a procedure that does disservice to both Dogmatics and to Exegesis; for the pleasant and salubrious pools of Systematic Theology cease to be so when they cease to be fed by the living waters of Exegesis. A sound Hermeneutics can provide defense against the wresting of Scripture, too, against error and falsification; for it can make us critical of men’s interpretations of Scripture and will constantly drive us back into Scripture and so place us, again and again, under the influence of the Spirit, who leads into all truth. If this be deemed a high claim for a humble sub-branch of theology, it should be remembered that the claim is made only on the basis of the fact that a sound Hermeneutics keeps us with, and

so under, the Word. It is hard not to quote Luther again: “*Der Herr haelt dich mit seiner Hand, so lange du sein Wort hast.*” And: “*Gott kann und will Geduld mit uns haben, wenn wir am Worte festhalten.*”

THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE

It is, or should be, a truism that the principles governing the interpretation of a document ought to be derived from, and in keeping with, the nature of that document; that, for instance, poetry be interpreted as poetry with due regard for the nature and conventions of that literary genus; that a novel be interpreted as a novel and not as a chronicle or a tract for the times. Accordingly, the principles that are to guide us in the interpretation of Scripture must be derived from the nature of Scripture itself. 2 Peter 1:21 may serve to indicate the nature of the documents that are the object of Biblical interpretation: “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” In Scripture God is speaking by men, has spoken by men, “at sundry times and in divers manners. . . .in times past.” The oracles of God are not a book fallen from heaven; rather, God spoke through men at a certain time, in a certain place, and in certain language. “*Men spake*” — that is one aspect of Scripture, the aspect that it shares with every other document ever written. The other aspect lies in the fact that here *God* spoke through men, and in this aspect Scripture is unique. We have in Scripture God speaking *once*, at a certain point in history, by men; and God speaking *once and for all*. We might, then, picture the interpreter approaching the sacred text through three concentric circles: the circle of language, the circle of history, and the circle of theology, or of Scripture. The first two of these circles are a recognition of the fact that in thus speaking God has spoken once and for all; that Scripture is a unity by virtue of the one Spirit that inspired all the books of the canon. It is a recognition also of the implications of Scripture for us, of the fact that Scripture is “*profitable* for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” That these three circles are distinct in analysis only and must inevitably interlink and interlock in practice should be understood at the outset and will become more obvious as we proceed.

I. THE CIRCLE OF LANGUAGE

Wiewohl das Evangelium durch den Heiligen Geist gekommen ist und taeglich komst, so ist es doch durch das Mittel der Sprachen gekommen, muss auch dadurch behalten werden.—Luther

It was Matthew Arnold, I believe, who said that a man who knows only his Bible will not even know that well. There is a modicum of truth in that, especially in so far as it applies to the language of the New Testament. The cry of the practical-minded for an exclusive concentration on the Greek of the New Testament, to the exclusion of the “heathen,” may be prompted by zeal for God, but it can hardly be called a zeal according to knowledge. The long way round is the shortest way home, here as so often. One does not learn the full potentialities of a language from one book; and without a feeling for the potentialities of a language, its tones and overtones, the one book is not fully grasped either; the mind’s hold remains slippery and partial. Our fathers builded wisely when they designed a broad base of secular Greek, upon which to rear the tower of specialized knowledge of New Testament Greek; we shall do well to think long and hard before substituting a six-easy-lessons procedure for their four hard years.

Within the circle of language, we may treat, first, words in isolation (etymology and usage), and then words in relation to one another (grammar, context, figurative language).

ETYMOLOGY

As regards etymology, we shall do well to remember that it is, in most cases, an excellent starting point in the study of a word, but usually no more than that. Exegesis of the word-picture variety usually sins in the direction of over-reliance on etymology. How insufficient etymology alone is for the interpretation of a word may be seen in the case of words with no recorded usage, where there is nothing but etymology to go by, words like *epiousios* in the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, where etymology alone has led to such Babelish confusion of interpretation as “daily,” “supersubstantial,” “of tomorrow,” “necessary,” “of the future,” and “of

the future kingdom.” In the case of *hapax legomena* and of newly formed compounds (e.g., *Theodidaktos*, 1 Thess. 4:9) etymology renders a substantive service. But commonly it is useful chiefly as fixing the concrete sensuous basis upon which usage has built the structure of actual meaning and connotation (e.g., *sunantilambanetai*, Rom. 8:26; note that the usage as observed in Luke 10:40 is the more helpful). We dare not forget that the vast majority of the New Testament words have behind them hundreds of years of history, especially the epoch-making history of God’s inscripturated revelation of Himself (LXX), the incarnation of the Son of God, and the coming of the Holy Ghost.

USAGE

In regard to usage, it is important to be clear on the nature of New Testament Greek. It is, first of all, non-literary Greek, the spoken language of the people. That does not mean that it is vulgar (in the derogatory sense) or illiterate Greek; it does mean that “the Holy Ghost spoke that language in which the largest possible number of people could understand Him” (Moulton). And it means that the documents of non-literary Greek, the papyri, ostraka, and inscriptions, are invaluable for establishing the connotations that New Testament words had for their first readers; that books like Moulton and Milligan’s *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament. Illustrated from the Papyri* and Deissmann’s *Light from the Ancient East*, as well as dictionaries like Bauer’s, which take cognizance of non-literary usage, should be on the shelves of every New Testament exegete. There can never again be talk of a Biblical Greek in the old sense, or of a “language of the Holy Ghost.”

But that is not the whole story. There is also the ever-present possibility of Semitic influence. The authors of the New Testament were, with one exception, bilingual and probably thought in Aramaic. And the influence of the Septuagint, all-pervasive and incalculable, must always be reckoned with. Especially in religious and ethical concepts the Greek Old Testament is the immediate and living background to the New Testament vocabulary.

The context, especially the immediate context, will also play an important role in the determination of usage. Any great new event brings with it new words and fills old words with new meanings (One need but think of the effect of two world wars and of atomic fission on our present-day vocabulary), and the event that marked the turning point of the world’s history was no exception. And so, in the last analysis, the whole of the New Testament must help determine the meaning of its parts; this is the so-called Hermeneutical Circle, the working from the part to the whole and back again from the whole to the part. Practically, this points to the importance of having a wide knowledge of the whole Bible, especially the Greek Bible of both Testaments, for the interpretation of any part of it; and it underlines the value of the concordance, which enables us to focus and bring to bear that knowledge without undue consumption of time or the danger of omitting anything essential.

Usage works in various ways. As we trace the development of meaning, we note that in New Testament usage some words deepen in meaning; for example, the Greek *eiraana* has, by way of the Septuagint, taken on the richer and more inclusive sense of the Hebrew *shalom*. Other words are revaluated, as the word *kosmos*, which passes from the sense of “the harmoniously ordered universe” to that of “the world as opposed to God.” Others appreciate; so *doulos* and the whole complex of words denoting servitude and humility, words infinitely ennobled by the New Testament. Again, the development may amount to a complete change; so the use of *xaris* to denote the love of God which forgives sins, a sense not prepared for by the Septuagint, which uses *eleos* for this sense; or the word *mustarion* as used by St. Paul. Or we may find a new concrete application of established terms, as in the case of *parousia*, used of royal or imperial visits in Hellenistic and Roman times, but given the specific sense of the Second Coming in the New Testament.

We must, of course, distinguish between general and particular usage, between general Koine usage and that of the New Testament; and within the New Testament, between the general New Testament usage and that of a St. John or a St. Paul. The immediate context and particular usage is decisive in any given case. So in using a concordance, in the case of a Pauline usage, the Pauline parallels receive primary consideration. It is in the matter of usage that the value of the larger dictionary, with its careful classification of usage and grouping of parallels, becomes evident. Not that the dictionary is a substitute for independent study. It is a good map for the

way; but each must go the way himself if he would really interpret, that is, meet the text and receive its impact at first hand. At the level of language, too, Scripture must interpret Scripture. The concordance and the dictionary are indispensable aids to firsthand acquaintance but not a surrogate for it.

GRAMMAR

In the matter of grammar, the present generation of exegetes is more fortunate than any generation of scholars before it. The vast accessions of comparative material in the field of popular or vernacular Greek in the last fifty years, together with an unprepossessed study of the sacred texts themselves, has cleared away the grammatical fog that darkened earlier exegesis on the grammatical side. No longer will the structure of New Testament Greek be tortured to fit the classical pattern. There is perhaps, rather, a tendency to exaggerate the difference between koine and classical Greek. The student well grounded in classical Greek is not entering an altogether alien world when he takes up the study of the koine. The changes are all in the direction of what seems 'natural' to him as an English-speaking person; a grammar of fifty pages can tell him all that he needs to know, to begin with, of the peculiarities of the later Greek. The present writer read his Greek New Testament for years, and not unprofitably, without benefit of any special grammar whatever. There were, to be sure, some puzzles, but really very few that further reading and continued observation did not clear up satisfactorily. New Testament Greek is, after all, Greek, popular Greek, which has transcended the dialectical boundaries of the earlier periods and has relaxed, not abrogated, the strict regularity of the classical literary Greek.

There is still a sharp division among New Testament scholars as to the Semitic influence on the structure of New Testament Greek. The fact, noted above in another connection, that the authors were with one exception born Jews and spoke and wrote Greek as a second language and the influence of the Semitizing Greek of the Septuagint make it precarious to minimize the Semitic influence. On the other hand, the study of the papyri and other documents of late popular Greek has shown that many features once considered Semitisms occur, at least sporadically, in non-Semitic popular Greek, and that should make us wary of exaggeration.

CONTEXT

Consideration for the connection in which a word or group of words occurs is among the most elementary rules for the interpretation of any text. But like all commonplaces, it is easily forgotten, especially when we should like the text to mean something; when we have hit upon a bright idea, homiletically valuable, which we should like to "get out" of the text. It is indicative that so many exegetical questions take the form, "Can this text mean so and so?"

The immediate context is the most important and is usually decisive. In 1 Thess. 2:6, for instance, the sense of *en barei einai* is fixed by the contrast with 6a and the example of the nurse in the following verse, rather than by the remoter verse 9, so that we are justified in translating "we might have stood upon our dignity" with Goodspeed, rather than "we might have been burdensome" with the Authorized Version.

Where there is no immediate context, as is the case in some of the loosely joined series of exhortations in St. Paul or in an isolated passage like Rom. 16:17ff., consideration of the remoter and remotest context is imperative. The whole larger context of St. Paul's treatment of error and errorists in Galatians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Corinthians, with its drastic rejection of the misleaders and its tender concern for the misled, would cast much light on the scope and meaning of the passage in Romans, which breaks in so unexpectedly into the chapter of greetings.

The connection of thought which we call context is variously established. The connection may be merely historical, the chronological sequence of events. For instance, the time and place of the Sermon on the Mount, so obvious in St. Luke and clear enough in St. Matthew, ought in themselves have been enough to preclude the characterization of the Sermon as "die grundlegende Predigt" or as "the inaugural discourse of the Kingdom." Or the connection may be at once historical and dogmatical, as when St. Paul in Romans 4 argues from the sequence of events in Genesis concerning the connection between circumcision and the imputation of righteousness.

Or the connection may be logical, as in the discourse on avarice and care in Matt. 6:19-34, where verse 24 (“No man can serve two masters”) indicates the connection between the two apparently disparate themes; the higher unity is to be found in the idea of the divided heart.

Or again the connection may be psychological, dependent on feeling or association of ideas, as often in highly personal epistles like Philippians and 2 Corinthians; or as in 1 Thess. 5:16-22, where the mention of prayer and thanksgiving leads naturally, if not by inevitable logic, to the giving of directions for the worship life of the church.

To sum up, in the case of a passage not immediately clear we look first to the immediate context, then to the remoter context of the work in which the passage occurs, then to the whole body of works by the same author, then to the whole New Testament, and then to the whole Bible. Here again, as in the case of usage, we let Scripture interpret Scripture.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Though not as luxuriant in its imagery as the Old Testament, where cedar trees bow down and the floods clap their hands and the warhorse saith ha, ha among the trumpets, yet the New Testament is rich and various in its use of figurative language. In this respect, as in many others, the New Testament is what Deissmann calls it, a *Volksbuch*; for figurative language is frequently anything but literary—a glance at our own slang, with its tremendous and bizarre metaphors, is enough to convince one of the absolutely “popular” character of the figurative. And the Spirit who so moved men to speak shows Himself as the Spirit of Him who knoweth our frame; for figurative language appeals to every man, and it appeals to the whole man—try to imagine yourself at a sickbed with the purely conceptual equivalent of the twenty-third Psalm!—; as over against strictly literal and purely conceptual language, it addresses itself not only to the intellect but also to the will and to the emotions of men. It moves men, in the manner as well as in the substance of its speaking.

The figures are drawn from manifold aspects of contemporary life. For an understanding of them an exact knowledge of the times, customs, and usages of the New Testament world are a prerequisite. Here the circle of history interlocks with the circle of language; language is inseparable from life.

The purpose of figurative language is to illuminate a relationship or a state in one domain by means of a comparable relationship in another. Since the figure never completely coincides with the thing to be illuminated or clarified, the cardinal point in the interpretation of figurative language is to discern carefully that quality of the figure which the author evidently wishes to denote as explanatory to the idea. In other words, an understanding of the author’s intent can be gained only by a careful but withal plastic and imaginative determination of *the tertium comparationis*. The tertium may be very limited, as when Jesus compares Himself to a vine, or when the Church is compared to a bride, or when St. Paul designates himself the nurse or the father of the Thessalonians. The context will make clear just what the point of comparison is, even where there is such a heaping up of images as in Jude 12 and 13.

This holds also for the extended figure, the parable; the point (in some cases, points) of comparison must be ascertained and the various components of the parable viewed in relation to it. Our Lord’s own interpretations of parables offer us sure guidance here; although His own words also do not justify the belief that the interpretation of a parable is necessarily easy. The parables serve to conceal as well as to reveal. But here, too, it will be given to the believing heart to know the mysteries of the Kingdom; a devout and humble searching will accomplish more here than any crassly schematic theory of the parable.

We might note in closing that in the religious sphere particularly we are often forced to speak figuratively, simply because there is no other way to express the truth. The idea of unreality which some naive minds associate with the figurative in religion, as in poetry, has no place here. The ultimate beauty of music is such that it can be expressed in no other terms than music; yet no one questions the reality of that beauty just because it cannot be reduced to a literally conceptual statement. The many mansions of Our Lord’s discourse and the Golden Jerusalem of the Apocalypse are a more “real” heaven than any abstractly literal statement of it; and Luther’s letter to his little boy is sounder theological sense than unscripturally philosophic adumbrations of

the unknowable. The golden mean in interpretation lies somewhere between the extremes of an intellectual exegesis, on the one hand, which rationalizes away the flesh and blood of Scriptural expression and leaves only the bare bones of an abstract thought; and a false sort of literalism, on the other hand, which makes the inspired writers subject to all the “primitive” and naive notions that first-century flesh was heir to.

II. THE CIRCLE OF HISTORY

And it came to pass in those days . . .

In the circle of language the interpreter seeks to master the language in which the Scriptures were originally written; in the circle of history he seeks to master the world in which and for which the Scriptures were originally written; he strives to envisage and to keep before himself, as concretely and as plastically as may be, the geographic, social, economic, and cultural pattern in which the original proclaimers and the first hearers lived and moved. This pattern, or complex, includes also the past of which the proclaimers and hearers were the inheritors, for by the very fact that a man is born of parents he is irrecoverably linked with the past and comes into the world with history upon him. This is especially true of the all-influential and decisive past of the Old Testament revelation of God, which was, of course, for the devout Hebrew and for the believing Church not strictly past at all, but an ever-present and continually effective actuality. When the Magi arrived in Jerusalem, Micah was no dim historical figure, but a present voice; and at Pentecost the voice of Joel, in the mouth of St. Peter, was a living, and for those who would hear, a decisive tongue.

That is the circle of history in its wider sense. In the case of the New Testament proclamation, which arose in Palestine, fulfilling, not destroying, God’s previous revelation of Himself to His people, and spread over the whole Graeco-Roman world, that circle embraces two cultures, the Semitic culture of Palestine and the Graeco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean world. The deeper and more comprehensive the interpreter’s knowledge of those two cultures is, the more immediate will his contact with the sacred text be; his understanding and appreciation of the text will be correspondingly more vital and rich. Good commentaries will, of course, give the material that bears on any given portion of text. But commentaries must of necessity give the information piecemeal; and piecemeal knowledge means little and dissipates quickly if it does not find a secure place in an organic complex of previously acquired comprehensive and general knowledge. Bible dictionaries and Bible encyclopedias supply that historical knowledge in outline; but what they give us is, for us, secondhand. Unless the mind have a basis of firsthand knowledge of contemporary and precedent texts and monuments, at least in selection, such information is likely to remain a pale, sickly thing, and the understanding of the text remains feeble and incomplete. Here, as in the circle of language, the value and purposefulness of our traditional pre-theological curriculum is vindicated. Its emphasis on the history as well as on the languages of the ancient world provides an excellent basis for the interpretation of Scripture on the historical side. One might wish to see it pointed more specifically to the fullness of times than has often been the case; one might wish that Palestine and its history and culture, both intra-Biblical and extra-Biblical, were made a more equal partner with the world of classical antiquity; but the general idea is sound, and the foundation so laid is indispensable.

The circle of history in the narrower sense includes the specific occasion that called forth a literary production, the circumstances under which it was written and received, the persons addressed, and so forth—the materials commonly covered in courses in New Testament Introduction, materials derived from the texts themselves, from other Biblical sources (e.g., Acts for the Pauline Epistles), or from extra-Biblical tradition. The very existence of courses in New Testament Introduction, or Isagogics, is a testimony to the importance of the circle of history in interpretation. Every book of the New Testament is written for the times; if we are to get the meaning which these books have for all time, we must first get at the meaning they had for the first time. The character of the New Testament books as occasional writings is most clearly seen in the case of the Epistles; but even in the case of the Gospels, the preface of St. Luke and the varied character and emphasis of the Synoptics generally, to say nothing of the distinctive character of St. John, leave no room for doubt that

they, too, were designed to meet definite needs. And as for the Apocalypse, the persecuted Church is the unmistakable background and occasion of its prophecies.

God makes all things serve the good of His Church: the vagaries and impieties of the elder Higher Criticism have, under His providence, had a beneficent by-product; they have recalled Biblical scholarship to a more sanely historical approach to Scripture. We have been forced to study Scripture in the live realities of its historical setting, and the result can only be beneficial. Common sense should have taught us as much: no man can be understood in a vacuum; he comes into the world with the ties ready-fashioned that bind him to his family, his people, his cultural setting. He must be understood, if he is to be understood at all, in relation to his contemporaries and his ancestors—imagine trying to understand Socrates without Athens or Demosthenes without Philip of Macedon! A man's new birth does not alter, for this world, the given historical facts of his human birth. Paul after the Damascus road is the same Roman citizen that he was before his conversion, and Paul the Christian and the missionary makes use of that Roman citizenship; parts of his history are unintelligible without a knowledge of what that citizenship involved. Nor does the fact of inspiration break the historical ties that bind a man to his present and his past: the converted Saul writes the Greek he learned before conversion at Tarsus and employs the imagery derived from the world about him, the Hebrew world with its Temple and its cultus, the pagan world with its athletics and its spectacles, its commerce and its law. The Holy Spirit took men as they were, historically situated and historically conditioned, and used them so. . . . There is nothing novel in this renewed emphasis on the historical side in interpretation; for Luther, too, the emphasis on history went hand in hand with the return to the single sense: "*Sola enim historica sententia est, quae vere et solide docet.*"

To attempt to exemplify all the implications of history for the interpretation of the New Testament, even in outline, would be an ambitious undertaking. We might do better to proceed modestly, and empirically: to take one of the shorter and simpler Pauline Epistles, First Thessalonians, and point out how history can further and enrich our understanding of this portion of Holy Writ.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus. ." Within the circle of history the very names in the greeting at the beginning of the Epistle are luminous and meaningful. "Paul"—suppose there were nothing known of this Paul save what 1 Thessalonians tells us. The Letter would still be meaningful and instructive, even as the Epistle to the Hebrews is instructive, although "God only knows for certain" who its author is. But what riches we should have to do without! For we know that this Paul had been Saul, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, a fanatical Pharisee, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. The Epistle is a testimony, writ large, to the fact that the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant toward him: we see him writing to the Christians whom he before had hated, to Christians from among the Gentiles, whom he had before despised; writing with an overflowing abundance of love and concern, with a fervent prayer of thanksgiving that runs through the first three entire chapters, with a burning zeal for their continuance and growth in the Christian estate. The very fact that this Saul-Paul is writing the Letter is a preachment of the power of God and the grace of God.

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timothy"—the linking of the names is a testimony to the cohesive power of the Christian faith. Here we have conjoined Paul, the converted enemy of the Church, the former Pharisee, and Silas, member of the first Jerusalem churches the charter aristocracy of Christendom, and Timothy, one of the first fruits of Paul's missionary journeys, a strangely diverse group, yet one in their servitude to the Lord Jesus Christ. The three names thus joined are a testimony, too, to the cosmopolitan character of the early Church, and thus of the universal intent and scope of the early Church, even at this early date. As Paul was also Saul, so Silvanus also bore the good Jewish name of Silas, and both men were Roman citizens, thus uniting in their own persons the two cultures that constitute the historical background of the New Testament, the Semitic and the Graeco-Roman. Timothy is similarly cosmopolitan: his father was a Greek, and his mother, though she bore a Greek name, was a devout Jewess who had reared her son in the Holy Scriptures of God's ancient people. By a sort of gracious irony, Timothy had not been circumcised until about to begin his work as a minister of the New Covenant. Salvation is marked in the history of its proclamation and in the persons of its proclaimers as being

of the Jews but for all the world. The character and the antecedents of these proclaimers are both a fulfillment of prophecy and in themselves prophetic.

“Thessalonica,” “Achaia,” “Macedonia,” “Athens”: the place names, too, are rich in meaning, within the circle of history. The indistinctly premonitory “isles,” “ends of the earth,” and “every man from his place” (Is. 41:5; Zeph. 2:11) have become concrete and plastic place names in the fulfillment of the new dispensation. In place of “isles” we have now, as fulfillment unrolls, the great harbor city of Thessalonica as the center and theater of God’s work, in which the Gospel takes root, grows, and spreads. The interpreter will do well to visualize this great city if he is to understand First Thessalonians to the full. Like most of the cities in which St. Paul labored, it is a crossroads city, being situated on the great Roman highway, the Via Egnatia, and being by virtue of its splendid and picturesque natural harbor a center of shipping and commerce; history under the providence of God so shaped this city, its character and site, as to make possible and to underline the words of the Apostle: “For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything” (1 Thess. 1:8). We may well believe, too, that it was an expensive city to live in; for here St. Paul, despite the labors of his hands where-with he toiled day and night that he might not be chargeable to any man, yet twice accepted help from the church of Philippi (Phil. 4:16). It was a populous city, and its population, which according to inscriptions was made up of men of every nation, included a goodly number of Jews, who had there their own synagog (Acts 17:1); it was here in the synagog that St. Paul according to his usual practice had begun work in Thessalonica “and three sabbaths reasoned with them out of the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2). Our Epistle and the history of the church of Thessalonica impinge here on the tremendous historical fact, important in more than one respect for redemptive history, of the Diaspora of the Jews, that vast scattering of Israel, whether by forcible deportation or voluntary emigration, over the face of the whole ancient world, so that the miracle of Pentecost was witnessed by men of Israel “out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5); so that we read in Philo a letter addressed to Caligula which contains the remarkable statement: “Jerusalem is the metropolis, not of the single country of Judea, but of most countries, because of the colonies which she has sent out, as opportunity offered, into the neighboring lands of Egypt, Phoenicia, Syria, and Coelesyria, and the more distant lands of Pamphylia and Cilicia, most of Asia, as far as Bithynia and the utmost corners of Pontus; likewise unto Europe, Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, with the most parts and best parts of Greece. And not only are the continents full of Jewish colonies, but also the most notable of the islands—Euboea, Cyprus, Crete—to say nothing of the lands beyond the Euphrates.” We have grown so accustomed to reading that St. Paul, again and again, at Pisidian Antioch, at Thessalonica, at Athens, at Corinth, at Ephesus, begins his work in the synagog that the wonder of that providential fact is likely to be lost on us unless we look upon it freshly with the historian’s eye; and it is only in the light of that fact that we can understand a statement like that of Acts 16:3 regarding the half-Greek Timothy: “Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews . . .” and yet the Epistle to the Thessalonians is addressed to a Gentile church, to men who had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). In Thessalonica, as elsewhere, St. Paul’s kinsmen according to the flesh fulfilled their tragic destiny, both to serve as the preparation for the Christ and to spearhead the rejection of Him; they who were the Israelites, to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose were the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came (Rom. 9:4-5), even they refused to submit themselves unto the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:3). The bitterest words that St. Paul ever spoke concerning his countrymen are found in our Epistle; they reflect the experience of the Apostle in Thessalonica as recorded in Acts 17:5, where we learn that it was the Jews (only some of them believed), moved with envy, who were the instigators of the persecution which made the Thessalonians followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus: “For ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews; who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway” (1 Thess. 2:14-16). Still it is true:

“The captivity of the Jew became the freedom of both Jew and Gentile, and the scattering of Israel was the gathering in of all nations unto God” (Plummer). The synagog was the starting point, and the synagog was also the bridge to the Gentile world; for on the fringe of the synagog were that fruitful group, “the devout Greeks,” or proselytes, among whom in Thessalonica, as so often elsewhere, the Gospel obtained a sympathetic hearing. We have the evidence of Acts that in Thessalonica “a great multitude” of such believed.

The Prophets saw the “heathen” and “every man from his place” worshipping Jehovah. We see the fulfillment, concretely and in detail. We see the laborers and artisans of Thessalonica—there were some Jews and “of the chief women not a few,” but the common Gentile men formed the bulk of the congregation—men who are exhorted to do each his own business and to work with his hands. We know from the whole ancient economic picture how hard was the lot of the free laborer (the problem of the Christian slave and the Christian master are not touched on in our Epistle; perhaps because they were few) in a slave-holding society; there is a new poignancy in St. Paul’s description of the labor of their faith, the toil of their love, and their patient endurance in hope in their new Lord Jesus Christ if we remember that. We know, too, that when St. Paul speaks of the churches of Macedonia as giving liberally “in a great trial of affliction . . . and deep poverty,” he is stating sober fact (2 Cor. 8:2). For this young church suffered both persistent persecution and chronic poverty.

We know, too, what were the temptations to which these young Christians of Thessalonica were, by their position in a Greek society and the ingrained attitudes acquired by life in that society, especially exposed. “God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness”; this emphasis on sexual purity, this foremost emphasis given in the hortatory part of the Epistle to the warning against fornication, comes as no surprise to anyone acquainted at all with the life of a Greek city, especially the life of a harbor city. Passages like this, and the *Lasterkataloge*, such as we have in Romans 1, evoke a thousand echoes in the mind that come to them conditioned by Archilochus and Mimnermus, Aristophanes and Greek comedy generally, the amatory epigrams of the Palatine Anthology, or their lineal Roman descendants, such as Catullus and Martial. To one who has walked the pavements of Pompeii and has seen the obscene mark of the brothels engraved on its stones, the strongest words of Scripture under this head will seem mild enough. ‘*Akatharsia* was in the grain of Graeco-Roman life. The Epistle to the Thessalonians is a living and immediate word spoken to an actual and concrete Thessalonica.

The forms of the Epistle are also well within the circle of history; they are in the main current of contemporary epistolography and can be paralleled, feature for feature, from the non-literary letters of the time. The greeting *Xaris kai eireenee* is so familiar and has become so much a part of ecclesiastical language that we are likely to be blinded to the fact that in these two words we have again the meeting and fusion of the two cultures that constitute the historical setting of the New Testament: *Xaris* reproduces the conventional greeting of Greek letters, *Xairein* (cf. James 1:1 and Acts 15:23), while *eireenee* is the Semitic *shalom*, which in ordinary daily usage had become so perfunctory and conventional that Our Lord had to mark it as “My peace” and “not as the world giveth” when He wished His disciples to feel the full force that the word had had in the Old Testament and was again to have in the mouth of His Apostles. We have not, of course, “explained” the greeting when we have traced its historic origins. Both words received in Christian usage a wealth and depth of content that pre-Christian and non-Christian usage never dreamed of. It is both the assimilative and the transforming power of the inspiring Spirit that we witness in even so slight an instance as this.

It is the same transforming power that we behold in the form that the opening of the Epistle takes: both the thanksgiving, here extended to unusual length, and the prayer can be paralleled from non-literary letters in the papyri; for instance, the letter of Apion, the Egyptian soldier, printed by Deissmann in *Light from the Ancient East* (pp. 179 ff.), who points out that this is “a thoroughly ‘Pauline’ way of beginning a letter and that St. Paul was . . . adhering to a beautiful secular custom when he so frequently began his Letters with thanks to God (1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; Philemon 4; Eph. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:3).” These lines are not theological lucubrations of generalized intent and import; history here underlines what Scripture asserts of itself; Scripture is “profitable,” *oophelimos* (useful); these are the words of an inspired man passionately concerned for the souls of men, writing to them in language and in forms that they were familiar with and

readily understood. And if we will but use the materials that God gives us, we shall readily understand them too.

The whole thanksgiving and prayer, extending through three chapters of the Epistle, are reminiscent of the history of the church at Thessalonica and of St. Paul's contact with, and separation from, it; to read it apart from the account in Acts 17 is to deprive oneself of living contact with much of its content. Nor should we neglect such light as incidental touches elsewhere can throw on the situation: the weakness and fear and trembling with which St. Paul first appeared in Corinth (1 Cor. 2:3) reflect the tension he was under regarding his beloved church in Thessalonica. The reminiscences reach back to history previous to the evangelizing of Thessalonica, too: the allusion in 1 Thess. 2:2 to the suffering and shameful treatment at Philippi recall the memorable events recounted in Acts, particularly the imprisonment of Paul and Silvanus; Paul's impassioned words at the magistrates' offer of a huggermugger release indicate and make vivid how deeply felt the indignity had been: "They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." (Acts 16:37.)

Interwoven with the reminiscent history of St. Paul's relations to the church of Thessalonica is an apologia of Paul the Apostle; St. Paul defends the sincerity of his conduct and the purity of his motives:

For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile; but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness; nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the Apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. (1 Thess. 2:3-7)

Why all this? Why should an Apostle of Jesus Christ feel compelled to meet suspicions as base and, to our eyes, as utterly unfounded and improbable as these? The obvious and easy answer that these were the aspersions cast upon St. Paul by his enemies at Thessalonica only pushes the question a step farther back. How, then, did the enemies of St. Paul hope to influence his Christians with such slanders as these? What grounds had they for believing that they might gain a hearing and create suspicion with such allegations?

The answer is obvious enough, but since it illustrates so well the value of the circle of history for interpretation, we shall do well to state it. First, St. Paul wore no halo when he entered the gate of Thessalonica. The good people of Thessalonica looked upon him with first-century eyes; they had no way of viewing him in the light of all that Acts was subsequently to recount of him and all that a Christianized Europe was to see in him: they saw merely "a small, unimposing, sickly man before them, who had nothing striking or prepossessing about him Once the formalities with the guard at the gate had been disposed of, not a soul took notice of the itinerant Jewish artisan" (von Dobschuetz). For those who received the Word of his preachment for what it indeed was, the Word of God, he became a person of authority; but the self-revelations of the Corinthian Letters show how slippery and unstable that authority might be, even in a church less young and religiously unfinished than that of Thessalonica. St. Paul was not impressive in personal appearance and demeanor; and the man on the street, especially the Greek man on the street, goes by externals—and the converted Greek did not cease to be Greek all at once; and, after all, even in our day a pair of broad shoulders and a stout, rolling bass have been known to compensate for less-than-perfect preaching. And St. Paul's history, though he himself does not blink his sufferings and reverses, was, to any but the eyes of faith that saw in his sufferings a glory, not impressive: the picture of the man of God driven by persecution from city to city and from province to province could easily be distorted into that of the deluded and discredited fanatic. And once a shadow had fallen on the person of the Apostle, his cause was endangered. Wavering and shaken faith in the man might soon and easily enough become a wavering and shaken faith in his cause: Was it all a delusion or perhaps even a clever deception on the Apostle's part? Was St. Paul, like so many others, only another selfish seeker after gain and fame?

The suspicion came easily to the inhabitant of a first-century Greek city. There were many others; the heralds and witnesses of Christ were not solitary travelers of the Roman highways and were not the only men who sought a public hearing. They were part of a motley procession of rhetoricians, rhapsodies, Sophists,

philosophers Stoic and Cynic, and Neopythagoreans, of swindlers and charlatans, of propagandists for the Mysteries and for Isis and Mithras, not to forget Jewish and Samaritan teachers, who traveled, made claims and created impressions, promised much, gave little, and went on, leaving their hearers richer in a few rapidly fleeting impressions and in enduring disillusionment, and poorer in money” (von Dobschuetz). For, though there were notable exceptions, the common run of these itinerants were after two things: fame and money. Against a background like that the Apostle’s words are not only natural, but inevitable, whether motivated directly or indirectly by a comparison with these “competitors.” The words were timely then, and, as anyone who hears popular criticism of Christianity and the Church knows (the Church the handmaiden of Capitalism, the workman’s opiate!), they are timely now; and we know what they mean now, more fully and more accurately, because we have learnt what they meant then.

As one might expect in a Letter written to a Gentile church only a few weeks after its founding, there are not many links with past history of God’s people in the Old Testament. One might find more fruitful material for the study of this aspect of the circle of history in a book like the Gospel According to St. Matthew, where the first verses, the genealogy of Our Lord, take us from the Patriarchs to the full moon of Israel’s history under David and on to the darkness of the Captivity and back again to the new light risen with the birth of Jesus, who is called Christ. But a verse like 1 Thess. 4:5: “the Gentiles, which know not God” —spoken to Gentiles!— shows us that here, too, the Old Testament is the ever-present background to the New, that the Gentile Church feels and knows itself to be the Israel of God, that the circle of history always includes the sacred past as well as the contemporary world.

There is much more that one might treat even in so slight an Epistle as this, especially in the region where the circle of history and the circle of language intersect, in those cases where a single word involves history for its understanding, words like *ekkleesia*, with their reach into the Old Testament; words like *parousia*, panoplied with associations from the reigns of the Ptolemies and the Roman emperors; words like *kurios*, that both reach into the Old Testament past, and present a “polemical parallel” to the contemporary claims of many lords and of the deified emperor; or even words like the simple *ekeeruxamen*, where a translation like “preached” fails to convey all the associations that cluster about the herald, from Homer down, within the circle of history.

But enough has been said to indicate, at least, the riches at the interpreter’s disposal within this circle of history, how much is to be gained by a patient and imaginative immersing of oneself in the times and the world of the Apostles and Prophets. Only, we must not forget: history is a means, not an end. The historical approach is not the historian’s approach. We do not aim to write the history of the primitive Church, neither do we seek the “historical Jesus.” Theology is a *habitus practicus* still; and we enter the circle of history in order to hear the words that spelled, and spell, eternal life.

III. THE CIRCLE OF SCRIPTURE

Thou art good and doest good; teach me Thy statutes. Ps. 119:68.

“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Heretofore, in the circle of language and in the circle of history, we have been concentrating on the fact that “men . . . spake,” on the fact that God the Holy Ghost spoke in tongues in definite moments in history. We have been, therefore, concerned largely with the skills and techniques of interpretation. In the circle of Scripture we pass from skills and techniques to what is rather an attitude, a gift of God, a *charisma* to be prayed for. For we are now concerned with the fact that what was spoken by men in times past was uniquely spoken; that these men spoke as “men of God,” as men “moved by the Holy Ghost.” We are concerned with that aspect of the Bible which makes it different from all other texts, however much it may, linguistically and historically considered, have in common with them; upon the fact that it is the Word of God, not only the record of God’s revelation of Himself, but the continuation of it; that here God not only spoke through men, but speaks.

Scripture being, then, not only a record of revelation, but itself the revelation of God, we are confronted immediately with the same sharp either-or that is involved in every contact with God: “In our relationship to

God there is no such thing as neutrality. Whether we obey His Law or not, whether we believe His Gospel or not, whether we love Him or not, fear Him or not—always we can do only the one or the other. No third attitude is possible. Disobedience is not defective obedience, but an active decision against God; likewise, unbelief; likewise, not fearing Him. That is to say that for which we decide when we decide against God is not a blank, not a non-entity, but is an act that absolutely determines our existence. In unbelief and in disobedience we have consigned ourselves, whether we know it or not, whether we want it so or not, to that other which is absolutely antagonistic to God.” (Elert.) Hence Luther’s constant insistence on what must be the first axiom in theological interpretation, namely, that we be under, subject to, Scripture; what he calls “*der Gehorsam des Worts.*” “*Du und ich sollen unter dem Worte sein. Das Wort ist nicht mein und dein, darum will ich dich nicht ueber Gott setzen und dich nicht lassen recht haben, wo du unrecht bist.*” God is King, and His Word is supreme; we are bound to it: “*An das goettliche Wort sollen wir gebunden sein, das sollen wir hoeren, und niemand soll ohne Gottes Wort aus seinem Kopfe etwas lehren.*” God’s Word is not a force that we can guide or control; it guides and controls us: “*Das Wort Gottes sollen wir nicht lenken, sondern (uns) von demselben lenken lassen.*” Against its authority, reason has no claim: “*Wider alles, was die Vernunft eingibt oder ermessen und ausforschen will, ja was alle Sinne fuehlen, muessen wir lernen am Worte halten.*” Neither has our feeling, our experience, anything to say over against this authority; especially is this so in times of trial, when our feelings so readily run counter to revelation: “*In der Zeit, wenn wir angefochten werden, sollen wir nicht nach unsern Empfindungen, sondern nach dem Worte Gottes urteilen* “ “*Wir muessen nicht urteilen nach dem, was wir empfinden, sondern nach dem, was Gott selbst in seinem Wort ausspricht und urteilt.*” Only so can Scripture be grasped: “*Das Wort Gottes ist so beschaffen, dass wenn man nicht alle Sinne schliesst und es allein mit dem Gehoer aufnimmt und ihm glaubt, man es nicht fassen kann.*” “*Christus kann durch sein Wort nicht in die Herzen der Menschen einziehen, wenn sie nicht ihren Sinn gefangen geben unter den Gehorsam des Worts.*” We not only suspend judgment until we have heard the Word of God; we renounce our own judgment when we hear it; we must learn not to think above what is written: “*Wo Gottes Wort gehet, soll man nicht fragen, ob es recht sei; was es heisst, das soll recht sein.*” We are not to seek beyond it: “*Was uns im Wort nicht offenbart ist, soll man fahren lassen, denn ohne Gefahr und Schaden kann man sich daran nicht versuchen.*” To render the Word anything less than absolute obedience is to add to it something of our own, and the Word of God cannot tolerate adulteration: “*Gottes Wort und Sachen koennen schlecht keinen Zusatz leiden, es muss ganz rein und lauter sein, oder ist schon verderbet und kein nutz mehr.*” Such an attitude of unconditional obedience will not be offended at the servant’s form of the Word either, its apparent weakness with which God’s revelation of Himself begins: “*Das ist die Art des goettlichen Wortes, dass, wenn es anfangen will, seine Kraft und Gewalt zu erzeugen, es zuvor geschwaechet wird.*” Interpretation is, therefore, finally, a gift of Christ: “*Das Wort kann ich nicht erdenken, sondern ich hoere es durch den Mund Christi, und ich kann es nicht verstehen, hoeren, lernen noch glauben, so er’s nicht ins Herz gibt.*” It is a gift of the Holy Ghost, who makes us spiritual: “*Soll ich die Worte verstehen, die ich hoere, so muss es geschehen durch den Heiligen Geist, der macht mich auch geistlich; das Wort ist geistlich, und ich werde auch geistlich.*” It was an appreciation of this basic attitude toward the Word of God that led Wilhelm Moeller to describe interpretation as “*heiliges Schauen.*” And it was the absence of just this “*Gehorsam des Worts*” that made liberal exegesis so flat and unfruitful that the inevitable reaction has set in widely again, a reaction that we find voiced, for instance, in Donald G. Miller’s review of Goodspeed’s *How to Read the Bible*: “Is it very presumptuous to express concern that a book which comes from one who would be considered by many the dean of New Testament scholars in America, should be so lacking in religious content and so devoid of the Biblical point of view while writing about the Bible? Has not the day come when American Biblical scholarship should end the process—which surely must be complete by now—of judging the Bible by the shallow canons of twentieth-century complacent American liberal thought and with at least a little of the feeling of the man who beat upon his breast and cried, ‘God be merciful to me, a sinner,’ to begin the very disturbing and humbling process of permitting the Bible to judge us?”

This demand for submission to the text might be deemed an unreasonable one to make of the interpreter at the outset and as the opposite extreme from that open-mindedness (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*) so often set up

as the ideal of the interpreter's attitude toward the text to be interpreted. But is it really unreasonable to ask of the Christian student that he approach the Word to which he owes his new birth with the reverence that befits a Word of such power and importance? His basic attitude toward Scripture has long ago been established by his position in Christ: "They are they which testify of Me." Our attitude toward Christ can never again be neutral or open-minded; we cannot even for the purpose of study assume an attitude of neutrality. The Christian interpreter might do well to write upon his desk what Luther used to write out before himself in hours of trial: "*Baptizatus sum*"—to remind him that Jesus Christ is his Lord and that the Word which testifies of Him is to be met with "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

And after all, this demand for complete open-mindedness in any field of interpretation is both impossible and wrong. Impossible, for no man comes to any text with a completely open mind, entirely without prepossessions. He has been conditioned to Shakespeare, for instance, a thousand ways before he ever opens a volume of Shakespeare: he has been exposed to rhythm, verse, and rhyme from his nursery days onward; he has been subjected to drama from kindergarten on; he has heard Shakespeare quoted, whether he knew it or not; he has heard his phrases in the mouth of everyman; even if his reading has been confined to billboards and the back pages of the *Saturday Evening Post*, he cannot have escaped Shakespeare entirely. And what child ever reached the age of six without being in some way touched by the influence of the Bible? At the very least, he has heard men curse and swear by the divine names which he meets in Scripture: that desecration of the holy is in itself a sort of satanic tribute to the power in those names and will have left its mark upon the man who heard it. (He has never heard anyone take the names of Thor or Baldur in vain.)

And the demand for open-mindedness, in the sense that it is made, is wrong also. For if a man would understand any text, he must at least begin by submitting himself to it. No one has achieved an understanding worthy the name of Homer or Milton or Goethe by remaining coolly above him. A man must submit himself to Homer if he would know Homer. He must submit himself fully and sympathetically to Milton if he is to know Milton. The demand for open-mindedness, for a prepossessionless approach, makes sense only in the form of the positive demand that man's mind be really open to the text that he is to interpret, that, as Torm puts it, a man "begin by bowing willingly and obediently to the quiet influence of the text. He must, so to speak, give the text time to work upon himself by dint of its own internal power"; he must exclude norms and analogies that are foreign to the text and hear the text out on its own terms. Most schoolboys who end up by hating Horace as heartily as Byron did ("Then farewell, Horace, whom I hated so"), do so, not because Horace is "hard," but because they could not, or were not induced to, submit themselves to Horace and his charm. And so it is no unreasonable demand, even from an untheological point of view, to ask the interpreter to begin by submitting himself to Scripture in order to understand it. There is, of course, this cardinal difference between submitting to Scripture and submitting to any other book: a man can, and ought to, detach himself again from the Horace or Homer to whom he has for a time sympathetically subdued himself; but—let the candid reader beware, and let him reckon the cost of the tower beforehand—he will never again be able to detach himself from Scripture once he has given himself to it unreservedly; for he will have been taken by a power and a love that will not let him go.

UNUS SIMPLEX SENSUS

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; this absolute submission to the Word is the beginning of all real interpretation, and from it all other theological norms of interpretation flow. So the one great Reformation principle of interpretation, that of the one intended sense of Scripture, is the inevitable outcome of this attitude toward the Word. If we are open-minded in the only admissible and fruitful sense of the word, that is, if we are under Scripture, we shall not be offended at the servant's form of God's Word. We shall accept Scripture as we find it, even as we accept the Son of Man, the sign that is spoken against, as we find Him, in His weakness and humility. We shall not deem it the business of interpretation to make Scripture more "spiritual" than the Holy Ghost has made it by going beyond the simple, literal sense of its words and

embroidering upon the plain meaning additional mystical “senses” after the manner of much Patristic and most Medieval exegesis.

The old “fourfold sense” of Scripture has become so remote for us, the inheritors of the Lutheran Reformation, that we can hardly appreciate how great and bold a step Luther took when he declared that the simple, literal sense of Scripture is “*Frau Kaiserin, die geht ueber alle subtile, spitzige, sophistiche Dichtungen, von der muss man nicht weichen. . .*” This in opposition to the whole medieval theory and practice which, during the centuries of its sway, had taken the literal sense as a mere point of departure for the sometimes devout but always arbitrary development of the allegorical, the moral (or tropological), and the anagogical senses.

*Litera gesto docet; quid credas, allegoria;
Moralis, quid agas; quo tendas, anagogia.*

Thus “Jerusalem,” in any context, might be literally the city of Judea; allegorically, the Church Militant; morally, every faithful soul; and anagogically, the heavenly Jerusalem. The burning bush that was not consumed might by this sort of “spiritual jugglery” (the term is Luther’s) be made to signify the Mother of our Lord, who was not consumed by the Divine Fire in her womb; and in the “two or three firkins apiece” of John 2:6 an adept might find a reference to the two or three senses that Scripture might bear in addition to the literal.

To be sure, this mystical or allegorical mode of interpretation finds some apparent support in the occasional “allegorical” use of Old Testament incidents or figures in the New Testament. But the support is only apparent; for aside from the fact that this “allegorical” interpretation of the Old Testament is confined to a few instances, a cardinal difference is to be observed: “Whereas allegorical interpretation goes its own way alongside the literal sense (often independently of it, sometimes even excluding it), the typological interpretation (in the New Testament), or better, the typological view, of the text holds fast to the literal sense and is based upon it” (Torm). In other words, these instances of “allegory” in the New Testament are not so much interpretations of the Old Testament text, giving them an additional meaning, as a fresh application of them. “This allegorical sense is not a second sense of the words, but a second meaning of the contents of the words. Gal. 4:21-31.” (Fuerbringer.)

We of the twentieth century deem ourselves, rather complacently, far above the vagaries of an Origen or a Thomas Aquinas. The wild work of patristic or medieval exegesis cannot, we feel certain, happen here. And yet the history of exegesis in modern times offers abundant evidence that the simple Gospel is still an offense to many, that the unregenerate heart cannot take it as it is. Modern exegesis does not allegorize; but much of it has paltered with Scripture in a double sense nevertheless: after all, an exegesis that pares away the miraculous in the Gospels and ignores the Atonement in the life and death of Christ, that ethicizes the “religion of Jesus” and creates an unbridgeable gulf between Jesus and St. Paul, or brings down everything in the New Testament, *religionsgeschichtlich*, to the level of a first century religious development, can hardly lay claim to dealing any more honestly with the text than the ancient practitioners of the fourfold sense.

SCRIPTURA SACRA SUI IPSIUS INTERPRES

From such an attitude of reverent submission to the Word there follows also the second great Reformation principle of interpretation, namely, that Scripture interprets itself. For such an attitude toward Scripture precludes any interpretation by an alien or imported norm, whether that norm be tradition, the consensus of the Church, “the spirit,” enlightened reason or the Christian consciousness, a moral norm, a dogmatic system, or an assumed entity, such as the whole of Scripture. For as F. Pieper points out, such a treatment of Scripture is not an interpretation, but a criticism of it: “What Scripture does not itself interpret, no man shall make bold to interpret.” It is worth while to remind ourselves again at this point that on this level skill in interpretation of Scripture is a gift. And like all God’s gifts, it is given to the humble, to the poor in spirit, to the broken and contrite heart. An *aliquid in nobis* is as bad in interpretation as it is in the doctrine of conversion and predestination (F. Pieper). And so the really Christian exegete will follow Luther’s advice: “Despair

absolutely of your own sense and understanding. Pray with real humility and earnestness to God that He may through His dear Son give His Holy Spirit to illumine and guide you and to make you wise.”

It is in this sense, Scripture as interpreter of Scripture, that Luther and our Confessions understood the analogy of faith. Luther uses “a public article of faith” and “Scripture” interchangeably, and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article 13, explains “regulam” by “scripturas certas et claras.” The men of the Reformation “sought earnestly to place themselves under Scripture, in the full confidence that the God who had given the Scriptures to the Church had also given clear and distinct guides to their understanding, if one would only use them rightly” (Torm). Luther has given classic expression to this confidence, this faith, in the words: “Rest assured, beyond all doubt, that there is nothing brighter and clearer than the sun, that is, the Scriptures. If a cloud has come before it, there is still nothing else behind that cloud than this same bright sun. And so, if there is a dark saying in Scripture, there is surely behind it the same truth which is clearly expressed in another place.” All the light that is needed, theologically, in Scripture is provided by Scripture itself.

Not as if the usefulness of the analogy of faith, or as it is also called, the analogy of Scripture, is exhausted in providing light for “dark sayings,” though naturally that use looms largest in the formulation of doctrine and in polemics. Its greater day-by-day usefulness lies in the establishing of the content of theological concepts, the sort of work done in the great theological lexica of Cremer and of Kittel. The interpreter in seeking to determine just what and just how much a word like *Xaris* means will welcome whatever by-illumination etymology and secular usage can provide (though it be but by contrast). But his real questions are directed to Scripture itself, and it is from Scripture itself that he gets his decisive answers. It is to Scripture that he directs such questions as: In what applications is the idea found? What is predicated of it? What is contrasted with it? With what is it paralleled? What synonyms or near synonyms of the word occur? What is the history of the idea in the two Testaments? All of Scripture is made to cast light on any portion of it.

It is, of course, a piece of irreverence toward the Word if the analogy of faith is used to rationalize away tensions that Scripture itself has left unresolved, the tension, for instance, that for human rationality will always exist between the universal grace of God and the particular election of the saints. A really theological interpretation will never seek to rend God’s veils nor pry into the hidden counsels of the Almighty.

True interpretation is better occupied. For in thus interpreting, always remaining under Scripture, we shall not only introduce no alien or imported norms; we shall also remain always under the influence of the same Spirit who first gave the Word to the Church. That Spirit is the Spirit of truth and will lead us to seek and find Christ as the whole content of Scripture. That does not mean that we are to allegorize and twist texts to find explicit reference to our Lord where none such exists. It does mean that we view and treat Scripture as an organic whole, with one Author, all the parts of which are vitally related to the one central theme of God’s redemptive work in Christ. It is Christ, our Redeemer, whom we seek and find.

Practically, all this means that the concordance is more valuable than the dictionary; that the large dictionary with its systematized parallels is more valuable than the small dictionary; that theological lexica of the order of Cremer and Kittel are more valuable than merely lexical works; that the best part of a good commentary is often the collections of parallels from Scripture; that the margins of a Nestle are better than a good many commentaries; that the best of all is to be your own concordance of words and ideas, to do as Luther did, who read through all Scriptures twice a year, “*bis ich ein ziemlich guter Textualis wurde.*”

THE POSTURE OF THE INTERPRETER

Practically everybody in Christendom claims to be in some sense under Scripture. The Liberal feels that he is being “true to the deepest intentions” of Jesus or of Paul when he treats Scripture in his own fashion. Bultmann claims to be dealing so radically with the form of the New Testament message merely in order to confront modern man with what he considers the essential content of the New Testament message. And certainly the Fundamentalist, for all his frequent failure to make the most basic and radical distinction that the Bible itself knows, the distinction between Law and Gospel, interprets his Bible in the conviction that he is putting himself under Scripture.

The matter is obviously not a simple one. How can the interpreter in the church assure himself and the church that he is really working in obedience to the inscripturated Word of God? Von Hofmann has pointed out (J. Chr. K. von Hofmann, *Biblische Hermeneutik* (Nordlingen: C.H. Beck'sche Buch handlung, 1880), pp. 24 ff.) that in the history of interpretation most of the aberrations from sound exegesis stemmed not from ignorance of proper hermeneutical principles but from a false attitude toward Scripture which led men to believe that these principles could not or did not need to be applied to it. The way toward being under Scripture begins, then, not with an examination of exegetical techniques but with a consideration of exegetical attitude. This paper, therefore, purposes to inquire not into the skills of interpretation but into the basic attitude of the interpreter of Scripture, the attitude which will dictate how skills are to be employed and techniques are to be applied. For this the term "posture" has been employed. As a workman's posture is imposed upon him by the nature of his materials and the nature of his work, so the interpreter's posture is dictated by the nature of Sacred Scripture and by his function as interpreter of Sacred Scripture.

The culmination of God's revelation is the incarnation, and the incarnation is the interpretive center of all divine revelation. Our point of contact with the incarnation is the apostolate, and our present point of contact with the apostolate is the apostolic Word of the New Testament. We may, therefore, describe the function of the interpreter in terms of that *mimesis* of the apostle (and of the apostle's Lord) which Paul requires of the church. (2 Thess. 3:6-12; Phil. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:14-17; 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6-8) [Since the English word "imitation" does not fully convey the meaning of the Greek word it literally reproduces, the Greek word *mimesis* is used throughout this discussion. Only a select number of passages involving the idea of *mimesis* will be treated here; for a full treatment of the New Testament word group see Wilhelm Michaelis' article in Th. W. IV, 661—678, to which I am indebted in the following section.]

"MIMESIS" AND INTERPRETATION

In all five of the passages cited above *mimesis* involves interpretation, that is, an inner appropriation of the apostle's Word. In 2 Thess. 3:6-12 the church is called upon to understand and to translate into appropriate action the commandments of the apostle (vv. 6,10) and to comprehend and to act in accordance with the tradition which it has received from him (v.6), a tradition which his own conduct among them has exemplified (vv. 8,9). On the basis of this interpretation of his words the members of the church are to become "imitators" of him. Likewise in Phil. 3:17 the *mimesis* to which the Philippians are summoned is no blind following in Paul's footsteps; it involves an inner appropriation of the apostolic word in which he proclaims the nature of a genuinely Christian life (3:18,19). When Paul appeals to the Corinthians to imitate him by turning from the intoxication of a theology of glory to the sobriety and suffering of a theology of the cross (1 Cor. 4:14-17), he is asking them to understand and to appropriate his words to them; he is asking them to interpret afresh the Gospel, by which he begot them (v.15), to understand and heed the admonition which he is writing to them (v.16), and to give ear to the reminder of his teaching (his "ways in Christ Jesus") which Timothy will bring to them. (V.16)

In 1 Cor. 11:1 Paul concludes his long discourse (chs. 8-10) on the consideration which Christians owe to a weak brother's conscience with the appeal, "Become imitators of me." The *mimesis* which he calls for obviously involves the understanding and the appropriating of all that he has said in the preceding three chapters. In the *mimesis* spoken of in 1 Thess. 1:6-8 the interpretive act is particularly prominent. The Thessalonians became imitators of Paul and of the Lord in "accepting" the Word, and this "accepting" is an inner appropriation and assimilation of the Word. As Grundmann points out, *dexesthai* is a way of describing the act of faith. ("... eine Umschreibung des Glaubensbegriffes," Th. W. II, 53.) So thoroughly did they appropriate the apostolic Word that they could transmit it faithfully; the Word that sounded forth from them was nothing less than "the Word of the Lord." (V.8)

Mimesis is broader than what we commonly call interpretation. Any act of faith, done in believing obedience to the apostle and the apostle's Lord, may be called *mimesis*. But since each such act is *mimesis* by virtue of the fact that the apostolic Word is inwardly appropriated, every such act involves interpretation. And

the interpretation of the apostolic Word is already a part of the mimesis, not merely a preparation for it. Or to put it differently, all mimesis is a being caught up into the apostolic impetus of a life lived under the Lordship of Jesus Christ; the means and dynamic of this “being caught up” is the believing apprehension of the apostolic Word. Mimesis is therefore, it would seem, a natural and suitable term for the task of the interpreter, and a consideration of this mimesis holds promise of being helpful in determining what the posture of the interpreter should be.

This act of mimesis includes two elements: (a) the recognition of apostolic authority and submission to it; and (b) the continuation of the apostolic task. When Paul speaks to the Thessalonians regarding the idle and disorderly enthusiasts among them, his words are markedly authoritative (2 Thess. 3:6-12). He asserts his authority even when pointing to his refusal to exploit that authority for his own advantage (v.9). He recalls the “tradition” which the Thessalonian church had received from him (v.6), and “tradition” is for Paul, the former rabbinical student, an authoritarian conception. (See Buchsel, *Th. W. II*, 175.) He gives commands (vv. 6,10,12), and he prescribes a penalty for disobedience to his instructions (2 Thess. 3:14,15). Mimesis is submission to apostolic authority, and it includes the continuation of the apostolic task, the carrying on of the apostolic impetus. The conduct of the idle and disorderly is to be shaped by the apostolic example as interpreted by the apostolic Word, and the church gets its norms for dealing with the disorderly from the apostolic Word.

In Phil. 3:17 Paul is pitting his authority against that of Judaizers (Phil. 3:2) and that of the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18,19). Of these two groups the Judaizers certainly claimed authority over the church, and the same may be said of the “enemies of the cross” also, especially if we follow Schlatter’s very plausible suggestions that Paul is referring to the arrogantly authoritarian pneumatics of Corinth. [*Paulus der Bote Jesu* Stuttgart: Calwervereinsbuchhandlung, 1939), p. 51.] Paul centers his authority, as always, wholly in Christ (Phil. 3:7-14). The second element in the mimesis, the continuation of the apostolic task, appears with peculiar clarity here. The Philippians are being called upon to “walk” as the apostle walks (Phil. 3:17), to “stand” where he stands (Phil. 4:1). But beyond that Paul points not only to himself but also to other men who “walk thus” and are therefore objects of mimesis. The apostle has initiated a rhythm which continues and is to be continued: believing and obedient men, through their mimesis of the apostle, have become, in turn, objects of the mimesis of the church.

In 1 Cor. 4:14-17 Paul calls himself the father of the Corinthian Christians as one who has begotten them in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. The father is a figure of authority. And Timothy is being sent to Corinth to remind the Corinthian church of Paul’s “ways in Christ,” the teaching which is authoritative and shapes the life of all the churches. The father-children figure also implies the other element in mimesis, the continuation of the apostolic task; the child not only owes its origin to the father, the child lives with the father in a communion of will and activity. (Cf. Jesus’ use of the father-child image, Matt. 5:44,45.) Paul’s Corinthian children are being summoned to live and work under the cross, with its nay to human wisdom and pride, as their father Paul lives and works under the cross.

In 1 Cor. 11:1 and 1 Thess. 1:6 the element of authority in mimesis is especially strong, for here Paul bases the mimesis which he asks of the church on his own mimesis of Christ; and it is clear that Paul does not “imitate” or “emulate” Christ—he obeys Him as his Lord. (Eph. 5:1 drastically points up the element of submission to authority in mimesis; here the churches are called upon to “imitate” God Himself.) In both cases the second element, the continuation of the apostolic task, is also apparent. The Corinthian church is being called upon to become a genuinely “apostolic” and Christian church, a church bent on the salvation of men, not on religious self-fulfillment. The Thessalonian church has evinced itself as a genuinely “apostolic” church both by receiving the Word with joy and by transmitting it energetically.

The words denoting “imitation” are not very frequent in Paul or in the New Testament generally, but the thought occurs again and again. We shall confine ourselves to Paul and shall be selective even within that limitation. It is instructive to note what kind of imitation Paul does not want. He does not want men to attach themselves to his person; it is not his mission as apostle of Jesus Christ to create Paulinists (1 Cor. 1:12). Much as he values his peculiar gift of celibacy, he does not call for a blanket imitation of it. Rather he calls on each

man to serve God with the *charisma* which God has given that man (1 Cor. 7:7). Paul does not expect the weak in faith to imitate his own strong faith. Rather he deprecates any attempt to force any such mimesis upon the weak in faith. (Rom. 14,15; 1 Cor. 8)

Paul does expect the men of the church to become “fools” as he is a “fool” (1 Cor. 3:18,19; 4:10,16). He expects the church to pass judgment on the offending brother as he has already passed judgment (1 Cor. 5:3,4,13). He expects the men of the church to use their gifts, not for display but for the edification of the whole church, as he, Paul, uses his gifts (1 Cor. 14:18-20). His confrontation with the risen Lord made a worker of Paul (1 Cor. 15:10); his apostolic proclamation of the risen Lord is to make the Christians of Corinth workers (1 Cor. 15:58). [Note the verbal echo, *ekopiasa* (v. 10), *kopos* (v. 58).]

He bids the church rejoice with his own apostolic Gospel-centered rejoicing (Phil. 2:17,18). Under the apostolic Word the church of Corinth is to become so “apostolic” in dealing effectively with the misleaders of the church that the person of the apostle becomes, as it were, expendable; the apostle as person is to become *adokimos* because the apostolic Word has created men in the likeness of the apostle. (2 Cor. 13)

The apostle speaks the authoritative word concerning the dead in Christ (1 Thess. 4:13-17), a word which is essentially a word of the Lord (v. 15); the church is expected not merely to receive that word in obedient recognition of apostolic authority—the word is to live and work on from mouth to mouth, from man to man (1 Thess. 4:13-17). The apostolic word concerning the times and seasons of the Lord’s return (1 Thess. 5:1-10) is to continue *per mutuum colloquium et consolationem fratrum* (1 Thess. 5:11). In the Letter to the Colossians this mimesis is spelled out word for word: The apostle proclaims Christ, admonishing and teaching every man in all wisdom (Col. 1:27,28); in the edifying converse of the church the Word of Christ is to dwell richly; in word and song the brethren are to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom (Col. 3:16). It can hardly be accidental that Paul speaks of himself as called apostle and of the church as called saints in just two letters, the Letter to the Romans and the First Letter to the Corinthians (Rom. 1:1, 7; 1 Cor. 1:1,2). In both these letters the summons to mimesis is very pronounced. The Roman saints are to be caught up in the apostolic missionary impetus of a life lived wholly to the Crucified, with all the abnegation of human pride and self-assertion which such a life involves.

Mimesis of the apostle, in the New Testament sense, involves both the obedient recognition of apostolic authority on the part of those who are interpreting the apostolic Word and the will to continue the apostolic task under the power of the apostolic Word. Any interpretation of the apostolic Word in the apostolic church will therefore have to be determined by these twin impulses if it is to be legitimate interpretation, that is, if it would claim to interpret the apostolic Word on its own terms.

I. THE MIMESIS OF THE INTERPRETER AS RECOGNITION OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

The interpreter’s recognition of apostolic authority is, first, a recognition of the fact that the apostolate is the creation of the grace of God in Christ. This is spelled out unmistakably both in the history of the Twelve and in the history of Paul. The calling of the first four disciples, destined to be apostles (Matt. 4: 18-22), is the first item under the rubric. “The kingdom of the heavens is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). “Kingdom of the heavens” is, by Jesus’ own definition, pure grace: royal largesse to beggars, comfort to mourners, the gift of God’s new world to the meek who look with serene confidence to God, the free bestowal of righteousness upon men who hunger and thirst for it and must needs die without it (Matt. 5:3-6). The calling of Matthew the publican to discipleship and to the apostolate (Matt. 9:9) is so purely gracious that it is an offense to the “righteous” (Matt. 9:10-13). “Freely ye have received,” Jesus tells the Twelve (Matt. 10:8). Paul cannot speak of his apostolate without speaking of the grace of God. His apostolate has its origin solely in that grace (Rom. 1:5; Gal. 1:13-16; Eph. 3:2-11) and is sustained by that grace. “By the grace of God I am what I am.” (1 Cor 15:9)

The absolute, divine character of this grace is seen in the fact that it comes to the apostles as to judged and doomed men. The Twelve came to Jesus with the Baptist’s proclamation still ringing in their ears. They had heard him pronounce the threat of God’s wrath upon the priestly nobility and upon the pietists of their people;

they had heard the Baptist pronounce the doom of God's wrath upon man as man ("offspring of vipers"), a doom from which the mere fact of their descent from Abraham could not shield them (Matt. 3:9). Matthew describes the coming of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus as the light of God's new creation breaking upon a doomed and hopeless people "sitting in darkness . . . in the land and shadow of death" (Matt. 4:16). And the story of the Passion is the apostles' *confiteor*; they had all, by their flight and dereliction, denied the Christ before men and could in justice look for nothing but that the Christ would deny them before His Father (Matt. 10: 33). It was absolute and incredible grace that He should, instead, call them His disciples and His brethren and send them out to make disciples of all nations. (Matt. 28:7,10,19,20)

For Paul, above all men, the apostolate was pure, incredible grace. He calls his coming into the apostolate a violent and unnatural birth, against nature (1 Cor. 15:8). He knew himself to be one of God's Onesimi, a runaway slave who deserved punishment, for he had persecuted the church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). For him, too, the call to the apostolate was the miracle of God's creative light shining, uncaused, out of darkness. (2 Cor. 4:6)

If the apostolate is the creation of God's grace in Christ, it is also the vehicle of that grace. "Freely give" is Jesus' word to the Twelve, who have received freely (Matt. 10:8). Paul becomes the Lord's chosen vessel to bear His name abroad, that only name by which men must be saved (Acts 9: 15; cf. Gal. 1:15,16). The authority of the apostle is therefore authority freely given, conferred authority, and it remains essentially Messianic authority. Jesus makes His disciples fishers of men (Matt. 4:19); He gives the Twelve authority (Matt. 10:1); He gives His apostle the keys of the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19). Thus their presence is the presence of the Christ of God; whosoever receives them receives the compassionate Shepherd of Israel and receives the God who sent Him (Matt. 10:40). Paul can boast only of the authority which the Lord has given him (2 Cor. 10:8); because authority has been given the apostle, the Christ speaks in him (2 Cor. 13:3) and works through him. (Rom. 15:18)

The apostles represent and present the Christ; in them and through them men are confronted with the ultimate Word of God. No man can attain to that; it is the recreative grace of God that makes them vehicles of revelation. The Spirit is bestowed on them, and thus, and only thus, do they become mediators of divine revelation. (Since the gift of the Spirit will be further discussed below, a mere citation of some of the principal passages may suffice here: Luke 24:48,49; Acts 1:4,8;2; John 14:16,17; 25,26; 16:7-15; 20:21-23.) The interpreter, in recognizing apostolic authority, remains aware of this. In the apostolic writings he is dealing not with the works of religious geniuses who have achieved breath-taking religious insights, but with the words of doomed, forgiven, and inspired men, men in whose hearts the creative grace of God has shined to enable them to bring to the world the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (The first four chapters of the First Letter to the Corinthians alone ought to have banished the term "religious genius" from our theological vocabulary.)

THE "WUNDERBAR" CHARACTER OF THE APOSTOLIC WORD

The interpreter's recognition of apostolic authority is therefore a recognition of the "wunderbar" character of the apostolic Word, using the word "*wunderbar*" in the sense which Von Hofmann gave it in his *Biblische Hermeneutik*, [*"Alles Geschehen und alles geschichtliches Erzeugnis, welches Verwirklichung des wesentlichen Willens Gottes ist, nennen wir wunderbar, weil in Widerstreit stehend mit der natürlichen Entwicklung des menschlichen Wesens, also alle Heilsgeschichte und deren Erzeugnis"* (p.35).] a sense not really adequately reproduced by "miraculous." One might describe it thus: "*Wunderbar*" describes that gracious intervention of God which transcends all the possibilities of human historical development and can therefore reverse the fatal cadence of fallen man's thinking, willing, and doing and can rescue man from fallen man's doom.

Proksch in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* has correctly oriented a theological consideration of the miracle and the miraculous by subsuming the miracle under the larger theme of creation. [*Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Guetersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1950), pp. 474,475.] He associates the miracle in this context

of creation not only with the creative act of God but also with the Spirit and the Word of God. [A fifth member of Proksch's creation complex, the wisdom of God, has not been utilized in this discussion, although it, too, could be documented in the New Testament proclamation of the Christ (Matt. 11:19; 1 Cor. 1:24,30; Col. 2:3; Apoc. 5:12), in the words of the apostles (Luke 21:15; 1 Cor. 2:6,7; Col. 1:28), and in the descriptions of the apostolic church (Acts 6:3,10; 1 Cor. 12:8; Eph. 1:8,17; 3:10; Col. 1:9; 3:16; 4:5; James 1:5; 3:13-18).] We can take the full measure of what is meant by "*wunderbar*" only when we consider God the Creator of the world and the God who does wonders and the God whose Spirit is the decisively creative force in all that happens in all history and the God whose Word endures and does its appointed work when all flesh fails and dies. All these elements (creation, miracle, Spirit, Word) are present in the existence of the apostles of Jesus Christ and mark them and their words as "*wunderbar*."

The apostolate is a creation of God, and the apostolic Word mediates God's new creation. Jesus "made" the Twelve (Mark 3:14). Mark uses the same word for the appointment of the Twelve that the Septuagint uses in the first verse of Genesis. The risen Christ breathed upon them (John 20:22). John here uses the word that is used in Gen 2:7 to describe the imparting of the breath of life to Adam. Paul likens his call to the apostolate to the *Fiat lux* of the first creation and knows himself to be not only the recipient but also the transmitter of that light. (2 Cor. 4:6)

God is the God who does wonders; His anointed King is the "wonderful" Counselor (Is. 9:5), and the incarnate Son is attested to men by mighty deeds and wonders and sign (Acts 2:22). The same nimbus of wondrousness is about the apostle; he does the wondrous deeds that are an enacted proclamation of the presence and power of the kingdom of God (Matt. 10:8). The Christ works through him "in the power of signs and wonders" (Rom. 15:18). God attests him with signs and wonders and manifold mighty deeds (Heb. 2:4). Where the apostle does his church-creating work, the signs of the apostle are wrought. (2 Cor. 12:12)

"Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit; they are created" (Ps. 104:30). The Spirit of God is present at the first creation, moving in creative energy over the waters (Gen. 1:2); the Spirit of God is in the people of God (Is. 63:10ff.); the Spirit is upon the Messiah (Is. 11:1 ff.) and on the Servant of God (Is. 42:1; 61:1; Luke 4:16 ff.). And the Spirit is in the apostles. They have received the Spirit (John 20:21,22; Acts 2:4) in fulfillment of the promises of their Lord (John 14: 16,17; 25,26; 16:7-15; Acts 1:4,8); and they bestow the Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:15-17; 19:6; Gal. 3:2). Their ministry is a ministry of the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:6,8)

The Word of God is a wondrous power; by it the heavens were made (Ps. 33:8,9); by it man lives (Deut. 8:3). It endures when all flesh withers as the grass and dies (Is. 40:6-8), and it surely carries out the purposes of God (Is. 55:10,11). The Word of the apostles confronts men with the kingdom of God and spells "peace" or "judgment" according as men accept it or reject it (Matt. 10:7-15). The miracle of Pentecost, which sets them to work in Jerusalem and in the wide world, is a miracle of tongues, a gift of language from on high (Acts 2). Their word is henceforth the working Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). Their Gospel is not a human production (Gal. 1:11) but the power of God Himself for the deliverance of men (Rom. 1:16), with all the inescapable energy of divine grace and divine judgment in it. (2 Cor. 2:15 f.)

All that asserts God's sovereign freedom in His relationship to the world and man (His unique creative power, His miracles, His Spirit, His Word), all these are present in the apostolate. The apostle is "*wunderbar*," an embodiment of God's wondrous and gracious countermovement against man's sin and doom. The apostle is not of this world; he is so different from the world that the world must needs hate him (John 17:14; 15:18,19). It is with the apostles' Word, their wondrous Word, that the interpreter has to do.

For all their wondrousness the apostles have no halos; they appear in history in the form of the servant. The sending of the Twelve confronts men with the kingdom of God, which is transcendently "*wunderbar*." And yet Jesus sends them out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matt. 10:16). As such—exposed and defenseless, going against the grain of the world, as sure of incurring contradiction as was their Lord as such they are the vehicles of the Kingdom (Matt. 10:7), the bringers of peace or judgment upon men (Matt. 10:13,15); as such they speak a Spirit-wrought Word (Matt. 10:19,20); as such they are the very presence of the Christ of God (Matt. 10:40). This servant's form conceals the wondrousness of the apostolate; but it also, and primarily,

reveals it, for the divine strength is made perfect in their human weakness. What is now hidden in the lowliness of the apostolic mission shall with divine inevitability be revealed (Matt. 10:26). Therefore Paul “boasts” in his weakness and his sufferings, for he sees in them the power of the God who works by contrarities (2 Cor. 1:9) and experiences in them the indwelling power of the Christ (2 Cor. 12:9,10). Just because his apostolic Word is not a word made strong by the devices of human art, he knows that the power of God is in it (1 Cor. 2:3-5). Just because he knows his Word to be innocent of rhetoric, he knows that it is a potent Word, a Spirit-taught vehicle of revelation. (1 Cor. 2:10-13)

THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF THE APOSTOLIC WORD

God characteristically manifests Himself in history in the form of the servant. He chooses the least of all peoples as recipients and vehicles of His revelation. He is heard not in the earthquake but in the still small voice. The final coming of His kingdom is likened to the rolling of a “stone not made with hands,” unimpressive in comparison with the fearful splendor of the great colossus that represents the kingdoms of this world. His anointed King appears as a shoot from the stump of Jesse—he comes from the judged and ruined house of David—and does his work as the Servant-Messiah, and the apostles who speak His Word appear in history as the world’s scrapings and rinsings. God enters, really enters, into the inglorious history of fallen man.

The essential counterpart to the recognition of the “*wunderbar*” character of the apostolic word is, therefore, the recognition of its historical character. The interpreter recognizes the historical uniqueness of the apostolate. The Christ appears with historical uniqueness at a certain time and place, born in Bethlehem under Augustus and dying in Jerusalem under Pontius Pilate. His apostles share in that historical uniqueness. They stand at a certain date on a mountain in the regions of Caesarea Philippi and confess Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, the Son of the living God. That confession has about it the wondrousness of a divine act. It rests on what their fathers did not give them, what flesh and blood could not give them, it rests on the revelation of the Father in heaven. But this revelation is not a religious abstraction divorced from history. The disciples confess Jesus as “the Son of the living God,” as the living, reacting, and acting God; their confession has its root and basis in a history which they have witnessed. It has been given them to see in the words and deeds of the Servant-Messiah, in the contradicted Christ, who must endure the blasphemy of men, the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God.

The corollary to the recognition of the historical uniqueness of the apostolate is the recognition of the witness character of the apostolic Word: “You shall be witnesses of me” (Acts 1:8). The apostles are witnesses! They are witnesses to acts of God, to facts in history, and these acts and facts constitute the revelation of God. This comes out clearly in the words of Paul just when he is speaking of the most incredible fact of all, the crucially significant fact, the fact of the resurrection. If the fact is not fact, if God has not acted, there is no revelation. The apostolic proclamation is empty, and the faith of the church has lost its content and is vain (1 Cor. 15:14,17). The apostles are no apostles but false witnesses against God if they attribute to God an act in history which He has not performed (1 Cor. 15:15). They are not harmlessly deluded men; they stand exposed as impious men and as blasphemers of God. The task of the interpreter is therefore not a search for a spiritual reality behind and beyond the historical reality communicated by the word of human witnesses, but the apprehension of the reality, witnessed and attested by men with eyes illumined by the Spirit in words taught by the Spirit, given in the historically conditioned Word in its witness to the historical mighty acts of God. Apostolic theology is essentially a theology of recital.

The interpreter therefore recognizes the historically conditioned human Word as the fit and adequate vehicle of divine revelation; the same condescending grace of God which enters human history also uses the plain human Word for the witness to, and the interpretation of, that entry into history (1 Cor. 2:1). That the human Word is the fit and adequate vehicle of God’s revelation is seen most simply in the fact that men are responsible before it. It saves them, or it dooms them, and the doom is their guilt. “Your blood be upon your heads” (Acts 18:6; cf. Z0:26). The modern notion that any human word is necessarily a distortion of the divine revelation which it mediates is not shared by the apostles and prophets.

THE INTERPENETRATION OF THE “WUNDERBAR” AND THE HISTORICAL

The “*wunderbar*” counter-movement of God, His gracious “nevertheless” over against the failure of man’s history, is not a casual or intermittent intrusion into history but is woven into the texture of history, so that miracle and “naked history” interpenetrate. The uniquely creative act of God stands not only at the beginning of the world and of history, when God creates the world, life, and man (Gen. 1:1,21,27). It runs through history and calls into being His chosen people (Is. 43:1,15), sons and daughters who are called by His name (Is. 43:7). The God who created heaven and earth creates the new age which dawns with the advent of the liberator of Israel, Cyrus (Is. 48:6,7). He creates the clean heart (Ps. 51:12). His Messianic salvation breaks upon His people like a new first day (Is. 9:2; Matt. 4:16). The light of the new creation irradiates the heart of the apostle (2 Cor. 4:6), and the apostolic Word of reconciliation creates new men in Christ. (2 Cor. 5:17)

The miraculous, which only the omnipotence of God can produce, is not, in the Biblical view of it, confined to the miracles that stand out in high relief from the surface of normal history. God’s intricate and hidden ways in guiding history are in themselves a miracle (Is. 28:29; 29:14), inaccessible to the probing mind of man. God’s anointed King, who is to sit on David’s throne in history, is a Miracle-Counselor (Is. 9:5). The life of the incarnate Son of God bears a strangely double aspect; it is both the history of a first-century man who could be contradicted and destroyed and the Word of God made flesh, whose manifested Godhead men might see in faith (John 1:14; 12:37-40). The life of the apostles bear this same double aspect (2 Cor. 6:8-10); it is the defamed and contradicted apostle, the apostle who has been humiliated before the face of his church, who points to the miraculous “signs” which he has wrought in Corinth (2 Cor. 12:12); miracle and history are intermeshed and intertwined.

Likewise the wondrous operation of God’s Spirit is not limited to primordial creation (Gen. 1:2) or eschatological renewal (Ezek. 36:26,27; Is. 32:15). The Spirit works in history and through history, the history of a Joshua, a Gideon, or a Saul (Num. 27:18; John 6:34; 1 Sam. 11:6). The Spirit enters the arena where nation contends against nation and “competes” with the men and horses of Egypt (Is. 31:3). In the power of the Spirit the Messiah of the Lord and the servant of the Lord do their work in a real and human history (Is. 11:1-10; Is. 42:1). In the power of the Spirit Jesus of Nazareth enters Israel’s history and deals with Israel’s agony (Luke 4:14-21). The Spirit comes upon the apostles and the apostolic church and works there in a history open to the eyes of men. “This thing was not done in a corner,” Paul tells Agrippa (Acts 26:26). The Spirit separates Paul and Barnabas for their mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2) and guides Paul and Silas through Asia to Troas (Acts 16:7). The Spirit sets elders over the churches of Ephesus (Acts 20:28). And the Spirit binds inspired men to history. The apostles, filled with the Spirit, speak of the mighty deeds of God, speak of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:11,22); Stephen, full of the Spirit, recites the history of Israel (Acts 7:2-53,55). According to John, the distinguishing mark of the Spirit of God is that He binds men to history; He confesses Jesus as the Christ “who has come in the flesh”—a theological flight from the Jesus of history is not the work of the Spirit of God. (1 John 4:1-3)

The word of God is the instrument by which the world was made (Ps. 33:6-9); and that Word runs through history, creatively and formatively making history. God’s name, God’s Law, God’s promise, these make the history of Israel and determine the history of the nations. The anointed of the Lord and the Servant of the Lord carry out the Lord’s purposes by the Word (Is. 11:4; Is. 50:4,5,10). The Messiah in history works by the Word. When He proclaims the great year of jubilee, that gracious year of God begins: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). His Word remits the sin of man and restores the ruined body of man (Matt. 8:16). He is, in the flesh, as man’s human and humane high priest, the Word (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1). And if we would give the Acts of the Apostles a title which Luke himself would sanction, that title would have to be: “The Word of the Lord grew and prevailed” (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20), for that is Luke’s own caption over the story of how an obscure sect spread from Jerusalem to Rome.

In the apostolate, as in all the works of God, that which is numinously wonderful and that which is intelligible as “plain history” interpenetrate. The “*wunderbar*” in the Biblical record of God’s revelatory words

and deeds asserts God's freedom of creative determination at every point in history. "He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" holds for every event in history. The interpreter as "imitator" of the apostle is therefore perpetually reminded by the immanent miraculousness of all that takes place under the sun that he must carry on his mimesis in the submission of faith, at every point, in the presence of the creatively active power of God, who calls the things that are not into being. On the other hand, the down-to-earth historical character of the mighty deeds of God serves as a perpetual reminder that his faith is not a vague and mystical absorption into the Godhead or an ecstatic intercourse with noble religious ideas but is, rather, relatedness to the concrete, historical redemptive action of God.

The interpreter is not critic; there is no legitimate technique of historical-theological inquiry (and the interpreter of Sacred Scripture is always both historian and theologian) by means of which the interpreter can separate the miraculous from the historical or can penetrate beyond the "*wunderbar*" into naked history without emptying this history of that which gives it significance. There is no place where the interpreter can stand (if he is acting in mimesis of the apostle) and exert critical leverage. The interpreter is aware of the fact that what is involved here is not the *Weltbild* or *Weltanschauung* of the men of the Bible but the theology of the Bible. The question is: Is God shut out from history, or is He in it, really in it, and free to reveal Himself in it? Is He the First and the Last, or did some nameless prophet merely conceive of Him as First and Last? Is He Lord of history or captive to laws of history? Is He both Creator and Redeemer? Is His grace an absolute grace, sovereignly invading the life of man and the world's history, or is it, after all, in some sort dependent on man? Or to put the question in another form: How seriously do we take the incarnation?

[L.S. Thornton, in his *Revelation and the Modern World* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1950), p. 16, arrives by quite a different route at a conclusion very similar to the one stated above. He deprecates "any attempt to distinguish the essence of revelation from the sacred literature in which it is enshrined." All such attempts, he says, "involve us in a process of discrimination by which we sit in judgment upon Scripture. . . . It is for the Creator to decide in what manner He will reveal Himself; and God being what He is, the manner of revelation is not a matter upon which man can safely form decisions. . . ."]

Ernst Fuchs has called the historical-critical method "*die altkirchlichen, bzw. mittelalterlichen Bibelauslegung*." As the tradition in practice outweighed the authority of Scripture, "*so ordnete die historischkritische Bibelauslegung die Bibel der Geschichte unter und nahm der Schrift damit das Prädikat ihrer Weltüberlegenheit, die Heiligkeit*" (*Hermeneutik* (Bad Canstatt: R. Muellerschoen Verlag, 1958), pp. 159, 160).

"MIMESIS" AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Since the apostolic witness is witness to a history interpreted by the Old Testament, mimesis as recognition of apostolic authority necessarily involves a recognition of the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God. The interpreter sees the Old Testament in apostolic perspective, that is, from the vantage point of its fulfillment in Jesus. He thus recognizes the continuity and unity of God's speaking in both Testaments, its essential Christocentricity.

This is a large topic, involving a host of problems which cannot be dealt with here. But this much may and must be said: The apostles (and the apostles' Lord), both by their use of the Old Testament and by their explicit utterances concerning it, make it plain where the interpreter whose work is a mimesis of the apostles must stand over against the Old Testament Scriptures. Both Jesus and His apostles perceive in this book the voice and will of the God who has in the last days spoken in a Son. Jesus is consciously the Fulfiller of the ancient Word of God, and the apostolic witness to the Christ is unequivocally a witness "according to the Scriptures." Both Jesus and His apostle make it clear also that they are not simply equating the Old Testament with the New Testament Word. The voice of Jesus is not merely another prophetic voice; His is the voice of the Son, who for the last time calls upon God's people to give God what is God's—and dies in delivering that summons (Matt. 21:33-40). Paul says of the Old Testament that it has power to make a man wise unto salvation

“through faith in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:15). The Old Testament has its limitation and its abiding validity as Promise, as revelation of the Covenant God in His motion toward the incarnate Christ.

The continuity and unity of God’s speaking in both Testaments is for the apostles a given certainty. If modern Old Testament exegesis has rarefied the nexus between the Testaments to the point where it bears only a shadowy resemblance to that massive and living connection posited by the apostles; if it has made dubious and problematical what is for the apostles certain and axiomatic, the methodological question inevitably arises: If modern methodology in Old Testament exegesis has brought men to the point where they can no longer “imitate” the apostles, may it not be that we are in the last stages of a grandiose aberration, comparable to the age-long domination of the fourfold sense in patristic and medieval exegesis?

Whatever one may think of Wilhelm Vischer’s attempt to interpret the Old Testament “Messianologically” with resolute consistency, [*Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, I (Munche: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1935).] he has raised the question of the nexus between the Testaments in a pointed and not-to-be-evaded way. [Ibid., p.32: “*Eine Kirche, die den Wert des alttestamentlichen Zeugnisses gegenüber dem neutestamentlichen herabsetzt, glaubt den Aposteln gerade das Entscheidende ihrer Botschaft nicht und hort auf, ‘christlich’ zu sein. Denn das Entscheidende der apostolischen Verkündigung ist nun einmal, Jesus sei der Christus des Alten Testaments.*” Pp. 33,34: “. . . der Christus Jesus des Neuen Testaments steht tatsächlich im Fluchtpunkt der alttestamentlichen Perspektive. Nun scheint aber die moderne Bibelwissenschaft eindeutig und endgültig das Gegenteil bewiesen zu haben. . . Die Frage ist jedoch, ob nicht die Methoden und Ergebnisse dieser Forschung begründete Zweifel gegen sich erwecken. Steht nicht diese moderne Forschung, mehr als bei der Auslegung alter Texte erlaubt ist, im Banne einer modernen Wissenschaftslehre? Tragt sie nicht fremde Gesichtspunkte ein?” Cf. also pp. 35,36.] And it can hardly be said that the challenge of Von Hofmann (that we follow the apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament with a real sympathy for what is essentially characteristic of it and derive our hermeneutics for Old Testament interpretation from it) has yet been really met. [p. 11: “. . . Unsere Schriftwissenschaft, soweit sie das Alte Testament betrifft, hat keine höhere Aufgabe als die, zu einer wissenschaftlich begründeten Methode der Schriftauslegung zu gelangen, vermöge deren wir mit Bewusstsein und unter Aufzeigung der von den Aposteln unausgesprochenen Vermittlung ebenso auslegen, wie die Apostel ausgelegt haben, welche es unvermittelterweise thaten.”

THE DIACONIC CHARACTER OF “MIMESIS”

Mimesis, as a recognition of apostolic authority, involves a recognition of the diaconic character of all apostolic speaking. The *genus proximum* in the definition of the work of the interpreter of the Bible is therefore not some branch of scholarship, some form of *Wissenschaft*, but ministry. Jesus put the imprint of ministry upon the apostolate once for all when He described His own Messianic mission as ministry (Matt. 20:25-28), and the apostles in turn put that same diaconic imprint upon the apostolic church. [E.g., Eph. 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10,11; 1 Cor. 16:15; Heb. 6:10.] A life of ministry is, as Jesus’ word indicates, abnormal for man as man; it goes against the grain of our manhood. The life of the interpreter is therefore a life of repentance, a radical aversion from self and denial of self. It is a life in Christ, a life of faith in Him who loved us and gave Himself for us in a ministry carried out to the utmost. It is a life in the Spirit, who is given for ministry (1 Cor. 12). In a word, it is a life in the church which is upbuilding itself in love.

Ministry is personal; it is a giving of *oneself* to others. One may expect of the interpreter therefore that he submit himself wholly to the Word, with which he deals. One may not expect of the interpreter an impersonal and iron objectivity or a gray neutrality over against his materials and over against those whom he serves. His heart must needs burn within him. While ministry is personal in this sense, it is also selfless. No professional vanity, no passion for professional acceptance, no striving for “intellectual respectability” keeps the interpreter from going his diaconic way; he is ready to risk contempt and endure professional obscurity for the sake of ministry to the church.

Ministry is toil and labor (2 Cor. 6:3-5; 11:28,29). To conceive of interpretation as being, first and foremost, a ministry is not to enter a plea for what has been called holy shortcuts in interpretation. Ministry is the motivation for the severest kind of scholarly discipline. Interpretation gets its scholarly character from its

diaconic nature; it is scholarly and “scientific” just because it fulfills its diaconic function wholeheartedly and scrupulously according to the norms dictated by its materials. However, the Pastoral Letters constantly remind the interpreter that he need not and cannot consider it a part of his duty to dispute endlessly about every wrongheaded and wronghearted interpretation that demands to be heard in Christendom. (E.g., 2 Tim. 2:14 ff.)

If the interpreter is a minister, diaconic restatement of the Word he has heard, restatement in terms of here and now, is part of his task. The interpreter, of course, ministers in meekness and commits the success of the Word to Him who gave it. He will not seek to storm the citadel of the modern mind with weapons his Lord has not allowed him. Nor will he abridge or distort the apostolic Word in order to conciliate prejudices which are rooted in man’s proud rejection of God. But that aside, the apostolic message becomes, since it is received in faith, the interpreter’s own. He is one with it and therefore speaks it to men in terms native to them and so seeks by all means to save some. [One might raise the question whether *diakonia* does not impose the duty to be brief; the compressed and pregnant eloquence of the New Testament is in striking contrast to the loquacity of its interpreters. Where is Bengel’s laconic successor?

II. THE INTERPRETER’S *MIMESIS* AS A CONTINUATION OF THE APOSTOLIC TASK

The task of the apostles is the fundamental and normative initiation of that rhythm of hearing and telling which is the history of the church. [I owe the image to Werner Elert, *Der Christliche Glaube*, 3d ed. (Hamburg: FurcheVerlag, 1956), p. 174.] The apostles receive the Word from their Lord in order that they may transmit it; their hearers receive the Word from them in order that the Word (still the Word of the Lord) may sound forth from them (1 Thess, 1:6-8). The risen Christ’s outpouring of the Spirit upon the Twelve is the first beat of the New Testament music of the inspiration of all flesh (Acts 2:17,33). The Good Shepherd (John 10:11), who remains always the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), makes the apostle the shepherd over His sheep and lambs (John 21:16,17). This shepherd-rhythm continues in the church which the apostolic Word calls into being. In it the elders are shepherds over the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Eph. 4:11), and their tireless shepherd love seeks and saves the lost lives and works on in the whole church, where brother seeks and saves his brother. (Matt. 18:12-15; James 5:20)

The ministering Christ (Matt. 20:28) creates apostles who are ministers (2 Cor. 4:1; 6:3f.; 11:8); their Word fits out the saints for their task of ministry (Eph. 4:12). Christ is Witness (John 18:37; Rev. 1:5; 1 Tim. 6:13); His apostles are witnesses; the apostolic church is a church of witnesses (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; 6:9; etc.). Christ is the Light of the world (John 8:12; 12:46); through Him the apostles are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14; 2 Cor. 4:6); and the members of the apostolic church are shining luminaries in the world, as they hold fast the Word of life, which they have received (Phil. 2:15,16). The Christ has the keys (Rev. 1:18; the apostle of Christ looses and binds (Matt. 16:19); the apostolic church looses and binds with divine authority (Matt. 18:18; 1 Cor. 5:2-5). The Christ is the Rock, the Foundation (1 Peter 5:4; 1 Cor. 3:10,11); the bearers of His Word, apostle and prophet, are the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20-22); on them the church rests, not as an inert mass but as living stones built into a growing temple. (1 Peter 5:5; Eph. 2:20-22)

The interpreter’s task has its place in this rhythm of hearing and telling. The interpreter hears the apostolic Word and the Old Testament Word, which is the indispensable background and presupposition of the word of the apostles. He hears in the New Testamental sense of the word “hearing”—he hears and accepts in the pure passivity of faith and in the resolute and active reversal of repentance; his hearing is “the obedience of faith.” (Cf. G. Kittel in Th. W. I, 220,221.) Such hearing of necessity leads to telling; “We cannot but speak” is the inner dynamic of this perpetual rhythm in the church. The prodigal variety of verbs of telling in the New Testament is an indication of the all-embracing character of the apostolic proclamation. (Friedrich lists 32 synonyms for “preaching,” Th. W. III, 701,702.) The Word, which they proclaim, wholly claims the whole life of man in a graciously total confiscation. It indicates also how comprehensive the task of the interpreter as *mimesis* is. The interpreter’s work of keeping the church in vital contact with the primary impulse of the apostolic Word may be roughly defined as a threefold one: it serves to maintain the genuinely apostolic rhythm

for the edification of the church; it serves to extend that rhythm for the enlargement of the church; and it serves to correct that rhythm, where it falters or grows false, for the continual reformation of the church. The interpreter has need of grace, above all men in the church; his is the high privilege and the awesome responsibility of being pastor, missionary, and reformer all in one. And in all three of his functions there must be the characteristically apostolic strain of doxology.

The interpreter cannot shake off his fearful sense of responsibility; but he can take comfort in the fact that he is not alone. He “comprehends with all the saints.” He has fathers who were before him and brothers who stand beside him. He can look back over the history of interpretation and find good guidance there, not least in the record of men’s tragic aberrations in their hearing and telling of the Word. The fact that these aberrations more often than not stemmed from the unquestioned *a prioris* of the times should make him critical of the *a prioris* of his own time and should make him scrutinize his own with a wary eye. He can hear in the Confessions the voice of his fathers in the faith, to whom was given grace to hear again the primal apostolic and prophetic Word and to tell it with such assured clarity and force as to put all succeeding generations in their debt. He can acknowledge the debt and document his gratitude only in using these confessions as they themselves want to be used, as interpretations of the Word of God. (“*Ein Bekenntnis steht nur insoweit in Geltung, als es die Funktion der Schriftauslegung auszuüben vermag.*” G. Gloege, in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d ed., Vol. I, Col. 997. More should be said on the place of confessions in the work of the Lutheran interpreters than the limitations of this paper permit.)

The interpreter has brothers beside him. He serves them and is served by them. Since the interpreter’s ministry is, of all the ministries in the church, characterized by the most immediate and intense pre-occupation with the apostolic Word, which determines the whole life movement of the church, he is in a position to serve, challenge, and correct the systematician, the preacher, the catechist, the hymnodist, and the liturgist. But on the other hand, since his is the most “theoretic” of the ministries, he can and should be served, challenged, and corrected by those whose ministries are more directly diaconic and doxological in character, for each of these also functions as interpreter and is peculiarly conditioned for his work as interpreter by the task he performs in the church. While the interpreter cannot compromise the apostolic witness in the interests of the supposed needs or a desiderated function of the contemporary church, the genuine needs of the church and the claims of the genuine function of the church can and should aid and guide him in his apprehension of the Word of God.

* * * * *

What, then, is the posture of the interpreter? It is the posture of the obedient hearer and the overawed beholder. He hears the verdict of the righteous God of the Law without evasion or attempts at self-defense; he hears with all defenses down. He looks upon the God of grace as He reveals Himself in the face of His Son and says with Job: “Now mine eye seeth Thee; wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:5,6)

If he abhors himself, he is set free for God, and his posture is the posture of adoration. His task of interpretation is a priestly ministration of the Word. He sees in the apostolate the vehicle by which God’s last Word comes to him, the token and evidence of God’s infinite condescension, a manifesting of God’s impetus toward incarnation, and he glorifies the God who has given such authority to men.

His heart burns within him as he hears the Word, and he hastens to tell his brethren. The vision that overawes him also sets him to work; like Paul, he is not disobedient to the heavenly vision. His posture is the posture of ministry.

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