

Luther and James: Did Luther Use the Historical-Critical Method? *By*

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By Way of Introduction

One Thousand nine hundred and eighty three will mark the 500th anniversary of the birth and Baptism of Dr. Martin Luther! This anniversary will be observed by Lutherans and other Christians around the world as the LUTHER JUBILEE YEAR. What splendid opportunities we shall have to thank and praise God for giving to us, and to the whole Christian Church, this great man of faith. Now, I'm sure, Luther would be astonished, if not embarrassed, by all the events and activities planned in his honor. Theologians from all over the world will travel thousands of miles to attend conferences and seminars. Scholars will publish countless numbers of books and articles about Luther's life and work. Governments, both democratic and totalitarian, will be issuing commemorative postage stamps to mark the event. Museums, art galleries, and choral groups will feature his artistic and musical contributions. Thousands of people will visit Germany to see the places most intimately associated with Luther's life and career. Celebrations planned for in Marxist countries and elsewhere will call attention to the social and political dimensions of his work. People in all walks of life will again read his writings and assess his impact not only on the holy Christian Church and its theology, but also on the learning, culture, and social structures of Western Civilization.

Now a 500th anniversary of an event or of an individual is certainly a noteworthy occasion. Few men are remembered for 500 years. But when the anniversary is that of an eminent man of faith, then there certainly are abundant reasons for rejoicing and celebrating. For us 1983 is another one of the commemorative years! The years 1967, 1977, 1979, and 1980 were significant years for Lutherans to reflect on their confessional heritage in celebrating the anniversaries of the *95 Theses* (1517), the *Formula of Concord* (1577), the *Small and Large Catechisms* (1529), and the *Augsburg Confession* (1530) and the *Book of Concord* (1580). Activities during 1983, even when misdirected, will still constitute a great tribute to the genius of the man whose name we Lutherans bear. But Luther would have sought no such praises or recognitions. If Luther, himself, could have advised us on how best to remember him, it would surely have echoed the counsel of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS, THOSE WHO SPOKE TO YOU THE WORD OF GOD: CONSIDER THE OUTCOME OF THEIR LIFE, AND IMITATE THEIR FAITH." (Heb. 13:7,8) During this 500th anniversary year, Luther will often be criticized for his bitter remarks against the Jews. His little booklet, *The Jews and Their Lies*¹ will be studied and quoted in an attempt to try to make of Luther a kind of "pre-Hitler." What will often be forgotten is the fact that Luther also wrote another book concerning the Jews. This one he entitled, *Jesus Christ, Born a Jew*.²

Another area of great concern in this anniversary year will be Luther's approach towards Holy Scripture. An attempt will also be made to show Luther as the patron-saint of the historical-critical method of Bible study.³ This paper will try to set forth Luther's real position on Holy Scripture. In considering Luther's attitude towards the Book of James, we will see Luther's true position in regard to God's Word. The basic principle which underlies Luther's approach to Scripture is: "If it is God's Word, if God said it, then we are to trust it without question, even if we do not understand it."⁴

It is primarily as the one who spoke to us the Word of God that Martin Luther must be remembered in this jubilee year. For neither pope nor emperor, reason nor emotion, fear of loss nor promise of gain could displace or overrule the Word of God as the norm for Luther's life, faith, and thought.

The Word of God, as Luther learned to emphasize with power and conviction, is centered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ who justifies the ungodly by grace for Christ's sake through faith. Such a man was Martin Luther. St. John prophesied concerning him as "another angel flying in the midheavens, having an everlasting Gospel to proclaim as Gospel to all who dwell on the face of the earth and to every nation and tribe and language and people, saying with a loud voice: FEAR GOD AND GIVE ALL GLORY TO HIM, because there will come the hour of his judgment and worship the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountain of waters!" (Rev. 14:6,7)

Luther and James

Luther, at the Diet of Worms in 1521, boldly and courageously confessed his faith and his allegiance to the Bible. He proclaimed:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captivated to the Word of God. I cannot, and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.⁵

Several important things are immediately apparent in this confession. For Luther there could be no contradictions in the Bible. He sets the Bible against popes and councils, (two high authorities for the Roman Church of his day) who have often erred and contradict. Luther's faith was founded on the written words, the texts of the Bible, the propositional statements of holy Scripture. This written Word, the Scriptures, he calls the Word of God.

However, one does not have to read very far in Luther to soon find critical comments by him about the Book of James. He says, for example:

I will not have him (James) in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases.⁶
Only the papists accept James on account of the righteousness of works, but my opinion is that it is not the writings of an apostle. Some day I will use James to fire my stove.⁷

We should throw the Epistle of James out of this school (Wittenberg) for it doesn't amount to much.⁸ These comments of Luther have become a favorite of liberal Bible scholars in an attempt to demonstrate that Luther had a liberal and loose attitude towards Biblical inerrancy and authority. Voigt, for example, writes: "Luther could not have regarded Holy Scripture word for word the product of the Holy Ghost, since he felt at liberty to express the most liberal views on whole books of the Bible."⁹

Krentz makes the following remarks concerning Luther's attitude towards the Scriptures:

Luther's evangelical canon for the canon is "*Was Christum treibet*" in his Preface to the New Testament and the prefaces to the individual books. James, Jude, Hebrews, and the Apocalypse fall short of the standard, John, Romans, Galatians, and I Peter form the core and are superior to other books. Some feel that Luther here introduced a subjective element as justification for present day content criticism (*Sachkritik*).¹⁰

However, Luther's attitude towards James proves the exact opposite of what the liberal Bible scholar wants to prove. The primary question for Luther was not "Is this part of the inspired Bible false?" but, "Is this a part of the inspired Bible?"¹¹

Luther had to face the whole issue of canonicity and reevaluate the question of what books belong to the Bible. The Latin Bible, the *Vulgate*, contained the Apocrypha Books of the Old Testament. In some Medieval manuscripts of the Bible we often find included a 5th Gospel, the Gospel of Nicodemus. Some printed German Bibles, before Luther's, had the Epistle to the Laodiceans.

Luther, therefore, renewed the old distinction, never forgotten in the Church, between those books which had always been "unanimously confessed" or were "to be read in the church" (1 Th 5:27; Col 4:16), and those books whose apostolic genuineness or authority had been spoken against (2 Th 3:17).

His reason for reopening the question of canonicity was not at all subjective, or arbitrary, and certainly not at all like the modern historical-critical method. Luther, in his study of the question of canonicity, appealed not to subjective considerations or negative higher criticism, but objectively to the judgments of the early

church and the writings of the fathers. Luther did not want to make the error of accepting the canon of Scripture because the institutional Church had declared it as such.

It must be admitted that Luther did develop a personal criterion of canonicity that took its place along side of apostolicity and universality (those books unanimously accepted by the early church, *homologoumena*). He states this criterion in his *Preface to James*:

All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach Christ and deal with him. That is the true test, by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all the Scriptures show us Christ (Rom 3) and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ (1 Co 15). What does not teach Christ is not apostolic.¹²

It was, of all people, Carlstadt who condemned Luther for this criterion. Carlstadt said: “One must appeal either to know apostolic authorship or to universal historical acceptance as to the test of a book’s canonicity not to internal doctrinal considerations.”¹³

This position of Carlstadt was also the position of Martin Chemnitz¹⁴ and of C. F. W. Walther.¹⁵

Even though Luther put James in a separate class, he, nevertheless, always printed the Book in his Bible. It is never put in the same classification as the Apocrypha of the Old Testament. Even in Luther’s strongest remarks against James, he always intersperses positive comments. In the revised prefaces to the Books of the Bible there are reductions in the negative comments. Luther makes it quite clear that the question of how to treat James must be answered by the readers themselves.¹⁶

For Luther the Bible could never contain an error or a contradiction. He says:

I have learned to ascribe the honor of infallibility only to those books that are accepted as canonical. I am profoundly convinced that none of these writers have erred. All other writers, however they may have distinguished themselves in holiness or in doctrine, I read in this way: I evaluate what they say, not on the basis that they themselves believe that a thing is true, but only insofar as they are able to convince me by the authority of the canonical books or by clear reason.¹⁷

Luther, when thus faced with what he believed to be an error or a contradiction between James and Paul, rejected James as canonical since the canonical Scriptures can never err or contradict. We might well question this approach. Instead, we might offer ways of harmonizing Paul and James.¹⁸ We can say Luther was wrong, but we must admit he was wrong for the right reasons. However, we can never prove from Luther’s attitude on James a loose or a low view of inspiration.¹⁹ In fact, it proves the very opposite. It proves that Luther had a very high and exalted view of the inspiration and inerrancy of the canonical Scriptures.

Conclusion

Luther’s opinions on the Book of James are not a blot on his theology of the Word. Rather they bear witness on how carefully he was in determining the standard and norm of his faith. One thing ought to be very clear: what Luther says about books which he does not consider genuine and inspired may not be construed as if he were speaking about books which he regarded as inspired and canonical.

Luther regularly says of Scripture that it “never errs, “has never erred”, is alone inerrant,” is the “absolutely infallible truth,” “cannot err,” “cannot lie,” and that “ it is impossible for Scripture to contradict itself.”²⁰ These statements Luther did not limit to the “gospel themes” of the Bible, but applied them to the whole Scriptures or Word of God. Luther regarded himself duty-bound to submit his mind, whatever the intellectual difficulties, to what the Bible teaches not only on faith and Gospel but also what it teaches about the chronology of the world, the occupation of Nimrod, the geography of the Hittites and the like. For Luther everything in the Bible was God’s Word!

A “conscience captive to God’s inerrant Word,” that is the strength of Luther’s theology. Luther’s example will permit us to join in this 500th jubilee year with the saints of a past jubilee year when they sang:

As true as God’s own Word is true, Not Satan, hell, nor all their crew can stand against his power. Scorn and contempt their cup will fill, For God is with his people still, Their help and their strong tower.²¹

NOTES

1. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 47.
2. *Luther’s Works*, vol. 45
3. Kurt Marquart, “Central Lutheran Thrusts for Today,” *Concordia Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (May 1982) p. 86f. “ If is one of the ironies of history that Luther of all people, Luther the thoroughgoing ‘incarnationalist,’ should so often be portrayed as the patron of the historical-critical dissolution of Biblical substance. . . . We have here a remarkable echo of Luther’s realization that the Gospel narratives are not simply histories but are “Sacraments,” that is, “sacred signs through which God works in believers” that which the histories mean. Unlike secular histories, which are ‘dead histories and histories of the dead,’ the evangelical history is God’s living instrument through which God imparts all His riches in Christ, justifies, renews, and saves us. In other words, the Gospel not only reports what God has said and done ‘then and there’ in the past, but it actually conveys God ‘here and now’.
4. Siegbert W. Becker, *The Foolishness of God*, p. 171.
5. *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 32, p. 112.
6. “Preface to James,” 1522 edition, *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. VI, p. 477-9.
7. Weimar, “*Tischreden*” (5) p. 5854.
8. *Luther’s Works*, “Table Talks” Vol. 54, p. 424. For a complete discussion on Luther’s attitude towards James see M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures*, Chapter 3.
9. Heinrich Voigt, *Fundamentaldomatik*, p. 536.
10. Edgar Krentz, *Historical-Critical Method*, p. 9-10.
11. Adolf Hoenecke, *Ev. Luth. Dogmatik*, Vol. I, p. 362. “One must distinguish well between the extent of the Canon and the inspiration of the books which are canonical with question. Here Wilhelm Walther says correctly that for Luther the extent of the Canon was an open question, but the books that were canonical were absolutely authoritative for him as the inspired Word of God. But this distinction is always being overlooked. Modern theologians always want to draw conclusions from Luther’s remarks concerning individual books as to his attitude towards the Word in general and its inspiration and thus make Luther share their liberal views regarding inspiration.” Cf. also Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 276-98.
12. *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. VI, p. 478.
13. Carlstadt, *De Canonicis Scripturis libellus*, Wittenberg, 1520, p. 50. Cf. Dr. John W. Montgomery’s excellent discussion of this whole question in *God’s Inerrant Word*, “ Luther As Independent Canonist,” p. 77-84. Also, Dr. Robert Preus article in *Inerrancy* “The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther,” p. 372-377.
14. Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, Part I, p. 100-150 and 168-196. “ Can the present church make those writings concerning which the most ancient church had doubts because of the contradiction of some, because the witness of the primitive church concerning them did not agree—can the present church, I ask, make those writings canonical, catholic, and equal to those which are of the first class? The papalists not only argue that they can do this, but they in fact usurp this authority in that they totally obliterate the necessary distinction of the primitive and most ancient church between the canonical and apocryphal, or ecclesiastical, books. But it is wholly clear from what we have said that the church by no means has this authority, for in the same way she could also either reject canonical books

or declare spurious books canonical. This whole matter, as we have said, depends on sure attestations of that church which was at the time of the apostles, which witness the immediately following church accepted and preserved in historical works which are sure and worthy of credence. Where therefore reliable testimonies of the primitive and most ancient church cannot be produced from the testimonies of ancient men who lived not long after the times of the apostles that the books concerning which there is controversy were without contradiction and doubt received by and commended to the church as legitimate and reliable, any and all human decrees are of no avail. For what insolent presumption it is to assert: Although the primitive church and the oldest subsequent church had doubts concerning these books on account of the contradiction of many churchmen because not sufficiently certain and firm testimonies of their authenticity were found, in spite of all this, we decree that they must be received as altogether certain and of equal authority with those which have always been judged to be legitimate. With what evidence do you prove this your decree? Pighius answers: 'The church as this power, that she can impart to certain writing a canonical authority which they do not have of themselves or from their authors.' They could, it would seem, also impart this authority either to the fables of Aesop or the true stories of Lucian. Not that I would want to equate those books concerning which there is controversy with the fables of Aesop (for with Cyprian and Jerome I grant to them that honorable place which they always had in the ancient church), but by a *reductio ad absurdum*, as the logicians say, I wanted to show that in the disputation concerning books of Scripture the church does not have such power, that it can make true writings out of false, false out of true, out of doubtful and uncertain, certain, canonical, and legitimate, without any certain and firm proofs which, as we have said above, are required for this matter.

Which books are in the canon, and which are not in the canon? as Jerome says. We are not speaking now of the spurious, counterfeit, and false writings... The question now is concerning those books which are found together in the Vulgate edition of the Bible and which are read in the churches by the faithful. We are seeking the witness of the ancient church concerning these, whether they are all equally certain and of equal authority. However, it is very certain and clear that the witness of the ancient church is that of these books some are in the canon, other are not in the canon but are apocrypha, as Jerome is accustomed to say, or that some of these writings are genuine and have, without contradiction, sure and harmonious testimonies for their authority from the whole first and ancient Church. Concerning some, however, there was doubt because, on account of the contradiction of some, they did not possess sufficiently sure, firm, and harmonious testimonies of the first and ancient church concerning their authority.

Of the books of the New Testament which lacked sufficiently reliable, firm, and harmonious testimonies of their certainty and authority in the first and ancient church, these are listed: (Eusebius, Bk, 3, chr. 25) The writings which are not considered to be undoubted but which are spoken against, although they were known to many, are these: The Epistle of James, that of Jude, 2 Peter, and 2 and 3 John; the Apocalypse of John some reject, while others number it with the certain and undoubted writings. It also must not be ignored that some in the Roman church rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, asserting that it was spoken against as not being Paul's... The Epistle of James, it is asserted, was published by some other person under his name... The epistle which is put down as the first among the general epistles is said to be by that James who was called the Just and Oblias. But we must know that it was not judged to be genuine and legitimate but spurious and counterfeit. Therefore not many of the ancients make mention of it, as also of that of Jude.

Since some of the most ancient writers had ascribed some of these books to apostles, others, however, had contradicted, this matter, even as it was not indubitably certain, was left in doubt. For this whole matter depends on sure, firm, and harmonious testimonies of the first and ancient church, and where these are lacking, the later church, as it cannot make genuine books out of spurious ones, so also it cannot make certain writings out of doubtful ones without clear and firm proofs.

15. Baier-Walther, *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*, Vol. I. p. 149. F. Pieper, op., cit., Vol. I, p. 331, 336.
16. This Lutheran approach towards the Canon of Scripture is in opposition to the Roman Catholic and the Reformed positions. For the Roman Church the question of canonicity has been decreed and set by the decisions of the Council of Trent. The Reformed Churches also in their Confessions, set the Canon at 66 Books. But the Lutheran Church, in her Confessions, simply states, “The Prophetic and Apostolic Scriptures of the Old and New Testament” or “the canonical Books.” The Reformed-fundamentalistic slogans of inerrancy and cover to cover inspiration, ignores the organic structure and contents of Scripture so clearly recognized by Luther. Thus Dr. Hermann Sasse asks the questions, “ Is it possible for a Bible-believing person to deny that Holy Baptism is the washing of regeneration and the bread which we bless in the Lord’s Supper the body of Christ? What kind of faith in the Bible is it that can deny these things?” Cf. Kurt Marquart, *Anatomy of an Explosion*, p. 47.
17. Weimar, 2 “ *Contra malignum Iohannis Eccii iudicium...Martini Lutheri defensio*,” p. 621.
18. “Apology Augsburg Confession” Art III, 123, *Triglotta*, p. 189-90. P.E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary, New Testament, Vol. II, p.504*. Luther, in a Table Talk in 1532, however still believed Paul and James could not be harmonized. He says, “ Many have tried hard to make James agree with Paul, as also Melanchthon did in his Apology, but not seriously (successfully). These do not harmonize: Faith justifies, and faith does not justify. To him who can make these two agree I will give my doctor’s cap and I am willing to be called a fool.” Weimar, “*Tischreden*” (3), p. 3292.
19. This would be like saying a person has a low opinion of money because he once burnt a ten dollar bill which he considered counterfeit. Or to say the Wisconsin Synod has a low view of inspiration and rejects the inerrancy of the Bible because it promotes Bibles, like the NIV, which has a line drawn after the first part of the 16th chapter of St. Mark’s Gospel or puts Acts 7:37 and 1 John 5: 7b-8a in a footnote thereby questioning whether these sections are Scriptural and part of the Bible.
20. Eugene Klug, *From Luther to Chemnitz*, p. 106-109.
21. *Lutheran Worship*, “ Do Not Despair, O Little Flock” Hymn 300, verse 3.

Die Bücher des neuen testaments.

1 Euangelion Sanct Matthews.2 Euangelion Sanct Marcus.3 Euangelion Sanct Lucas.4 Euangelion Sanct Johannis.

5 Der Apostel geschicht beschrieben von Sanct Lucas.

6 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Romern.

7 Die erste Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Corinthern.

8 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Corinthern.

9 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Galatern.

10 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Ephesern.

11 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Philippern.

12 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Colossern.

13 Die erste Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Thessalonicern.

14 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Thessalonicern.

15 Die erst Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Timotheon.

16 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Timotheon.

17 Epistel Sanct Paulus an Titon.

18 Epistel Sanct Paulus an Philemon.

19 Die erst Epistel Sanct Peters.

20 Die ander Epistel Sanct Peters.

21 Die erst Epistel Sanct Johannis.

22 Die ander Epistel Sanct Johannis.

23 Die drit Epistel Sanct Johannis.

Die Epistel zu den Ebzeern.

Die Epistel Jacobus.

Die Epistel Judas.

Die Epistel ossinbarung Johannis.

THE CANON OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

How do we know what books belong in our Bible?

- I. A biblical book did not become authentic because the Church accepted it, BUT the Church accepted it because it was authentic.
- II. The Church is indeed active in the historical process of the formation of the canon. But the main point is that the Church neither creates nor validates the canon. The canon has prior authority and validity. What the Church does in the historical process of canon development is to receive it, acknowledge it to be the truth of God, show reverence to it, and give unhesitating assent to it.
- III. For the Old Testament canon we have the words of Jesus. The 39 books of the Old Testament were and had been established by the Jewish Church. Christ gave his approval and acceptance of these books when he said, "All things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and Psalms concerning me." (Lk 24:44)
- IV. For the New Testament the Church asked the following questions:
 1. Does it make a claim for inspiration?
 2. Are miracles recorded in the book?
 3. Does the words of the prophet come true (Dt18:20)?
 4. Does it contradict the rest of Scripture (Dt 13:1f.)?
 5. Was it written or approved by an Apostle (Jn 14:26; Jn 15:26; Jn 16:12-14; Jn 17:20; Ro 1:1,2,5; 2 Th 2:1,2, 2 Th 3:14,17; Eph 2:20; Gal 1:18.)
 In considering the books, the early church would ask:
 "What did the apostles say?" "What did men with the apostles say?" "What did the eye witnesses say?"
 Concerning the writings of Mark and Luke the early church unanimously agreed that Mark wrote his gospel as Peter guided him, and Luke recorded the Gospel preached by Paul and Luke wrote in Acts the things Paul said and did. Paul, Peter, and John approved these three books as inspired Scripture.
 6. Was the book universally accepted by the people to whom it was written?
 7. What about the contents of the book? (If you question a book, read it, compare it with known false books.)
 8. What about the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit? The work of the Holy Spirit is very important when we talk about Biblical books. He is very active in inspiration (II Ti 3:16), illumination (I Co 2:10,14), conviction and certainty (I Co 2:4-11). The Spirit works with the Word, and through the Word, and in the Word, but never without or apart from the Word.
- V. Luther and the Canon
 1. Luther had to work through the whole question of canonicity. Some German and Latin Bibles in the Middle Ages included certain questioned or rejected books, and even apocrypha books.
 2. Luther questioned the authority of James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation. (The early Luther had stronger statements than the older Luther.)
 3. Luther's main question was concerning apostolicity. He questioned what books should belong to the Bible; not was a Biblical book inspired.
 4. Luther was wrong. But he rejected the books for the right reason.
 5. Luther's whole approach was one of only questioning, never rejecting. James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation are only questioned, they are never rejected.
- VI. For us today the 27 books of the New Testament have won their place in the Canon. We accept these 27 books because they were written or approved by the Apostles.

THE OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES

The Old Testament *Hebrew* canon was divided somewhat differently than we are accustomed to divide it today. However, even though this is the case, it is still of primary importance that we note the ancient division. This will especially help us to understand our Savior's references to these writings. Let us, therefore, cite the Hebrew formation and comment on it in relation to a few New Testament texts.

A. **Torah** or **Law** -

Pentateuch - (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) 5 books

B. **Prophets** -

1. Former Prophets - (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) 4 books
 2. Latter Prophets - (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve) 4 booksC.

Writings or **Scriptures** -

1. Poetry - (Psalms, Job, Proverbs) 3 books
 2. Rolls - (Song of Solomon, (Ruth), (Lamentations), Ecclesiastes, Esther) 3 (5) books
 3. History - (Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles) 3 books

Total 22 (24) books

This final total is in agreement with Josephus' comment that the Jews had 22 books in their Old Testament canon. Josephus was a famous Jewish historian, contemporary with Christ.

This division as was mentioned helps us to understand the comments of Christ and His apostles when they speak of the Old Testament writings. For instance, in Luke 24:44 Jesus says: "...all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalm, concerning me." Here in a concise statement, Christ refers to the three major divisions of the Old Testament. He says that the Old Testament spoke of Him in the **Law**, the **Prophets**, and in the **Psalms**. The term "Psalms" here is collective, including 811 of those books in the third section, the **Writings**. Psalms is the first book in the third section and therefore sometimes is given the role of speaking for all of the other books in this category.

At Jesus' time it was also a custom to refer to the entire Old Testament either by the term "Law" or "Scriptures" (Luke 24:27; John 10:34). This is the thing Paul does when he writes to Timothy and tells him to remain faithful to the whole Old Testament since "all **Scripture** is given by inspiration of God."

For those interested the Hebrew word for **Law** is "*Torah*"; the Hebrew word for **Prophets** is "*Nebhi'im*"; and the Hebrew word for **Writings** is "*Kethubhim*".

It might be mentioned in passing that the total number mentioned above varies between 22 and 24. The reason for this is that at one time the book of Ruth was counted with the book of Judges as one book. The same was true in relation to the book of Lamentations being counted as one with the book of Jeremiah. At other times both Ruth and Lamentations were counted separately, thus expanding the total from 22 to 24 books.

A comparative List of the Old Testament Books as they appear in

(a) The Hebrew Scriptures (38)	(b) The Septuagint (52)	(c) The Modern English Bible (39)
Genesis	Genesis	GenesisExodus
	Exodus	Exodus
Leviticus	Leviticus	Leviticus
Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy
Joshua	Joshua	Joshua

Judges	Judges	Judges	
1 Samuel	Ruth	Ruth	
2 Samuel	1 Kings	1 Samuel	
1 Kings	2 Kings	2 Samuel	
2 Kings	3 Kings	1 Kings	
Isaiah	4 Kings	2 KingsJeremiah	1
Chronicles	1 Chronicles		
Ezekiel	2 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	
Hosea	1 Ezra	Ezra	
Joel	2 Ezra	Nehemiah	
Amos	Esther	Esther	
Obadiah	Judith	Job	
Jonah	Tobit	Psalms	
Micah	1 Macc.	ProverbsNahum	2
Macc.	Eccles.Habakkuk	3 Macc.	Song of
SolomonZephaniah	4 Macc.	IsaiahHaggai	
Psalms	JeremiahZachariah	Proverbs	
Lamentations			
Malachi	Eccles.	Ezekiel	
Psalms	Song of Solomon	Daniel	
Proverbs	Job	Hosea	
Job	Wisdom of Solomon	Joel	
Canticles	Sirach	Amos	
Ruth	Psalms of Solomon	Obadiah	
Lamentations	Hosea	Jonah	
Eccles.	Amos	Micah	
Esther	Micah	Nahum	
Daniel	Joel	Habakkuk	
Ezra	Obadiah	Zephaniah	
Nehemiah	Jonah	Haggai	
1 & 2 Chronicles	Nahumum	Zechariah	
Habakkuk	Malachi		
Zephaniah	Haggai		
	Zechariah		
	Malachi		
	Isaiah		
	Jeremiah		
	Baruch		
	Lamentations		
	Epistle of Jeremiah		
	Ezekiel		
	Susanna		
	Daniel		
	Bel and the Dragon		

THE OLD TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The Fourteen (14) Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament (that is, “books outside the Hebrew Canon”), may be classified as follows:

I. Additions to the Canonical Books

1. The Prayer of Manasseh (to 2 Chron.) (150 B.C.)
2. Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah (to Jeremiah) (50 B.C.)
3. The Story of Susanna (to Daniel) (150 B.C.)
4. Song of the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace (including the Prayer of Azariah) (added to Daniel) (150 B.C.)
5. The Story of Bel and the Dragon (to Daniel) (100 B.C.)
6. Additions to the Book of Esther (150 B.C.)

II. Legends of National Heroes

7. The Book of Tobit (200 B.C.)
8. The Book of Judith (200 B.C.)

III. Jewish Historical Books

9. The First Book of Maccabees (90 B.C.)
10. The Second Book of Maccabees (Cp. 12:43, prayers for dead) (90 B.C.)
11. The First Book of Esdras (150 B.C.)
12. The Second Book of Esdras (60 A.D.)

IV. Wisdom Literature

13. The Wisdom of Solomon (50 B.C.)
14. The Wisdom of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus (180 B.C.)

NOTES:

1. These books are found in the *Septuagint* (LXX) and the *Vulgate*, and thus they really formed part of the Bible of the Early Church.
2. All of them with the possible exception of **Sirach** were not written in Hebrew, but in Greek. Some, like 2 **Esdras**, were not even written in Greek but in Latin.
3. Many of them were issued under false names (why called “apocrypha”)
4. Jerome (400 A.D.) found they were not in the Hebrew Bible, so he called them **Apocrypha**. He scattered them here and there in the *Vulgate*, just as they were in the Greek Bible.
5. Luther followed Jerome in regarding them as Apocrypha, but separated them from the Canon in his German Bible of 1534 and placed them at the end of the Old Testament with this note: “*Apocrypha, das sind Buecher so der Heiligen Schrift nicht gleich gestellt, und doch nuetzlich und gut zu lesen sind.*”
6. Coverdale, the Great Bible, the Bishops’ Bible, and the King James Version all included the Apocrypha at first. The British and American Bible Societies (1827) excluded them from the English Bible and thus most Bibles today are published without them.
7. The Catholic Council of Trent (1546) adopted all of them as an official part of the Catholic Bible with the exception of 1 and 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh.
8. They were never included into the O.T. Canon because -
 - a) None were written in the “language of Inspiration” - Hebrew
 - b) The Church did not know the authors
 - c) The contents are erroneous and often ridiculous
 - d) They are never quoted in the New Testament

Good Bibliography: Goodspeed (splendid introductions), Chicago Press

Apocrypha, Tudor Publishing Co.

Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*.

Surburg, Raymond, *Introduction to the Intertestamental Period*

THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

PRIMITIVE HISTORY REWRITTEN FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE LAW

The Book of Jubilees

SACRED LEGENDS

The Letter of Aristeas

The Books of Adam and Eve

The Martyrdom of Isaiah

APOCALYPSES

I Enoch

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

The Sibylline Oracles

The Assumption of Moses

2 Enoch, or the Book of the Secrets of Enoch

2 Baruch, or the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch

3 Baruch, or the Greek Apocalypse of Baruch

4 Ezra

PSALMS

The Psalms of Solomon

ETHICS AND WISDOM LITERATURE

4 Maccabees

Pirke Aboth

The Story of Ahikar

HISTORY

The Fragments of a Zodikite Work

Note: This page is a copy of the Table of Contents of the major work *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, R.H. Charles, Vol. II, Clarendon Press, 1913

Most of the writings fall in the category of apocalyptic literature. Such literature was produced during the times of stress and persecution to revive the hearts of men to stand firm against the enemy. At the same time, the revelatory mysterious nature of the material hid the meaning from the unbeliever, Among the canonical books of the Bible, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation of this nature---prophetic, symbolic, and enigmatic.

Some add these titles to the list: *Book of Jubilees, Lives of the Prophets, Testament of Job, Testament of Abraham.*

COMPARATIVE LISTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON
(Second Century)

Marcion's Canon		Muratorian Canon		Origen's Canon
Rome, 140 A.D.		Italy, 170 A.D.		Alexandria, 200 A.D.
(12 Books)		(19 Books)		(31 Books)
		Matthew		Matthew
		Mark		Mark
Luke		Luke		Luke
		John		John
		Acts		Acts
Romans	(4)	Romans		Romans
I Corinthians	(2)	I Corinthians		I Corinthians
II Corinthians	(3)	II Corinthians		II Corinthians
Galatians	(1)	Galatians		Galatians
Ephesians	(7)	Ephesians		Ephesians
Philippians	(9)	Philippians		Philippians
Colossians	(8)	Colossians		Colossians
I Thessalonians	(5)	I Thessalonians		I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians	(6)	II Thessalonians		II Thessalonians
		I Timothy		I Timothy
		II Timothy		II Timothy
		Titus		Titus
Philemon	(10)	Philemon		Philemon
		Hebrews		Hebrews
				James
				I Peter
				II Peter
				I John
				II John
				III John
				Jude
				Revelation
				Barnabas
				Shepherd of Hermas
				Didache
				Gospel of Hebrews

COMPARATIVE LISTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON
(Third Century)

Cyprian's Canon
Carthage, 250 A.D.
(20 Books)

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Acts

Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus

I Peter

I John

Revelation

Dionysius' Canon
Alexandrian 250 A.D.
(25 Books)

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Acts

Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus
Philemon

Hebrews

James

I Peter

I John

II John

III John

Revelation

Hippolytus' Canon
Rome, 250 A.D.
(22 Books)

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Acts

Romans
I Corinthians
II Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians
I Timothy
II Timothy
Titus
Philemon

I Peter

I John

II John

Revelation

COMPARATIVE LISTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON (Fourth Century)

Canon of Eusebius Caesarea, 320 A.D. (27 books)	Canon of Athanasius Alexandria 367 A.D. (27 Books)	Canon of Jerome Rome , 385 A.D. (27 books)
Matthew	Matthew	Matthew
Mark	Mark	Mark
Luke	Luke	Luke
John	John	John
Acts	Acts	Acts
Romans	Romans	Romans
I Corinthians	I Corinthians	I Corinthians
II Corinthians	II Corinthians	II Corinthians
Galatians	Galatians	Galatians
Ephesians	Ephesians	Ephesians
Philippians	Philippians	Philippians
Colossians	Colossians	Colossians
I Thessalonians	I Thessalonians	I Thessalonians
II Thessalonians	II Thessalonians	II Thessalonians
I Timothy	I Timothy	I Timothy
II Timothy	II Timothy	II Timothy
Titus	Titus	Titus
Philemon	Philemon	Philemon
Hebrews	Hebrews	Hebrews
James	James	James
I Peter	I Peter	I Peter
II Peter	II Peter	II Peter
I John	I John	I John
II John	II John	II John
III John	III John	III John
Jude	Jude	Jude
Revelation	Revelation	Revelation
Acts of Peter	Shepherd of Hermas	Susanna
Acts of Paul	Didachee	Bel and Dragon
Revelation of Peter	O.T. Apocrypha (5)	Hymn of the 3 children
Gospel of Peter		
Shepherd of Hermas	Augustin's Canon	
Didachee	354-430 A.D.	
Gospel of Thomas	1. Same as Jerome's Canon	
Acts of Andrew	2. Accepts Antilegomena	
Acts of John	3. Some O.T. Apocrypha	
	4. Canon about fixed at this time	

THE NEW TESTAMENT APOCRYPHA

The New Testament Apocrypha may be conveniently divided into four (4) classes. They vary in character from the sublime to the ridiculous. Often the terms “Apocrypha” and Pseudepigrapha” are used interchangeably. Many of these writings are pious frauds or worse.

I. The Apostolic Fathers

These men were leaders of the Early Church after the death of the Apostles. Sometimes their writings were held so highly that they were used along with the writings of the Apostles. Seven of them rose to special prominence. They all wrote in Greek.

<i>Epistle to the Corinthians</i>	Clement of Rome, 100, A. D.
<i>Clementine Homilies</i>	A story of St. Peter (fiction)
<i>Apostolic Constitutions</i>	Church Organization
<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>	Barnabas, companion of Paul (Jewish Law)
<i>The Shepherd of Hermas</i>	Rome, Rom. 16:14. on repentance
<i>Seven Epistles of Ignatius</i>	Antioch, 100 A. D. Asia Minor
<i>Epistle to the Philippians</i>	Polycarp, 150 A. D., Smyrna
<i>Exposition of the Worlds of Jesus</i>	Papias, 150 A. D. Phrygia
<i>Epistle to Diognetus</i>	Justin Martyr
<i>Didache</i>	Teaching of the twelve Apostles, 150 A.D. for Baptism

II. The Apocryphal Gospels

The purpose of these writings was to fulfill the gaps in the life of Jesus. They are imitations of the Apostolic Gospels and represent pure fiction. Many of them were written to propagate heretical views condemned by the canonical New Testament writings. The authors are unknown.

<i>The Gospel of the Hebrews</i>	130 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Marcion</i>	(Gnostic, antinomian) 140 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Peter</i>	(Docetic) 130 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of the Egyptians</i>	(asceticism) 130 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Thomas</i>	(Gnostic) 150 A. D.
<i>The Traditions of Matthias</i>	(Philosophical) 185 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of James</i>	(Perpetual virginity) 200 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of the Ebionites</i>	(Vegetarianism) 200 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Nicodemus</i>	after 150 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew</i>	after 150 A.D.
<i>The Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus</i>	after 150 A. D.
<i>The Gospel of Judas</i>	
<i>The Gospel of Truth</i>	
<i>The Gospel of Philip</i>	
<i>The Gospel of Bartholomew</i>	
<i>The Gospel of Andrew</i>	
<i>The Gospel of Barnabas</i>	
<i>The Gospel of the Birth of St. Mary</i>	

III. The Apocryphal Acts

These attempts to imitate the Book of Acts, but are fewer in number. Their purpose was to propagate false doctrines.

<i>The Acts of Paul</i>	(continuation of acts), 160 A.D.
<i>The Story of Tekla</i>	(opposes marriage) 160 A.D.
<i>The Acts of John</i>	(Docetic) 180 A.D.

<i>The Acts of Peter</i>	(Praise of Peter as Roman Bishop), 210 A.D.
<i>The Acts of Thomas</i>	(asceticism), 220 A.D.
<i>The Acts of Andrew</i>	(asceticism), 250 A.D.

IV. The Apocalyptic Apocrypha

<i>The Shepherd of Hermas</i>	(No repentance after Baptism) 95 A.D.
<i>The Apocalypse of Peter</i>	<i>The Apocalypse of Paul</i> <i>The Apocalypse of Bartholomew</i>
<i>The Apocalypse of Mary</i>	
<i>The Apocalypse of Thomas</i>	

NOTES:

It should be remembered that only a few of the New Testament Apocrypha got into the Canon at any time and it cannot be ascertained with all certainty that the person using them considered them inspired Scripture. Generally these were writings of the Fathers. The Apocryphal Gospels and Acts were always rejected by the Church.

Strictly speaking, the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Apocalypses should be called “**pseudepigrapha**,” **that is, false writings**. But now even the writings of the Fathers are sometimes included in the term “Apocrypha.”

Since they include some Apocrypha in their canon, Catholics generally call the Apocrypha “deuterocanonical” and reserve the word “apocrypha” for “outside books” which are not in (outside) the Latin *Vulgate*. These they then call the “pseudepigrapha”.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers were all in Greek; the language of many of the Apocrypha was Latin, not having the mark of the New Testament language of Inspiration.

“Some of these Apocrypha of the New Testament were known and read in Europe as late as the period of the Reformation, but others were entirely unknown in Luther’s day, having been discovered through modern researches among the vast store of ancient manuscripts. But even those which Luther knew were disregarded by him entirely when he translated the Bible, their religious value being immeasurable below that of the Old Testament Apocrypha. Even the Roman Church found them unworthy of consideration.” (Schaller, *Book of Books*, P. 277).

Today the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha must be read in separate volumes. Following are some of the better titles:

Old Testament

Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha*, Chicago Press, 1938
 Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature*, Yale, 1945
 Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (O.T.), 1913

New Testament

James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon, 1924
 The Lost Books of the Bible, World Publ. Co.

The Authority of a N.T. canonical book

by Elmer J. Moeller, July 12, 1963

[Taken from *Lehre und Wehre*, 47, 262-263; 50, 58-59; 2,204ff.]

1. Had God not given an inspired absolute authority in Holy Scriptures, He could have handed down the message of His grace otherwise.
2. God could have preserved the Gospel message by oral tradition. Cf. the time from the creation to the writings of Moses.
3. God could have preserved the Gospel message by ordinary written records. Cf. hymnbooks, Bible story books. Even in the case of written records, the assumption of absolute authority (verbal errant) is not an absolute necessity for preservation of the Gospel message. To be sure, the absolute authority of Scriptures was taken for granted in Christendom until the 19th century. But since that time large sections of the Church have not accepted such absolute authority at the same time that they used in their own circles the recorded Scriptures without changing them.
4. A knowledge of a collection of books called the Bible is not necessary for saving faith. Cf. the faith of a 3 yr old child. Nor is the faith in verbally inspired books necessary for saving faith. Cf. a heathen converted by hearing the simple story of Jesus, perhaps from a Sunday School lesson. We note that the Diatessaron, later replaced in the Peshitto by the four gospels, for many years served the Syrian Church as Gospel. The knowledge of a particular number of verbally inspired books is not therefore necessary for saving faith.
5. Today, when a person who believes in Jesus as Savior, no matter how he has been brought to faith, desires to learn more about the teachings of Jesus, and when he desires to check on the truthfulness of what he has believed, he is led, step by step, backward in time and in the history of translations and of manuscripts in the original languages to the status of the canon in the early centuries of the Christian Church.
6. Such a search lays bare in the area of the N.T. the fact of rejected books and the distinction between **homologoumena** and **antilegomena**. (The canonicity of O.T. books depends on the authority of the N.T., which attests to the Palestinian canon, the content of which we know from history.)
7. There was never any doubt about the **homologoumena** among orthodox teachers.
8. Books that were not demonstrable written by an apostle and accented as such by the ancient church were rejected. Content in some instances was used as proof of non-apostolic authorship. Eg. Gnostic writings, attributed to a apostles, were compared with the teachings of the apostles and were rejected.
9. Some books were accepted by part of the church as by apostles, but were unknown to the rest of the church or, although known, were considered of non-apostle authorship. These were called **antilegomena**. These books were not appealed to in case of doctrinal controversy, and were interpreted by the **homologoumena**.
10. The distinction between **homologoumena** and **antilegomena** which the early church made, and which has been followed in our own Church, indicates three criteria which on investigation are found to be echoes of Scriptural requirements for imposition of authority in doctrine:
 - a. Authenticity. Cf. 2 Th 2,2.3-15;3,14.17; 1 Co 14,37.
 - b. Authorship by an apostle. Cf. John 14, 26;15, 19.20, 26;16, 12-14; 17,20 and Ro 1,1.2.5. et al.
 - c. Authorship by someone whose person and message were commended to the Church by apostles. For the apostles were normative to 1) N.T. prophets. Eph 3,5; 2 Th 2,2; 1 Co 14, 37.38. 2) Co-workers of apostles. Col 4,7. 10-11. 17; 1 Ti 3, 14-15; 4,11-12;6,2; 2 Ti 1,12; 1 Co 16,10; 2 Ti 4,11; Eph 6,21; Co 8,6.23; Tit 2,15.
11. The homologoumena meet criteria a and b. In the instance of Mark and Luke a and c apply. The Church indicates that Mark and Luke held unique positions to Peter and Paul, and that living apostles, particularly John, approved the writings of Mark and Luke.

12. To deny that such criteria applied to and were fulfilled in the homologoumena is to deny any Scriptural reason for accepting them as authoritative. Doubt as to the fulfillment of any of these criteria in the early church caused a book to be antilegomenon, therefore not absolute authority (cf. 9 above.)
13. N.T. books themselves, therefore God the Holy Spirit, indicated these criteria and through them imposed themselves on the early church as indicated by the evidence. To deny these criteria is to assume instead a process of canonization which predicates an inspired choice of authoritative books, something which Scripture knows nothing about. Cf. 2 Th 2,2,2,15; 3,14. To uphold inspired canonization is to uphold a false doctrine of inspiration. Where does this allegedly inspired process begin or end? Cf. The ethiopic canon, the O.T. apocrypha, the Letter to the Laodiceans, the Pericope of the Adulterous Woman.
14. Inspired canonization, if accepted, places the stamp of permission if not approval on the results of literary and form criticism in the N.T. The process of revelation is determined and defined, not by Scripture itself, but by criteria outside Scripture. Experience shows that literary and form criticism has reached conclusions on the basis of the presupposition that God did not give an inerrant revelation. If these conclusions are then applied in N.T. books, there is nothing remaining in the N.T. which requires one to believe that an edited book, a pseudepigrapha, is inspired and inerrant in the N.T. Inspired canonization contains within itself the destruction of an inerrant Scripture.
15. Canonics and inspiration are inseparable related. God inspired known apostles to write known books which were accepted as inspired; or (Mark, Luke) God inspired known men, whom the church knew from apostles to be inspired, to write known books which were accepted as inspired under apostolic authority.

How Much Should a Layman Know?

by Elmer J. Moeller

[Taken from *The Christian News*, March 10, 1975, pages 5ff.]

“They say that it is dangerous to divulge the distinction to the people. This is dangerous only because the didn’t tell them about It from the beginning”

C. F. Walther wrote this note in the margin of the book on Christian doctrine (Baier’s Compendium) which t e use as text during the last six years of his life as professor and president of Concordia Seminary. St. Louis

He referred to the fact that Christians in the early church distinguished those books about which there was no doubt that an Apostle had written or commended then (the Homologoumena or “acknowledged” books from those books about which there was doubt in sections of the Christian world that an Apostle was the author (the Antilegomena or “spoken against” books: Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

Walther’s remark puts the finer on a major reason, if not the reason, for Missouri’s doctrinal problems today. our laymen haven’t been told what they ought to have ten told, and many pastors have forgotten.

What Do We Mean?

Most pastors, teachers, and laymen (this term includes women) of our church accept the Bible as the inerrant, utterly trustworthy source of Christian teaching

In the last two or three decades, however, various professors, pastors, teachers and laymen have begun to operate with a “Bible” that for them, contains spiritual truths and man trustworthy accounts of events, but which also contains, they think, things that “ain’t necessarily so.” According to this approach, the Christian is to pick out what is true.

This “moderate “ approach adapts the results of historical-critical scholarship to what we have always taught in our church. The crux in this kind of scholarship Is he view that one must investigate the authorship and content of the books of the Bible to find out what one ought to accept and what one ought to reject.

In the New Testament area the conclusions of this scholarship make the Christian communities or congregations after the times of he posies the source of the content of the books. Only with a few of the New Testament books does one accept the traditional author.

And, so thinking goes, since people like us developed the New Testament books, these books cannot be inerrant or absolutely trustworthy, even if one speaks of them as inspired.” In the latter case, our “moderate” theologians assert, God inspired “erring” books.

You Get Into Trouble

On the face of it, the well-intentioned Missouri Synod Christian still sees no problem. “Who cares who wrote the Bible? It’s inspired, isn’t it”

This is a simplistic view is impatient with questions that must be answered In today’s world. When the conservative Christian, upholding the authority of Scripture, says, “I don’t care who wrote Matthew,” he has no reply for the person who asserts, “Since we don’t know who wrote Matthew, it’s a purely human book, with errors .”

When, then, our “moderate” friends refer to Luther as a “Bible-doubter” too, because he didn’t believe Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation were written by Apostles and therefore were not God’s Word, how can the uninformed Missouri Synod Christian, be he clergy or layman, defend a trustworthy Scripture. After all, if Luther (supposedly) didn’t believe the Bible is inerrant and trustworthy, the “conservatives” in the Missouri Synod must be wrong. It would follow, on h is false premise, that the Missouri Synod has been wrong all along in its use of Scripture.

“But I believe it is God’s Word and that it is true,” protests our well-intentioned conservative friend. “And we are the majority in Synod.”

One can restate this argument by saying that what any Christian or group of Christians believes to be God’s Word must by virtue of that belief be God’s Word. But we are thereby asserting (because at given times certain Christian people have so believe) that the fourteen or so books of the Old Testament Apocrypha are also God’s Word, s are the extra eight or so books of the Ethiopic New Testament and the words In the Syriac Gospel of Matthew Sinaiticus) which assert that “. . . Joseph . . . begat Jesus,” making Jesus only a man.

By using our belief as sufficient proof of the identity of what is God’s Word we are admitting that the belief of some other Christian of another place and time cancels out or adds to our own teachings and validly so, by our own argument. Christian doctrine becomes fluid and entirely subjective.

What They Don’t Know Won’t Hurt Them

The basic difficulty is that too many of us in our Synod do not now, or if we now, do not accept and use, the view of Scripture which up to probably the last 30 years our own Lutheran forebears accepted and used on the basis of Scripture. It is a view which Jesus and the Apostle Paul teach, which guided the early Church, and which is the bedrock to which we must die when we speak of Scripture authority.

I say “we” for the reason that our ministerial training some 30 years ago began to overlook the doctrine of Scripture with which Luther operated; which Martin Chemnitz, co-author of the Formula of Concord, spelled out; and which the teachers of our church as represented by C. F. Walther, . L. Graebner, F. Pieper, J. T. Mueller, and others, taught and used. As a consequence, many (or most) of the graduates of our seminaries within the last 25 years have not learned or have not used a Scripturally-correct doctrine of Scripture. Nor have they, of course, taught the members of our congregations what these members ought have learned.

For example, our laymen have not been directed to what J. T. Mueller former professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis states Christian Dogmatics, 1934, p. 131 “The Lutheran dogmatician Chemnitz very correctly called it an anti-Christian undertaking to eliminate the distinction between the Homologoumena and the Antilegomena which the ancient church established.”

It’s In The Minutes

Our laymen are not told what the Synod of 1857 (minutes, page 334ff) stated: “Like the primitive church, the Lutheran church must leave it uncertain whether Revelation, or any of the other books of the New Testament which were spoken against by a few in the early church, was written by an Apostle or under Apostolic authority. This distinction is maintained in the orthodox church out of true reverence for God’s Word, and not because of a cavalier attitude toward it.

“Consequently, it was an unwise, unChristian, and provocative act on the part of Pastor Schieferdecker to conceal the actual status of he doubted New Testament books. Thereby he gave rise to rumors which cast aspersions on those who maintain the distinction between canonical books of the first and second rank; whereas in this distinction they were following the earliest church Luther, and the older orthodox theologians.

Quoting Chemnitz, the Synod then declared, “It is intolerable arrogance for us to place ourselves above the primitive church by deciding that originally doubtful books can be considered just as authentic as the ones universally acknowledged as written by Apostles. Those books about which the primitive church had doubts as to their Apostolic authorship (because sure and unshakable evidence of their authority did not exist) cannot be regarded as having the same authority as those which were always considered authentic . . .”

Facing the Facts

What ought our laymen be told and what ought they know? The following:

When pastors and congregations in the centuries after the Apostles accepted books as God's New Testament written Word and rejected others as not God's Word, they did so on the basis of the testimony of the earliest church, to the effect that the books had been written by Apostles or at the time (Mark, Luke-Acts) when there were living Apostles to commend the book as inspired.

Where there was doubt as to authorship by an Apostle (the Antilegomena mentioned above), the book was accepted on the basis of authorship by an Apostle. But because of the original doubt, the book was not used as a basis for teachings which were not in the undisputed books. This standard of judgment is one which Jesus and Paul established.

John 14:26, ". . . the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." John 15:26,27. ". . . the Counselor . . . will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses because you have been with me from the beginning." John 17:20 ". . . those who are to believe in me through their word." 1 Corinthians 14:37,38, "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized." 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "When you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you believers." 2 Thessalonians 2:15, "Brethren stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter." 2 Thessalonians 3:14, "If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, not that man, and have nothing to do with him . . ." 2 Thessalonians 3:17, "I Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine." Colossians 3:16, "When this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea."

In the present controversy against "moderate" theology one must know how to defend the character of a New Testament book. It is necessary to maintain that it was an Apostle or Evangelist, not the "Christian community" or some unknown member of it, who wrote a given New Testament book. If authorship was in doubt in the earliest times (the Antilegomena) we cannot change that doubt. But the existence of the doubt in the early church established the true character of the undisputed books: and Apostle or Evangelist wrote them; they are God's inspired Word.

In the New Testament Jesus identifies the Old Testament books as those used by the Jews in Palestine at Jesus' time. Concerning the inerrancy of Scripture, Jesus says (John 10:35) that it cannot be broken.

Much more should be said, and must be said elsewhere, about Luther's use of Scripture, about his alleged "doubts," about alleged discrepancies and contradictions in Scriptures.

And So We Conclude

We are doing a disservice to God and His Kingdom if we do not, as clergy and as laymen, fully ventilate all the objections to the authority of Scripture and to its teachings, as well as to the teachings which we in our Lutheran Confessions "believe, teach, and confess: as God teaches them to us in Scripture. But to deal the laity out of the game is not God's will. Lutheran lay people are "the church." They cannot hide their heads in the sand, nor are they to be given a "snow-job." They have a right and responsibility to be able theologians.

Missouri's Critical Issue

by Elmer J. Moeller

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In the doctrinal conflict within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, beneath the charges and counter-charges, beneath the cash of two admittedly district theologies, is there any single issue which can be isolated as the crucial one? The writer, a clergyman of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, believes there is, and will attempt to demonstrate it. Furthermore, he believes that the same issue exists for every evangelical, conservative Christian individual, congregation, and church body.

Background Points

The Missouri Synod has heretofore upheld a "conservative" theology, summarized well in the threefold Reformation slogan, "By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, Scripture Alone." God's good (Gospel) of salvation for sinful mankind, not by man's merit, but by God's grace in Christ Jesus, appropriated by faith alone, faith itself being a gracious gift of the Holy Spirit, is revealed only in Scripture, which alone is the source of God's revealed good news. As God's Word, Scripture utterly trustworthy (inerrant, infallible in all things to which it addresses itself.

It is this relationship of Gospel and Scripture which is the challenge. "Moderate" members of the Synod contend that on the basis of modern scholarship one cannot insist upon the utter trustworthiness of Scripture. The content of Gospel, they say, does not depend upon the trustworthiness of Scripture in its data. In fact, to insist upon a Scripture that is inerrant in its data, they say, is to become legalistic, it is to destroy the very concept of Gospel, to become "unLutheran," "un-evangelical."

A conservative Christian, or a Christian of conservative Lutheran persuasion, in reply will assert that sinful unbelief, i.e. a rejection of what God wants His disciple to believe, is involved ever any Christian rejects what the Scripture clearly teaches. But the rub comes when one begins to delineate what is clearly taught. Immediately one is involved in presuppositions, in one's hermeneutical approach with its often unstated presupposition. It is here that the critical issue lies.

In formalized statements of faith the historical Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the modern Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, have never articulated a complete doctrine of Scripture as set forth in Scripture. This lack has permitted, as will be demonstrated, an incomplete statement with a frequently-occurring erroneous, extra-Scriptural and therefore anti-Scriptural, doctrinal addition. Consequently the Missouri Synod now experiences the tragic division in its midst.

Historical Background

A study of the history of the Missouri Synod shows that from the time of its founding in 1847 by German immigrants, up to and through the period of language change associated with World War I, the leading theologians and their students, the clergy of the church, generally speaking upheld the classic distinction in the New Testament canon between the "accepted" (homologumena) books and the "disputed" (antilegomena) books.

In the New Testament church of the third and fourth centuries certain books were not accepted in some geographical areas as being God's New Testament Word because there was not unanimous evidence from previous generations that the book had been written by an apostle.

Hebrews was accepted in the Eastern churches as the product of Paul; it was not considered Paul's epistle in the West and was not accepted there. John's Apocalypse was accepted in the West as from the hand of John the Apostle; in the East the author was not so identified and the book was not accepted. The apostolic authorship of James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude was similarly doubted.

Meanwhile, the Mediterranean world in the fourth century, under the blessing of a Roman government that sponsored Christianity, proved to be a fertile field for the growth of a unified church. The councils and church leaders agreed on canonical” books, in the practice accepting the evidence “for” as outweighing the objections “against” authorship by apostles. The subsequent lists of New Testament books carried Hebrews by Paul, James by James the Less, 2 Peter Peter, 2 and 3 John and the Apocalypse by John the Apostle and Evangelist, and Jude by the Apostle Jude.

The “disputed” character of these books surfaced at the time of the Reformation. Luther, for instance, placed Hebrews, James, Jude, and the Apocalypse at the end of his New Testament, as books from which one did not draw doctrine. He felt that certain of their teachings could not have come from apostles, since some teachings disagreed, he thought, with what e.g. Paul had written in his undisputed letters. (The apocryphal books of the Old Testament, the surplus of the Alexandrian canon as compared to the Palestinian canon, were likewise not to be considered canonical. In general, when Lutheran teachings were later delineated, the antilegomena books were not used to establish doctrine in the church. In the Missouri Synod up through the 20’s this same attitude and approach prevailed.

As analysis of this view of the origin of New Testament books and their subsequent authority shows that under this view one accepts as God’s written New Testament Word, utterly reliable in all things with which it deals, those books that were written by apostles, who were inspired or “moved by the Holy Ghost,” or, in the instance of Mark and Luke Acts, by associates of apostles who wrote at a time when living apostles commended the books of the church as being written by men whom the apostles knew to be “inspired.” An authoritative New Testament is therefore under this view authentic, i.e. written by the author to whom attributed, and genuine, i.e. the actual work originally known by that name. It is such an authoritative New Testament, containing references to the Palestinian Old Testament canon as being God’s Word, which establishes for the Christian the limits of the Old Testament canon and also its inerrant authority.

It is interesting to note that the German Bible available to homes in the Missouri Synod in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, the Altenburger Bibel (Concordia Publishing House), contained Luther’s introductions to the New Testament books, giving his views about Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation. The laymen therefore were acquainted with the view of Scriptures which associated inspired New Testament authority with authorship by apostles.

The Change

A change in the view or doctrine of Scripture within Missouri begins to emerge in the 30’s and 40’s. The writer himself experienced this change. This writer explains the change as the result of pulpit and congregation usage of the King James version when the transition took place from German to English as a result of World War I.

Where previously the pastor had used Luther’s German Bible and could take for granted the character of the antilegomena New Testament books as being recognized at least by those clergy and laity who were acquainted with basic church teaching, now one used an English Bible which in its book heading assumed the apostolic authorship of the antilegomena. There was apparently no need any longer for a pastor to think about a distinction between a homologoumenon and antilegomenon, or who was the author either. In fact, one was almost obliged, in the context of preaching and teaching, to refer to the volume of the King James Version as being the inspired Word of God.

Consequently, in the seminary classrooms and in the congregational teaching situations there developed in the Missouri Synod a view of Biblical authority which in the New Testament posited the inspiration of all 27 New Testament books without paying attention to who wrote them. The shift was from inspired New Testament books to an inspired book, the New Testament.

True, the King James Version claimed apostolic authorship for the antilegomena. But a practical development, and a disastrous one, as it turned out, was for Missouri New Testament scholarship to distinguish between, on the one hand, the inspiration of the New Testament (and of the entire Bible), and on the other hand,

the “purely isagogical” questions of e.g. the authorship of Matthew, of Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles, etc. The question of authorship and associate authenticity became “merely historical,” totally unrelated to the authority of a New Testament book.

The Resulting Complications

One notes what had happened. From areas of scholarship both outside confessing Christianity and within it, conclusion of critical scholarship were making themselves felt and were being taken for granted. “A majority of scholars” concluded that Paul did not write Ephesians or the Pastorals, that Matthew did not write the canonical Greek Matthew, etc. But how can one be really a “scientific” Bible scholar and still uphold the authority of Scripture within the confessional context of membership in a conservative Lutheran church body? Answer: by simply holding to an inspired, inerrant Bible, which in the New Testament is inspired regardless of who wrote the individual books.

When one in a critical scholarly environment holds such a view or inspired Scriptural authority, he finds that he must now operate with inspired people in the post-apostolic Christian communities who wrote inspired Scriptures just as Paul wrote e.g. Romans. These people he substitutes for apostles and evangelists. Likewise, he must posit that the Holy Spirit governed the thinking of the church leaders and of Christian communities in the centuries immediately following in such a way that, although readers and leaders had wrongly accredited anonymous writings to apostles, or had wrongly accepted pseudepigrapha as authentic, nonetheless leaders and councils were led by the Holy Spirit were inspired?) on the one hand to reject man books as not written by apostles, but on the other hand to accept as canonical,” i.e. as inspired and authoritative book wrongly attributed to apostles

It is easy to see what happened next. As the historical-critical” method of Biblical study had everywhere gained ground, its proponents had pointed to its results, e.g. a non-Matthean Matthew, a non-Johannine John, a pseudepigraphic Timothy, etc., as proof that one cannot use the New Testament to establish confessional” positions such as that of historic Lutheranism. The historical-critical conclusions dared not be challenged: the Bible contains different and contradictory theologies, errors in fact, manufactured speeches in the mouth of e.g. Jesus and other characters, etc. (Space does not permit us to discuss here the fact that the conclusion of the historical-critical approach to the Scriptures mirror the presuppositions of that approach.)

The Lutheran “Scholar’s” Bind

Meanwhile the Missouri Synod scholar and clergyman who has arrived at this same point in his “scholarly” Biblical views is still bound by his oath of office and by the confessional paragraph of his church’s constitution to the Inspired characters and complete authority of the Scriptures. How to solve the problem now? Answer: an inspired erring Scripture, which is however authoritative and “inerrant” in achieving its purpose; namely, to make wise unto salvation. The Holy Spirit supposedly leads one to believe the “Gospel,” and one uses historical-critical scholarship to pick out of the Scripture that which the Holy Spirit intends one to believe as content of the Gospel. It comes as no surprise, then, that it becomes difficult and finally sometimes impossible for such a Missouri Synod Lutheran to uphold the distinctive Scriptural doctrines of Lutheranism; for obviously “the Holy Spirit” has supposedly led all sorts of scholars to all sorts of other conclusions as to what is the Gospel and as to what Scripture clearly states.

The clash now in the Missouri Synod is between those who wish to operate with a Scripture which somehow establishes the “Gospel” but may err in detail of fact and data, and those who claim that the Scripture is one aspect of the Gospel proclamation, in fact, the message Or the Gospel. Jesus as the only Savior, assumes the utter trustworthiness of the source of the message, the word of the Scriptures. If Jesus’ words are a part of the Gospel we now, then the Gospel attests the utter trustworthiness of the Scriptures. Likewise, the Scriptures assure us that we know what Jesus taught, what is the content of God’s “good news.”

Practical Effects

At this point the writer pauses. He realizes he has attempted to condense many details of history and of doctrinal development. The reader may challenge some of the details of the distillation. But the writer believes the overall picture is accurate. Against the background of the overall picture the writer wishes to make several observations.

1. In a way he does not understand and for reasons he is able explain only later, a person becomes a Christian through hearing (or read, or receiving by his senses, in the case of a blind and deaf person the message that Jesus Christ is his Savior. Such a Christian need not know there exist the Scriptures in order to come to faith. When such a Christian wants to know more about the “Gospel,” the good news he has heard, he goes to the Scriptures. Anything that increases the content of his faith, any enlarging of the concept or concepts contained in “Gospel” depends on the content of the Scriptures.

2. Confessing Christians must delineate and articulate the proper complete doctrine of Scripture. Missouri must do so if it wishes to retain the Gospel which it has believed. It must say the following in some way or other:

a. The New Testament is God’s inspired, utterly trustworthy Word, written by apostles, or by Mark and Luke, associates of apostles at a time when living apostles commended their writings to the churches as being God’s inspired Word. Jesus Himself, in a writing that the earliest congregations kept because John the Apostle had written it, tells His disciples apostles) that they will convey His Word to future believers John 1, 26; 5 27; 6, 3-15; 17, 20). Paul as an apostle claims to write God’s Word 1 Cor. 1, 37, 2 Thess. 3, 170. He warns against false apostles and false letters (2 Th 2, 2; 3, 17). He makes congregations responsible for giving to others copies of the letters they have from him (Co 4, 16). He thus shows how God wants His New Testament Word handed from one Christian to others and from one generation to the next.

It is this framework of authority and transmission of God’s Word, outlined in Scripture, which the church of the earlier centuries followed, rejecting gospels epistles, and apocalypses for which there was no evidence that an apostle had written them, but acknowledging as authoritative the 27 New Testament document that had the testimony of the Christian communities who had once received them at the hands of the apostles. (And one cannot make sure what was not sure in the case of the antilegomena.)

It was therefore not a man-made criterion of authority which the very early congregations and councils followed in recognizing a New Testament canon, but rather the yardstick which God Himself had given through the directives of our Lord and His apostles in the books which measured up to these directives and which were “canonical” because they did so.

b. To assert divine authority, inspiration, and inerrancy as belonging to e.g. a Matthean gospel that Matthew didn’t write, an Ephesians that Paul didn’t write, a Hebrews that Paul didn’t write, is to predicate an activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community which Scripture does not teach. Rather, it is the word of the apostle which is the word which the Holy Spirit has inspired (cf. “spirit” in 2 Th 2, 21); it is the word of the apostle to which the charismatic persons must bow (1 Co 14, 37).

The Christians are not able to know or themselves that a written document is God’s Word except by knowing that an inspired apostle, e.g. Paul, had written it (2 Th 2,2).

But if one contends that the Holy Spirit inspired the Christians of the second century to develop new doctrine and to incorporate this into writing which must be accepted as God’s Word dare one limit the Holy Spirit to doing, this only in the second century? Must not one accept as God’s truth, taught by the Holy Spirit, whatever any person, or group teaches who claims to be Christian and claim to be led by the Holy Spirit? Finally, then, how can anyone say what the Gospel is or is not, or what it will become? What does the Holy Spirit want me to believe? Who will answer?

c. To assert that the fact that Christians (or that I) have believed a book or a portion of a book to be God’s Word proves it is God’s Word, to assert that the Holy Spirit would not have permitted Christians to use as source of doctrine books or passages that aren’t inspired, is to assert also that

1) The Old Testament apocrypha are God's inspired Word, since they were accepted by many early Christians as inspired.

2) the Ethiopic New Testament canon of some 35 books is all God's Word since it has been accepted by many Christians as such.

3) such a variant reading as the one in Matthew 1.16 (Sinaitic Syriac) which makes Joseph the natural father of Jesus, is truly God's Word, because Syriac Christians once considered it a part of Matthew's Gospel. (What this does with the Virgin Birth is obvious.)

d. To extract a Gospel from a Scripture which is the product of the theologians of various New Testament Christian communities and the result of the efforts of who knows how many editors makes the Gospel content a purely subjective matter. No one can finally say about anything in the New Testament, 'This is God's revealed truth.'

e. The authority of the Old Testament fails, for the reason that we cannot know, with such an approach to Scripture, whether the acceptance of the Palestinian canon as God's Word by Jesus and the apostles is actually what Jesus did and wanted and said, or whether some later Christian editor put into Jesus' mouth and into the supposed writings of a supposed apostle the approving references to the canon of Palestine.

We're Not Alone in This

One final thing. While it is in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that the battle is being fought, no Christian is free from its implications. Either the reader must place himself completely under the authority of a New Testament that was written or commended by apostles, and of an Old Testament that was approved by the testimony of such a New Testament, both Old and New Testaments being the inspired and utterly trustworthy Word of God. or, he must begin to choose on the basis of his own scholarship or that of others such truths as he thinks the Holy Spirit (is there really a Holy Spirit, or is He the creation of the second century Christian community?) is leading him to believe. there is no middle ground of "substantial trustworthiness of Scripture" with an admixture of untrustworthy elements. Who decides where the trustworthiness ends? Who can tell for sure what is the Christian Gospel, if the Scriptures are actually made up of these kind of untrustworthy books? Does the "Gospel" really come to us from God, or from man?

A theology which thus leaves seekers after God and His Truth hanging in mid-air does not have what it takes to give modern man something solid to live and die by. What the Christian church had in the first place is the only resource available to fallen man to answer the human need with truth and hope.

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