

Neo-Orthodoxy—The “New” Threat to Our Christian Heritage

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Introduction

Neo-orthodoxy—why should we have a paper on this subject? How does this concern us? Perhaps one or the other may have had such questions in mind when he first heard the title of this paper that was to be read at your district convention. The fact is that in recent years Neo-orthodoxy has become a subject of an increasing number of papers and essays at conventions and pastoral conferences. More and more the question is being asked: What is Neo-orthodoxy?

And it is a pertinent and timely question. For Neo-orthodoxy is the name given to the theology that has been taking over protestantism in the last few decades. In the book entitled *Religion in a Changing World* the author of the chapter on Neo-orthodoxy writes: “In spite of these attacks against it, Neo-orthodoxy, either in its liberal or more conservative form, is the dominant trend in the theological schools of America and will inevitably take over leadership in the major denominations in America just as it has done previously in Europe.”¹ And among major denominations in America the Lutheran Church must be included. When the weekly church periodical of the United Lutheran Church, *The Lutheran*, can reprint portions of a book entitled *Conversation on Faith* by Eberhard Mueller, which breathes the theology of Neo-orthodoxy, we can see to what extent this body has been taken over.² As to the American Lutheran Church, over a year ago we read the following statement: “A professor emeritus of the ELC Luther Seminary admitted that the younger professors at this seminary have been infected with liberal and Neo-orthodox theology. The same situation exists within the ALC seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Only men with the necessary academic degrees are called. The question whether the new professors accept the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, mentioned in the school’s catalogue, is not seriously discussed.”³ In November 1960 a pastor of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, writing in *Christianity Today*, asked the question about his church body: “Are we being shorn of our strength by an encounter with the blandishments of the neo-orthodox Delilah?”⁴ Concerning Dr. Karl Barth, one of the leading neo-orthodox theologians, the *Walther League Messenger*, a periodical for Missouri Synod youth, writes: “Among Missourians the status of Barth stands both high and low. Almost every young theologian at Springfield and St. Louis has read him, or has been influenced indirectly, even though the depth of his thought often makes him attractive only as an unknown quantity.

“Greater or lesser Barthians teach at almost every Protestant seminary in America, including our own. A score at least of our pastors have studied with Barth at Basel and hundreds more have heard an occasional lecture or speech.”⁵

It is quite evident that Neo-orthodoxy underlies the controversy within the Missouri Synod over Dr. Scharlemann, professor at the St. Louis seminary. In bringing these quotations and examples, our aim here is not simply to point fingers at anyone, or simply to try to establish where a certain form of theology is dominant, but we do want to show the extent to which the theological tidal wave of Neo-orthodoxy is threatening to engulf Protestantism and also Lutheranism. This is something that cannot be ignored. That is the theological world in which our Synod is living, with which it also has certain contacts. No church body can be so completely

¹ Vos, *Religions in a Changing World*, p. 430.

² *The Lutheran*, Jan. 25 and Feb. 1, 1961.

³ *News and Views*, Feb. 1961, p. 11.

⁴ *Christianity Today*, Nov. 21, 1960, p. 13.

⁵ *Walther League Messenger*, April 1959, p. 11, as quoted in *News and Views*, June 1961, p.22.

isolated in this world that it will not be confronted by these influences. They must be faced and reckoned with. Our concern, then, about Neo-orthodoxy in the last few years and your concern in having this present essay on your convention schedule is a valid one.

We have entitled the essay: *Neo-orthodoxy—The “New” Threat to Our Christian Heritage*. The title already expresses a judgment regarding Neo-orthodoxy. We consider it a threat to our Christian heritage. We also use the word “new” because in some respects it is a new threat, one that has been confronting us in this particular form and under this name only in recent decades, but we place the word “new” in quotation marks to indicate that many of its basic ideas are not as new as they sometimes are considered, or sometimes seem to be. We shall treat this subject in three parts, asking three questions. 1. What is Neo-orthodoxy? 2. How does it threaten our Christian heritage? 3. What can we do to meet this threat? We shall in the limited time available not be able to treat each question exhaustively. We think of our assignment not primarily to give an exhaustive study of Neo-orthodoxy, but to acquaint those with it to whom it is something still strange, to alert them to its threats, to give some suggestions on how to combat it.

1. What is Neo-orthodoxy?

The term itself means new orthodoxy. If by that were meant a renewal of orthodoxy, a return to orthodox teaching, then we should be quite happy with such a theological revival. We ever want to renew and continue the orthodox, the true, correct teaching, which has become our Christian heritage through the Holy Scriptures. However, the term, Neo-orthodoxy, does not describe a return to what was known as orthodoxy; it does not want to teach Scripture as formerly done under orthodoxy. It is a new orthodoxy, meaning one that is not the same as the old.

I think we can best learn to know Neo-orthodoxy by seeing it in its historical context. What gave rise to it? What does it aim to do?

As we look back a few years to the time of our fathers and grandfathers, back also to the last century, we realize that the great threat to the Christian heritage that confronted them was religious liberalism. As you read, for instance, Dr. Pieper’s work on dogmatics, he repeatedly makes reference to this danger. Not infrequently that is one of the errors to which Dr. Hoenecke in his dogmatics refers in the antitheses. Since modern religious liberalism had taken over in many churches and was the basis for much thinking even down to our present time, we became quite accustomed to referring to its evils, its errors so destructive of Christianity.

What were some of these? Let us begin with liberalism’s view of man. It denied original sin in man, considering him as basically good. One author puts it this way: “Inherent goodness is one of the fundamental pillars of liberal anthropology.”⁶ Stated very simply, what this theory of inherent goodness says is this: Man is good by nature; it is only bad company, bad surroundings, bad habits that have made him bad; given the opportunity, his goodness will show itself. How familiar isn’t liberalism’s view of man to all of us!

But this leads us to speak also of other basic ideas of religious liberalism. The *Christian Century* in 1933 pointed out that this “faith in man and his highest values ... makes possible confidence in human reason and insight as the basis of authority in religion.”⁷ In other words, the Bible no longer is or is needed as an authoritative source for our religion. As one man put it: “We have learned, not to think of the Bible as the final and infallible authority and have come to see that there is no such authority and that we need none.”⁸ Man can know everything he needs to know through his reason, through his religious experience. In fact, the Bible was called “essentially a record of man’s past religious experience.”⁹ That, of course, does away with the Bible as revelation, that is, that in the Bible God reveals to man that which he could never in and through himself get to know. It is a record of religious experience and if the religious experience recorded there agrees with your own

⁶ Carnell, *The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr*, p. 20.

⁷ *Christian Century*, Nov. 8, 1933, p. 1403, quoted by Carnell, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸ *The American Journal of Theology*, 1916, p. 326, quoted by Horsch, *Modern Religious Liberalism*, p. 14.

⁹ Burt, *Types of Religious Philosophy*, p. 324, quoted by Carnell, *op. cit.*, pp. 15f.

reason and experience, then you may possibly accept it. On the otherhand, your own religious experience may lead you to something that is far advanced beyond what is recorded in the Bible.

This, of course, also made the Bible subject to man's critical reason. What was known as radical criticism was applied to the Bible. The Bible had to be judged by man, by his reason, judged even as all other writings are subject to man's judgment. In modern higher criticism "the critics take the position that all that cannot be explained by human standards of knowledge is unacceptable. All questions pertaining to Bible study are approached on the basis of naturalism and rationalism."¹⁰ For example, according to human standards and the natural way of thinking no child could be born without having also a human father, therefore it cannot be scientifically true that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. The miracles either did not happen as stated in the Bible, or what happened took place in a way that can be explained scientifically. Accepting the theory of evolution as scientifically true, liberalism rejected the creation of the world as told in Genesis. This critical study of the Bible, of course, undermines the very foundation of Christianity, its only authoritative basis, God's inspired Word.

Liberalism having the view of man and the Scriptures, which it does, one can easily realize how it also rejected Christ as the Son of God, as the Redeemer whose death gained salvation for sinful mankind. Christ was viewed as a great man, the great example for us all to follow.

Indeed, its entire view of the world (*Weltanschauung*), its judgment of the history of the world was one that naturally follows from the acceptance of evolution. The idea of evolution is that everything is ever developing upward, from monkey to man, and from man as he is at present with still many imperfections to one ever more perfect. This world is getting ever better, moving upward. And it is man with his own efforts who is responsible for this. Science and education are leading man onward and upward. Thus spoke liberalism.

But it was just this idea of the inherent goodness of man and of the upward evolutionary process in history which set the stage for the reaction to liberalism which is known as Neo-orthodoxy. By the time of the First World War liberalism had taken over the religious thinking in Europe; but then came 1914 and the First World War. Niebuhr writes of this: "Then came the deluge. Since 1914 one tragic experience has followed another, as if history had been designed to refute the main delusions of modern man."¹¹ Man, facing the world realistically, had to ask himself whether his optimistic view of man and of history was justified. You can't see the whole world's energies directed toward destruction and killing and still optimistically say 'all's right with the world.' World War I, then, marks the historical turning point in liberal optimism."¹² Later the great depression of the thirties and the Second World War added to man's disillusionment.

Modern religious liberals in the face of this had to either return to evangelical conservatism, that is, to Biblical orthodoxy as we know it, or otherwise make some changes in their own approach and thinking. The latter was done, and the result is known as Neo-orthodoxy, sometimes also called dialectical theology or theology of crisis. It claims to hold a position somewhere between the liberalism we and our forefathers have been opposing and our conservatism, orthodoxy, or also fundamentalism, the latter a position with which we are not ready to identify ourselves in every respect, but which does hold to the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

The man who first reacted against modernism and who may be considered the father of Neo-orthodoxy is Karl Barth. Born in Switzerland in 1886, he was a comparatively young pastor when the First World War broke out. In the face of a war-torn world he, trained as a modernist, discovered that he had nothing more than shallow human reasonings and guesses to give his people. The spiritual food he could give his hearers was only a lot of "milk-toast of good advice," not real meat. The idea of man's progressing toward an ever better world, modernism's optimistic view of history, did not make much sense in the face of the tragic realities with which he was confronted in the world. His thinking found expression in a book which he published in 1919, a commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans*. And so the theology known as Neo-orthodoxy was born. Since then other names have become associated with it, that of Emil Brunner, and Bultmann, although some consider the

¹⁰ Horsch, *Modern Religious Liberalism*, p. 22.

¹¹ Niebuhr, *Faith and History*, pp. 6-7.

¹² Carnell, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

latter really a liberal. In America names like Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich are among the better known ones. Although there are many differences among these men, we shall not enter in upon them to any great extent here. That is a lengthy study in itself. We shall need to limit ourselves to gaining certain general impressions. In general as to its historical position we can say that Neo-orthodoxy wants to oppose liberalism in religion, but at the same time with equal decision opposes conservative orthodoxy. Since it opposes liberalism, it has found sympathizers where liberalism was rejected. But since it also opposes conservative orthodoxy, we see in it a threat to our Christian heritage, one that may prove a greater danger to conservative Christianity than was liberal modernism just because of its opposition to it. With this historical setting, let us ask then: What is Neo-orthodoxy?

In attempting to answer this question, we cannot say: These are the specific teachings of Neo-orthodoxy. We already indicated that there is quite a difference in the views of those who come under the general term of Neo-orthodoxy. In fact, one author even states that the “differences are so great and so confusing that the very term, Neo-orthodoxy, has become almost meaningless.”¹³ However, in Neo-orthodoxy we are being confronted not so much with a system of doctrine as with a theological method. Actually it “believes that theology dare not be stymied by doctrinal formulations.”¹⁴ It speaks disparagingly of what it likes to call a mere propositional Christianity, a Christianity that is supposed to consist in merely drawing up correct propositions, that is, doctrinal statements. So its concern does not involve attempting to state what truth is, what is objectively true according to the Scriptures. Its interest is not so much to find out what Jesus really says to us in the Scriptures, but to tell us how we may have Christ speak to us right now in an encounter with Him as the present Christ. It is not interested in what is truth objectively, but in showing how you can find that which will become true for you. Keeping this in mind, let us compare it in three areas with what we heard in these same areas about liberalism.

Consider first the view of man and of history. Liberalism viewed man as basically good and history as a steady march upward on the part of man. Neo-orthodoxy by contrast recognizes the fact of sin and takes sin seriously. It speaks of God as the Wholly-Other and recognizes that there is a great gulf between man and God. While there may be differences among the new theologians in regard to the degree of man’s sinfulness, they do recognize it. Man’s sin consists particularly in his being self-centered. Because of this he is inclined toward destruction and his history is not one that is evolutionary, that is, moving onward and upward. As man recognizes this, he is faced with a crisis. Hence this is spoken of as the theology of crisis. In this crisis man is faced with a decision. Dr. Engelder in an article in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* of 1936 speaks of this crisis and decision as referring to “the critical situation in which the sinner finds himself and to the necessity for a right decision, meaning the decision of faith.”¹⁵ He then quotes these words from one of Brunner’s books: “Decision ought to mean an act in which the self is left behind, a flying leap, rather than a gliding motion. The act of decision ought to mean a definite move forward, stepping over the boundary-line, an act in which the soul really steps out into the unknown”¹⁶

It is here that we take note of what is known as existentialism, a term much heard today in connection with present-day theology, but one that is a little hard to define and nail down. But it involves this decision that we spoke of above, this radical decision, or leap, in the face of the crisis that confronts man. Only when you make this “leap,” do you recover your real personal existence, which is the deep concern of existentialism. One man describes it in this way: “By existentialism is meant primary emphasis on man’s decision rather than on his ideas and experience.”¹⁷ Perhaps an illustration that has been used will help to show what is meant. Three umpires, a realist, an idealist, and an existentialist, speak about their calling of balls and strikes in a game. The realist says: I call the balls and strikes as they are. The idealist says: I call them as I see them. The existentialist says: There are no balls and strikes until I call them. In existentialism it is the decision that leads to true existence. And man finds his true personal existence when he makes the right decision in the critical situation in

¹³ Vos., *op. cit.*, p. 428.

¹⁴ Mayer, *Religious Bodies of America*, p. 491.

¹⁵ Engelder, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 1936, p. 332.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁷ Ferre, *Where Do We Go From Here in Theology*, p. 6.

which he finds himself. We, of course, notice that existentialism is very subjective, placing emphasis not upon what something is objectively, but on what it becomes for you. We shall take note of this also in our next point.

Consider next the area of Scripture and revelation. Liberalism claimed for man the ability through his reason and experience to know and judge all things. Scripture was considered a record of religious experiences and had to be judged on the basis of reason and experience. Neo-orthodoxy, recognizing the gulf between man and God, opposes liberalism in certain respects. God, being the Wholly-Other, can be known only or primarily by revelation. Here there are considerable differences among the neo-orthodox theologians. Barth claims that nothing can be known of God through nature, but all things must be learned through divine revelation. Others, as Emil Brunner, attribute some knowledge of God as being revealed in nature. At least there is agreement on this that we must look to divine revelation to learn about God.

But how does God reveal Himself? In His acts, and particularly in Christ, is the answer. Scripture is a record of God's acts, which men have recorded. In itself, Scripture is not revelation. But when you concern yourself with Scripture, it may happen that God will reveal Himself to you. The Bible is not the Word of God, but it may become the Word of God to an individual believer through the Holy Spirit. This is the way Dr. Engelder speaks of this neo-orthodox view of Scripture in the article referred to above. He writes: "Only under certain conditions do the words of the Bible become to us God's Word: only then when *God* speaks them to our souls. God's Word is what we hear God speaking within us, independently of, albeit through the medium of, the Bible Word."¹⁸ He then points out that this is a form of subtle enthusiasm. Enthusiasm—in Luther's day it was refuted under the name of *Schwärmerei*—does not look to the written word of the Scriptures, but to the Spirit. Though Neo-orthodoxy sees the Scriptures as a medium through which the Holy Spirit speaks, yet it does not look upon the Scriptures themselves as that which the Holy Spirit speaks to us but looks for some direct revelation from the Spirit as the Scriptures are read. That is surely a form of enthusiasm. We shall enter in more on the matter of Scripture and revelation in our second part.

Thirdly, let us see what Neo-orthodoxy has to say of Christ. In liberalism Christ was not essentially different from other men, but He was the one in whom the good that is in all men expressed itself in perfection. So Christ was considered man's perfect example. Neo-orthodoxy is not content with that. It speaks of Christ as God's perfect revelation of Himself. Not so important is the Christ of history, but the present Christ. Here opinions again differ widely. Some like Barth recognize the virgin birth of Christ, the historicity of His death and resurrection. They speak in terms that sound quite orthodox. Others will say that we cannot know the Christ of history and reject the reality of the virgin birth and of the resurrection, in fact, of anything miraculous. But in general the emphasis is upon this that we must have an encounter with the "present" Christ.

Now as we view all of these points, it does appear that Neo-orthodoxy seems to be an improvement over liberalism. It does face the fact of sin. It seriously concerns itself with revelation and the Scriptures. It recognizes Christ as more than a perfect man. Yet, we must view it as a real and serious threat to our Christian heritage. That is what we shall now consider in our second part.

2. How does Neo-orthodoxy Threaten Our Christian Heritage?

If we speak of our Christian heritage as being threatened, we need to ask first what we mean by our Christian heritage. We are using the word here in a broad sense, including in the term inheritance, that which has come down to us as Christians from the past as well as that into which we as Christians still hope to enter in the future. St. Paul spoke of the Christian heritage to the elders of Ephesus when he bade them farewell at Miletus. He said to them: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). The inheritance into which they would enter is the one that they have with all them that are sanctified. This is the inheritance which St. Peter in his first letter says we have through the resurrection of Christ Jesus, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Pet. 1:4). It is

¹⁸ Engelder, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

the inheritance we have as “heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit. 3:7). That is the glorious inheritance to which we as Christians are looking forward, an inheritance that to us now is incomprehensible in all its fullness, richness, glory, and joy. Who can know the blessings of eternal life? Who will want to miss this inheritance once we have been proclaimed heirs?

St. Paul tells the elders at Ephesus how this inheritance is given to them. He commands them to the word of his grace, which is able to build them up and to give them this inheritance. It comes to us through the word of grace, the gracious word of God, the word that proclaims the Gospel of Christ. And so to this he commends them. This was a heritage that they had received from him when he had proclaimed to them the whole counsel of God. Later they also had this word in written form from his inspired pen.

It is the word of God’s grace in written form that has come down to us from the Apostles and Prophets that is our heritage from the past. It is through that word that the heritage, upon which we hope to enter in eternity, has brought to us. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul points out that they have obtained an inheritance in Christ and then says: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13, 14). If we trace Paul’s line of thought back from the idea of the inheritance, it is as follows: That you will finally have a glorious inheritance in heaven you can be certain, for already now God has given you a down-payment (earnest) of it in that He has given you the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit came to you when you believed, and you believed in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. We see how ultimately the basis for their inheritance goes back to the gospel, the word of truth, God’s Word. And that Gospel was given to them, that was their Christian heritage through which they would be given the eternal inheritance with God.

This word of truth, this Gospel of our salvation, is the Christian heritage that has come to us also, has come to us in the inspired writings of Moses and the Prophets, of the Evangelists and Apostles. It is in its fullest and most complete sense the word of truth. For it is a word that was spoken and also written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, II Peter 1:21. When St. Paul and other Apostles spoke and wrote this word of truth, these things that were freely given to them of God, they did so, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, I Corinthians 2:12, 13. So of this word, though it was written by men in human language and in the particular style characteristic of the individual who was writing, we confess that the Holy Spirit is the author. We find that in our Lutheran Confessions the *Apology* speaks of the “Scripture of the Holy Spirit” (Ap., Intro. 9). In the *Augsburg Confession* the question is asked: “Why does the divine Scripture so frequently forbid the making and keeping of human regulations?” and a few lines later asks: “Is it possible that the Holy Spirit warned against them for nothing?” (A. C. XXVIII, 49). Thus in the divine Scripture the Holy Spirit is speaking. In the *Apology* we read: “Do they think that the Holy Spirit does not utter his Word surely and deliberately, or does not know what he is saying?” (Ap. IV, 108). Yes, we confess that the Holy Spirit utters the word of Scripture, that He is the true author of it.

As such it is then indeed in the fullest and most complete sense the word of truth. It does not err, it speaks no untruth, but it is reliable, true, trustworthy, inerrant, infallible, and wholly dependable. As such it is the only infallible basis upon which our Christian faith and life are built. That is our Christian heritage, this word of truth that by God’s grace has come down to us from the Apostles.

It is our Christian heritage in a special way in our Synod and for many years was that for the Synodical Conference. For in the face of modern religious liberalism with its rejection of the divine origin and authority and reliability of Scripture, in the face of those who hold that “Holy Scripture is not in all its parts the Word of God,” the Missouri Synod stated in its *Brief Statement* and the synods of the Synodical Conference agreed with this: “We teach that the Holy Scriptures differ from all other books in the world in that they are the Word of God... Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical, and other secular matters, John 10:35.”¹⁹ That confession to the Scriptures has in a

¹⁹ *Doctrinal Declarations*, 1937, p. 43.

special way been the heritage that has come down to us from the fathers in the Synodical Conference. So when we here speak of the Christian heritage that is being threatened, we think of the Holy Scriptures, we think of them in the sense in which we have learned to know them in our Lutheran Church, we think of the eternal inheritance that through those Scriptures is given to us as through them we are brought to faith in Christ and receive now already the down payment of that inheritance.

It is this Christian heritage, Scripture, the sure basis for our faith, which is being threatened by Neo-orthodoxy. Faith must have a firm anchor to which it can hold. That has been given to us in the Scriptures, in Christ, who is revealed to us in the Scriptures. That is something firm and abiding outside us. Scripture is the solid rock that stands firm in the tempestuous sea of this changing world. Neo-orthodoxy makes of that firm foundation a mere floating dock, one that rocks about as the waves carry it along. We see the greatest threat of Neo-orthodoxy in this that it undermines the Scriptures, and in doing so makes all doctrine uncertain. It undermines the Scriptures on the one hand by its view of what the Scriptures are, by its view of the nature of Scripture. It does this on the other hand by the way it uses, or interprets, Scripture.

First we ask: What view does Neo-orthodoxy have of the Scriptures? What is the Bible? What kind of writings are these? Are they considered as God's own word, as His revelation? We have already touched upon this question in our first part, but we shall enter upon it more fully here where we shall consider several quotations from the advocates of this new theology. Before doing this, we want to note two things about their way of expressing themselves. One is this. At times they will use language that sounds very orthodox. Concerning Barth's language the view has been expressed: "Barth has the ability to a very large degree of being able to employ the language of Scripture in a system that is totally foreign to the Bible."²⁰ This new theology can use terms that are familiar to us and have a definite meaning for us but mean something entirely different to them. As it has been put: "It can speak of the resurrection of Jesus, for instance, without any reference to his resuscitation, to his being raised by God; and it can refer to our resurrection, even of the body, with no thought of personal life after death."²¹ So in reading neo-orthodox literature one needs to keep this ever in mind. One needs to ask: Do they mean by these words and expressions what the latter have always meant to us?

On the other hand, regarding the language used by Neo-orthodoxy this also must be said: It expresses itself in ways that are completely foreign to us. Often one has to pause and ask himself: Just what do these words mean? After reading in Brunner with considerable difficulty I was somewhat consoled by this comment of Dr. Engelder regarding one of Brunner's books: "And so the book makes very hard reading. Much of it, in the first place, is hard to understand. The reader must first acquire a new and sometimes strange vocabulary and then finds it ordinarily rather difficult to follow the line of abstruse thinking and finely spun argumentation set before him."²² Someone has said regarding Tillich that he did not write anything that could be understood. No doubt this was an exaggeration, (for we shall quote some references from him that quite clearly reject what we believe concerning the Bible) but it certainly applies in much of his writing.

In quoting, we shall have to limit ourselves to a few basic points, for very much has been written on the subject of Scripture and Revelation in recent years. The new theologians concern themselves much with this subject. Karl Barth alone wrote an entire volume consisting of two parts having 514 and 990 pages respectively on the doctrine of the Word of God. Otto Weber in his book entitled *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* condensed this into 72 pages, which, however, does include many direct quotations. Just a few quotations from this latter book will at least give us some idea of what views we are faced with here.

Is the Bible God's Word? We read: "Thus it is also simultaneously asserted that when we confess in faith that the Bible is God's Word, it is not because a man has laid hold of the Bible, but because the Bible has laid hold of him. In this event the Bible becomes God's Word. In the sentences, 'The Bible is God's Word,' the tiny word 'is' refers to the Bible's existence in this becoming."²³ Without going into a lengthy attempt to elaborate on all of this, at least this should be apparent: These words of Karl Barth do not say that the Bible is

²⁰ Wingren, *Theology in Conflict*, p. 125.

²¹ Ferre, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²² Engelder, *op. cit.*, pp. 244f.

²³ Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics*, pp. 25f.

God's Word in the sense in which we have always understood that. The Bible is not the Word of God in any objective sense because it was written by inspiration of God. But they say that somehow under certain circumstances the Bible may become God's Word, namely, when the Bible lays hold of man.

Is the Bible revelation? We read: "'The Bible is ... not itself and as such the divine revelation which has taken place' It is rather 'the concerted means by which the Church is reminded of the divine in the future, and is thereby challenged, empowered, and directed toward proclamation' (114). It *IS* 'revelation,' 'where the Biblical word functions as a word of witness' (116)."²⁴ This hardly speaks of the Bible itself as God's revelation. But again, the Bible becomes that only under certain conditions, when it functions as a word of witness.

Let us also hear a few quotations from Tillich on this same point. He warns against saying that the Bible is the Word of God. We read in his *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I: "The term Word is applied to the document of the final revelation and its special preparation, namely, the Bible. But if the Bible is called the Word of God, theological confusion is almost unavoidable... Probably nothing has contributed more to the misinterpretation of the Biblical doctrine of the Word than the identification of the Word with the Bible."²⁵ That these words reject the Bible as God's Word is quite evident and no further comment need be made.

Is the Bible divine revelation? Tillich writes: "It is obvious that the word as a medium of revelation, the 'Word of God,' is not a word of information about otherwise hidden truth."²⁶ In this statement Tillich is speaking quite clearly. It seems quite evident that according to him the Bible does not tell us things that we otherwise cannot know. He then continues by giving the reason for this statement. He continues: "If it were this, if revelation were information, no 'transparency' of language would be needed. Ordinary language, transmitting no 'sound' of ultimacy, could give information about 'divine matters.'"²⁷ If this latter statement made you wonder what this is all about, don't feel badly about that. I read this quotation primarily as an example of his not-so-clear way of speaking.

That God's Word and revelation is something quite apart from the Bible and the Scriptures for Tillich becomes apparent also from some things he says about preaching. When your pastor preaches, you rightfully believe that he is preaching the Word of God to you when he says what the Bible says. If he says anything else, if he would preach something that is not taught in the Scriptures and even contradicts them, then you would have to say that he is not preaching the Word of God. His preaching is the Word of God only when and as long as it is preaching that is Scriptural. Thus we believe.

Now listen to what Tillich says on this: "No minister should claim more than his intention to speak the Word when he preaches. He never should claim that he has spoken it or that he will be able to speak it in the future, for, since he has no power over the revelatory constellation, he possesses no power to preach the Word. He may speak mere words, theologically correct though they may be. And he may speak the Word, though its formulations are theologically incorrect."²⁸ In this quotation from Tillich perhaps everything is quite clear except the expression that the preacher has no power over the "revelatory constellation." This has reference to something he said earlier and to which he applied that expression. This is the explanation: "The Word depends not only on the meaning of the words of preaching alone but also on the power with which they are spoken. And it depends not only on the understanding of the listener alone but also on his existential reception of the content."²⁹ These factors he calls the "constellation" in which human words may become the Word, that is, the Word of God. So even when a preacher proclaims the truths of Scripture, even when people hear those truths and have the true meaning conveyed to them, they are not God's Word unless the preacher has spoken them with power and unless they have also been received existentially, that is, with a decisive faith. And when the latter happens, it doesn't even matter that the preacher actually taught what is theologically incorrect, it yet is

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁵ Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 176.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

the Word of God. Where does that leave the Scriptures? They are no different than the words of any pious man or of anyone who speaks with power and the content of whose words are existentially received by the hearer.

We shall bring one more quotation on this subject to show how some who lay claim to the name of Lutheran speak. The *Lutheran*, the weekly periodical of the United Lutheran Church, printed a quotation that is taken from the book, *What the Bible Can Mean for You*, published by its Muhlenberg Press. In this quotation we see how language is first used that sounds very good, but then is explained in a way that denies what we have always understood those words to say. We read: "Today the Bible is recognized as revelation. It is the book of God. His word is authoritative. God is the author of the Bible." So far this sounds very good. In fact, it sounds truly Lutheran. But then the explanation is added: "Not, as the Fundamentalists taught, in some mechanical way, but because in the Bible God speaks his saving words through the experience of his people. The Bible is the historic record of God's effort to communicate himself to men. It is also the instrument of his self-revelation. There is a distinction between the Word of God and the Bible."³⁰

God speaks His saving word through the experience of His people, and the Bible is the historic record of God's effort to communicate Himself to men, in that sense God is called the author of the Bible. The Bible only tells you how God attempted to make Himself known to man, but it does not actually make God known. It is the instrument of self-revelation, but it does not itself reveal God. That is hardly as we understand and have ever understood God's authorship of the Bible.

How can we then sum up the new theology's views of the nature of Scripture? While opinions may differ among neo-orthodox theologians, I think we can safely say that quite generally they agree that the Scriptures are a record, yes, a human record, produced by fallible men, in which these men tell us how God revealed, or attempted to reveal, Himself in certain events which they experienced or which by oral or written tradition were transmitted to them. Thus the Scriptures arose out of the life and experience of the Christian community. When you now devote yourself to the study and meditation of this record, God may reveal Himself also to you, not directly through the words and what they say, for the words themselves do not reveal directly, but they may become the medium of revelation. What concerns us deeply in such a view is that it is a direct denial of the divine character of Scripture. Neo-orthodoxy lets Scripture speak about divine things, but denies that Scripture itself is something divine, something God-given. Thus its view of the nature of Scripture is a serious threat to our Christian heritage, the divinely inspired Word of Scripture.

However, neo-orthodoxy's view of Scripture does lead these new theologians to show a great concern for and interest in Scripture. They do not ignore the Scriptures. Countless volumes that concern themselves with the Scriptures, with the theology of the Old or of the New Testament are appearing. But the question that we are now interested in examining is this: What do they do with the Scriptures? How do they treat them? How do they interpret them? When we realize that they consider Scripture as basically a human book, a human record, we already will be filled with evil forebodings. As we proceed we shall see that our fears are justified.

Since the Bible is really only a human record, it must be read and studied critically. By this is meant not only that we must carefully study the original texts and manuscripts to determine as closely as possible what the original reading must have been. It does not mean only this that we must study the original languages to see what meaning the words used in the Scriptures had at the time of their writing. But what is known as radical criticism should be applied to the study of the Scriptures. Radical criticism arose under religious liberalism. It rejects the inspiration and infallibility of the Scriptures. Scripture must be judged, evaluated, accepted or rejected on the basis of the findings of science, history, geology, anthropology, or what have you. When radical criticism goes to work, nothing is true because the Scriptures say so, but you may accept something that Scripture says as true if you upon critical study can find corroborating evidence for accepting a certain Scripture statement as true. St. Paul did not write the Letter to the Ephesians or any of the others just because his name appears as the author of the letter. Isaiah was not necessarily the author of the 66 chapters of that book because he is mentioned as its author. Moses did not necessarily write the first five books, although Christ refers to him as the author. The words of a blasphemous song: "It ain't necessarily so" are applied to all of Scripture. And

³⁰ *The Lutheran*, May 9, 1962, p. 15.

Neo-orthodoxy, although it claims to be opposing religious liberalism, which operated with radical criticism, has accepted this method of Scripture study to a considerable degree. And why should it not, if the Scriptures are only a record, a human record, of revelation?

But let us take note of certain methods that are applied to the study and use of the Scriptures. One is known by the German word, *Formgeschichte*, literally meaning the history of form, also in English rendered by form criticism. Martin Dibelius applied this method to the study of the Gospels in a book that appeared in 1919. But its method has also been applied to the Old Testament. Instead of accepting the Gospels as inspired accounts of what Jesus actually did and said, form criticism holds “that records of the life and teaching of Christ in the Four Gospels were largely shaped by the purposes of those who had preserved and handed down what was contained in these brief accounts.”³¹ By way of mouth what Jesus had said and done was handed down. This oral tradition took on a certain form. This form may be recognized in the writings of the Gospels. But this oral tradition also met with changes according to the purpose to which the Church put it. So in the Gospels we have much that has the form it has because that is the way the Church spoke of it and taught it. To make a certain point the Church may also have added to or changed the tradition. In addition, also the Evangelists did some editing of the material they used. So, for example, the accounts of the Lord’s Supper were very much influenced by liturgical usage. Without going into further detail, it is apparent that such a way of using Scripture will make it completely uncertain. Who will be the judge to determine what Jesus actually did do and say? Regarding the Lord’s Supper your pastor would have to say to you: This is what the early Christians said was instituted. He could not say: This is what Christ says He is giving you in the Sacrament; this is what actually happened on the night in which He was betrayed.

Another term that is being heard in connection with biblical criticism is “demythologizing.” We are to demythologize the Bible if we are to get at the real truths it teaches. It is claimed that the Bible uses so-called myths to teach important truths. These myths must not be taken as historically factual; it is to misunderstand them and Scripture if you believe that they actually happened as the literal interpretation of the words would demand. So these theologians will speak of the creation myth. That means the creation did not really happen literally as told in Genesis 1. We misunderstand Scripture, so they say, if that is the way we take that account. We must get at the truth which lies behind the myth, in this case that man is dependent upon God, that we are creatures and that that places certain limitations upon us. Or take the case of the fall of Adam and Eve. This is not something that really happened to people by that name, but a myth that shows us that man will always bring about the corruption of his moral nature. It is a picture of what happens in every person’s life.

These various methods are used in interpreting Scripture, it is said by the modern theologians, in the interest of Scripture itself. The deep concern they have is to make Scripture relevant, that is, meaningful, understandable, to modern man. And we will certainly sympathize with such a concern. Woe unto us if that is not also our deepest concern. We, however, will understand the responsibility of making Scripture relevant to modern man as consisting in speaking in a way that modern man can understand us. We want to be understood when we preach sin and grace. What we say must be put into words that have meaning to the person who hears us. I am not speaking relevantly if I use the word “justification” in speaking with a man who has never heard the word before and has no idea of what the Biblical meaning of that word is. I must speak so that the thoughts I am expressing will get through to the listener. That we understand as speaking relevantly. You make Scripture relevant by a proper distinction between Law and Gospel in preaching and ministering.

But that is not what the neo-orthodox means when he says that he wants to make Christianity and Scripture relevant to modern man. What he means is that Scripture must be explained in such a way that it will fit in with modern man’s philosophy and with his scientific way of thinking. For example: Modern man accepts the theories of evolution as basically true, hence I must explain Genesis 1 and 2 in a way that makes sense to him. Or to cite another example: Modern man in his scientific research has observed that nature follows a certain regular course; hence there can be no miracles. Where in Scripture it would seem that this regular course of nature was disrupted, there must be another explanation for it. The dividing of the Red Sea so that Israel

³¹ Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, p. 1380.

might pass through it, if it happened at all, must have happened “probably from the East wind blowing over the Red Sea,” as one man put it. So making Scripture relevant to the neo-orthodox is not only being clear in communicating, but it means adapting Scripture to the modern, scientific man’s way of thinking, to the modern mentality.

To show what happens when the above critical methods are used in order to make Christianity relevant to modern man, I should like to bring some examples from a book to which reference was made at the very beginning, the book entitled *Conversation on Faith*, which appeared first in Germany and has now appeared in America in an English translation and is published by the Muhlenberg Press of the United Lutheran Church. We already stated that portions of it were reprinted in *The Lutheran*. This would indicate that the book is considered very worthwhile by at least many in the United Lutheran Church. In the *Foreword* the author states that he is attempting “to fashion and mold the Christian message in the terms of our time and the thought forms of the critical, inquiring person of today.”³² That is another way of saying that he wants to make the Christian message relevant to our times. Now let’s see what happens when that is done following the critical procedures we have described above.

Was Jesus born of the virgin Mary, born without having a human father? That a child should be born in this supernatural way appears impossible to the scientific mind. What solution does Mueller give? He writes: “If we of the twentieth century are to understand and believe the Christian creed concerning the birth of Jesus, it will depend on our understanding what is essential in it for the New Testament and the whole Christian church. The essential thing is not the natural process that took place at the birth of Jesus. When the Bible presents its accounts of miracles, the question as to whether or not God employed the customary orders of nature is irrelevant.”³³ So the virgin birth is made relevant to modern man by saying that the question whether Jesus had a human father, that the Scriptures deny, is entirely irrelevant. He goes on to say: “For the primitive church the question whether God used only Mary or also Joseph as an instrument and vessel of his purpose was not the central question at all.”³⁴ But how does it happen that Matthew relates the account of the virgin birth? Matthew, it is said, is merely giving the account of the virgin birth “which was current in the primitive Christian church.”³⁵ But how did it happen to be current in the primitive church? Why did they speak in this way? Mueller goes on: “Today we can no longer ascertain whether Mary herself, who would have been the only person in a position to do so, recounted to the disciples of Jesus the miracle story of the virgin birth.” Since then this cannot be established, he surmises: “It may also be possible that this story was an attempt on the part of the primitive Christian church and the generations following to explain the miracle of the unique, God-dedicated personality of Jesus.” So the church was told about this wonderful man, Jesus, who was so completely God-dedicated, and in order to explain the appearance of such a wonderful man they began to tell the story of his birth of a virgin, and that is what Matthew related in his Gospel. Mueller then concludes this discussion by saying: “If this were the case, then the story of the birth of Jesus would be a figurative, childlike interpretation of that statement which, according to John, Jesus himself made about his coming from God (John 8:23)³⁶” He doesn’t present this as a positive explanation, but as at least a possible way of explaining all of this. There you see source criticism at work. Instead of being a divinely inspired account and true, Matthew’s account of the virgin birth is only a story that arose within the church and may well be nothing else than a myth. What is important is only the truth that they wanted to express, namely, that Jesus was a unique, God-dedicated personality, and that He was from above, not of this world. And this poses as Lutheran teaching!

The empty grave is another event in the Gospel history that does not make sense to the modern scientific mind. Can a dead body be made alive again? Was the grave of Jesus really empty? To make the resurrection of Christ relevant to modern man this question, which we remember Scripture does answer, is made irrelevant. Mueller points out: “Many interpreters are of the opinion that the detailed accounts of the events in and near the

³² Mueller, *Conversation on Faith*, p. VII.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

tomb of Jesus (especially the scenes involving the soldiers Matt. 27:66–28:4) are embellishing narratives of the later church. The resurrection of Jesus itself, they say, was not a physical process, but something that happened as a spiritual or ‘mythical, super-historical’ process in the hearts of the disciples.”³⁷ Here you have both *Formgeschichte* and demythologizing at work. In that way you get rid of what in Scripture is offensive to the modern mind. Mueller doesn’t directly state whether he agrees with the interpreters to whom he has referred. But later on he does say: “Faith in the risen Christ is not decided by the question of what happened to the material substance of his physical body.”³⁸ In the concluding paragraph he says: “We therefore should not think we are contributing to the defense of faith or historical truth when we agonize over some external side of the resurrection message of the Bible.”³⁹ Alas! This wants to be considered as Lutheran teaching, when for Luther there was only one question: What does Scripture say?

We shall cite one more example of destructive criticism at work from the book under consideration. In the creed we confess: And he descended into hell. Mueller promises “to describe in present day language what the ancients were asserting when they confessed their faith in the descent of Christ into hell.” We are told: “The Christian church believes that it was not only to the living that God revealed himself, as he appeared personally in the man Jesus Christ. God in his goodness condescended even farther and went to meet those who had already died. Everything that God’s love does for us who are living when we experience the goodness and the majesty of God in the proclamation of Jesus or in the reception of his sacraments God did not withhold from those who had already entered the realm of the dead.”⁴⁰ Then he quotes from I Peter 3 and 4. In the next paragraph he continues: “The myth of Christ’s descent into hell is therefore not a fable or a legend invented by some poet. It is the expression of a conviction of faith that was held by the first Christians. They considered it unthinkable that the rule of God’s love which appeared in Christ should extend only to those people whom Jesus Christ met whether in person or through the message proclaimed by his disciples.”⁴¹ So the descent of Christ is a myth. And it is confessed in the creed only to express the faith of the early Christians in something that Scripture does not at all teach, namely, that the souls in hell were offered fellowship with God, peace, and forgiveness. And all of this is done in order to make this doctrine relevant to modern man, for regarding it the author says: “When we stop to reflect about this, we see that here in this mythical language of the ancients we are given a message which is absolutely indispensable to countless people today, if they are not to go wrong about God.”⁴² And remember again, that all of this wants to be considered as Lutheran teaching!

There you see what happens when the new theologians employ their methods of Scripture interpretation in the interest of making Scripture relevant to modern man. No doctrine that doesn’t make sense to the modern mind, that doesn’t harmonize with what man at the present considers as true on the basis of scientific research—and in this connection we don’t want to forget how the findings of science have changed over the years—no doctrine that doesn’t agree with all of that is sacred. It can and must be changed. The Bible loses all authority. It becomes a book of myths, a book with many errors and contradictions.

The extent to which the latter idea is held becomes forcefully apparent in the account which *Christianity Today* had of Barth’s lectures before an overflow audience of more than 2000 in the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago, many of whom must have been theologians and students of theology. He was asked during a question period whether a theology could claim to be a biblical theology and reject parts of the Bible because of supposed theological and historical errors. Who is going to decide what in the Scripture is to be accepted and what is not? Barth’s answer was reported as seemingly not meeting the question. “He asserted,” *Christianity Today* reported, “that the Bible is a fitting instrument to point men to God, who alone is infallible. The Bible is a human document and not sinless as Christ was. Then a large part of the overflow audience ...

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

applauded Barth's assertion that there are 'contradictions and errors' in the Bible."⁴³ Note! The denial of the reliability of the Bible, of its inspiration, its divinity was actually applauded by a large part of those who heard that. This surely shows us both the dangerous threat that Neo-orthodoxy is to our Christian heritage and the extent to which it has already engulfed the religious world of America. The threat that faces us in Neo-orthodoxy will undermine the very basis of our whole faith, undermines those divinely inspired Scriptures which are the only place where we can find Christ, the one and only Savior of mankind. And note from the examples we brought that the doctrines that are being made relevant to modern thinking contrary to Scripture included those which had to do with the life and work of our Savior.

We see then a serious threat to our Christian heritage in this new theology. This is the new threat that confronts us, and yet not a new threat at all. In its attitude toward the Scriptures we are here confronted not by a new orthodoxy, but by a new modernism, a new liberalism, one that claims to take the Bible seriously, but that undermines it no less than the liberalism against which the true church has had to battle for a long time. This was well expressed in an essay read at the convention of our Wisconsin Synod last summer by Prof. Blume of our Seminary. This is the way he summed up that thought: "Frankly," he said, "I find myself unable to see that this so-called 'neo-orthodox' position has departed at all from the basic tenets of the old unbelieving liberal position. Both put the Bible entirely into the realm and competency of man. Both carefully examined, compared, analyzed, sifted, and checked the ancient documents that are contained in our beloved Bible, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. Both the old and the new modernism have felt free to accept or reject, rearrange and reassign to a different period of time from the one implicit in any book or any portion of any book of the Bible whatsoever. Both have always rejected the authority of the Scripture in anything like a reasonable understanding of the term 'authority.' Both militantly deny the infallibility of Scripture. Both deny the intimate connection between the Old and the New Testaments that Jesus and the Apostles found to exist there, and of course both deny the fulfillment of prophecy in the sense in which the New Testament speaks of it. In fact, present-day liberals fall all over themselves in paying homage to the excellence of the work that was done by the negative destructive critics of the Bible of the past century."⁴⁴ Indeed, this new threat to our Christian heritage is really an old one. Whatever threatens to undermine the word of our God, what raises doubt about what God has said is the old voice heard in the Garden of Eden by our first parents: Yea, hath God said?

So we are facing the same threats in many respects that our fathers and grandfathers, the early fathers in our Synod and in the Synodical Conference had to face. Only these threats are confronting us in what may be subtler and more deceptive ways. Our fathers fought a valiant battle against the forces of liberalism. The question for us is: What can we do about this "new" threat that confronts us? That brings us to our third question.

3. What Can We Do to Meet This Threat?

Any attempt to answer this question will have to take into consideration the place where a church body is most vulnerable to these threats. That must be reckoned with in meeting any threats to the Church. There are certain dangers to which especially laymen may succumb, others that are to be noted especially by pastors and teachers, still others that may be a threat particularly to those who labor in our schools of higher learning. Where will the threats of Neo-orthodoxy most readily find a church open to successful attack?

I believe that both the nature of the threat and also the results of observation as we look at other church bodies lead to this conclusion: This is a threat that finds inroads particularly first of all in the colleges and seminaries of a church and among the more highly educated of the laity. The very purpose of Neo-orthodoxy is to bring the Scriptures into line with the scientific and philosophical thinking of our day. It had its beginnings and first growth in the universities of Europe, especially in Germany, and from there it has spread to our country. It has found ready acceptance at the divinity schools found in many of our American universities. With

⁴³ *Christianity Today*, May 11, 1962, p. 36.

⁴⁴ *Proceedings*, 1961, p. 120.

the growing emphasis upon academic degrees as a requirement also for teaching at church-related schools and especially at seminaries, the result has been that a great number of the men called into these schools has carried on graduate work at these universities and has carried back the neo-orthodox influence. Among these men of learning the neo-orthodox approach to the Scriptures is considered the only one that is truly scholarly. Not to follow it is considered quite provincial, is evidence of backwardness in learning, is indicative of hopeless obscurantism. Not to follow Neo-orthodoxy in its method of Scripture study in the field of theology might be compared to a scientist who today would ignore all the findings that research in our atomic age has made available. And what man studying for an advanced degree wants to be considered behind the times? Nor can we fail to face the fact that in our present age of increased education there are questions we must answer that did not deeply trouble Christians in an earlier age. The temptation to compromise the Scriptures does indeed become great, even though this is not done intentionally or consciously. So we need to be very conscious as to where the new theology most readily makes its inroads and where it will prove most harmful.

This means that although we all, pastors, teachers, laymen, need to be on our guard against these threats; this is particularly true of those who need to go beyond our own circles for additional training and education. With the growing emphasis upon higher education throughout the world, the need for advanced training beyond what we ourselves can give will become ever greater. It is evident that there is a growing increase in advanced study in our Synod, and we are not minded to discourage that. But we need to keep ourselves watchful, and recognize the dangers to which we will be exposed. While we want this advanced training for those entrusted with the training of our future workers—Paul, too, had received the best education available at the time, as did also Moses—we do not want it at the expense of any part of our Christian heritage. For then the word of our Savior applies also here: “What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

But let us proceed to see how we may best stand in the face of also this threat to our Christian heritage.

In his letter to the Ephesians St. Paul bids us be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Our strength lies in putting on the whole armor of God. That will enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil. We shall take a look at certain parts of this armor that are of special significance over against the dangers that threaten us today.

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph. 6:16). Faith is the shield that protects us from the fiery darts, the temptations, also the temptations to follow the wiles of Satan in the destructive theologies that face the church from time to time.

When we speak of faith that includes two things. One is the personal conviction that God has wrought in our hearts. The other is that which this personal faith lays hold upon, the objective content of faith. In practice the two cannot be separated. Personal faith is of no benefit when it does not trust in the right thing. The true faith, the true doctrine, is of no value when it is not personally embraced in trust. Faith, and we take it as the proper combination of personal and objective faith, is a shield that protects us against Satan’s wiles.

For this we need to study the Word of God. It gives our faith the proper content. It is the means whereby personal faith is worked in our hearts and strengthened. And it is the means with which we can fight effectively against Satan and his wiles. For a little later St. Paul bids us take the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

Now what is vital is that we never forget where that Word of God is found. We dare never forget that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God. That means turning to the Scriptures and studying them on their own terms, on the basis of the claims they make concerning themselves. They must become and ever remain our most treasured possession by the working of the Spirit through them. We must not first ask what Barth or Bultmann or Tillich or anyone else tells us about the Word of God and the relationship of the Word to the Scriptures. We must simply go to the Scriptures themselves so that the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation may assure us of the heritage that truly is ours in Christ.

Since our Christian heritage is also one that has come down to us in our Lutheran Church, we need to devote ourselves to the writings of Luther and to our Lutheran Confessions. It is true that in our day there has been an unusual expansion and intensification in the study of Luther and his writings. Evidence of this is also the monumental English translation that is appearing of Luther’s works. But again, we shall turn to Luther and

the Confessions themselves. We shall see how Luther expounded the Scriptures from his own writings, and not first see how someone else says that Luther expounded them.

Important also to preserve our heritage is the study of our Synodical Conference literature. This must be studied not from the viewpoint of perpetuating a tradition, but that the rich treasure our fathers mined from the Scriptures may also become our own. Unfortunately much of this literature is in the German language. Some, however, has also been translated into English. Walther's *Law and Gospel* is such a treasure, deserving of our repeated study. We may mention Pieper's *Dogmatics*, Koehler's *Galatians*, etc. In our *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* some of the important articles of our Synod's earlier writers are appearing in translation. Particularly important for us is that we learn from them the proper view of Scriptures, the proper manner of interpreting the Scriptures. That is the heritage that has come down to us. It is ours not only by being written in articles and contained in books. It must become and remain a part of our inner being. *Es muss uns in Fleisch und Blut uebergehen*. We cannot defend our Christian heritage unless it has become a priceless treasure to us. That then is important for us all, pastors, teachers, laymen. That also first of all must be what we pass on to those whom we train for work in the Church. We have a rich treasure that must continue to live in our hearts and in the hearts of those whom we train for future generations.

In the face of danger and temptation our Savior told His disciples to watch and pray. We truly need to be watchful. In this case it means that we ever need to try the spirits whether they are of God. We need to examine, to test, and to accept only that which can stand on Scripture. That will have to be our attitude toward the new theology.

That of course does mean that we need to gain some knowledge of it. We shall not be able to defend ourselves against the threat of Neo-orthodoxy by pretending that it does not exist. You cannot ignore something out of existence. We shall be easy targets if we tell ourselves that it will never be a threat to us.

So we shall need to concern ourselves with Neo-orthodoxy. While we used to guard against the inroads of liberalism and its false views of man and of Christ, we shall need to recognize the change that has taken place, that we are confronted by what may still be called liberalism, but in new and varying forms. We shall need to know what danger to watch for, and what the symptoms indicate its presence. A cancer, if it is detected in its early stages, may be cured. But let it grow for a time unchecked, and it will develop beyond the possibility of removal. What are some of the early symptoms of Neo-orthodoxy that we can watch for?

I shall name some that come to my mind. Perhaps others will emerge from discussion. In general it is a viewpoint taken toward the Scriptures and revelation that confronts us. This will show itself in the manner of interpreting the sacred writings. This changed view of Scripture may show itself in the way certain accounts in Scripture that are presented to us in the Bible as actual history are expounded and explained. One where this may first show itself is in the creation account. It is thought that room must be made for some of the conclusions of science by not considering the days of creation as natural days. The approach often begins: "It is entirely immaterial whether those were natural days or not, whether the world came into existence in the exact manner described in Genesis 1 and 2 or not. What is important is that we acknowledge the truth of creation. The manner of it is of little importance. So you may believe that it happened in 6 natural days or you may believe that those "days" were longer periods of time. Now it is true, to us in the world today it matters little whether God created the world in six natural days or over a longer period of time, *except for one thing*. And that is the question: What does the Scripture tell us? If the Scriptures clearly present something as a factual happening, then any other explanation means that I am beginning to apply a method of interpreting the Scriptures that leaves it entirely up to me as to what the Scriptures say and what they do not say. I am turning to a higher authority outside Scripture to determine what it must mean. And such an approach to the Scriptures will make the entire Bible uncertain. So it may seem unimportant how long the days of creation were, it may seem unimportant whether Jonah was actually inside a large fish's belly, whether Daniel spent a night in the lion's den, except for this that Scripture says so. We dare not apply new, arbitrary methods of interpreting Scripture that will ultimately permit man to decide what is true and what isn't.

A second symptom for which to watch is closely related to the previous one. It is the attempt to make a distinction between fact and truth. Applied again to the creation account this would say: The account is true, but

it is not factual. For example, 1,000,000 Israelites leaving Egypt in the Exodus is not factual, yet it presents a truth.

This, of course, involves a third point, namely, the possibility of Scripture containing errors, inaccuracies, contradictions. The thinking in this often takes the following course. It is said, the Scriptures were never intended to be a book about geography, therefore its references to geographical matters are not necessarily factually correct. The writers simply expressed themselves in accordance with what they knew and if their knowledge was not correct, then there may be error in what they present. They were not scientists, they were not geologists, they were not historians in the true sense, so what they present in these secular matters must be judged in the same manner as all other human writings. This, of course, fails to take into account the fact of inspiration.

In line with the above, we can mention also this: Watch for an overemphasis of the human side of the Scriptures. We realize that God is accommodating Himself to us in the Scriptures and is speaking to us in human language, written also by men in a style of language that was characteristic of those men. We do not hold to a mechanical inspiration of the Scriptures such as is often attributed to those who believe in verbal inspiration. However, we must watch lest this human side of the Scriptures is stressed to the point that we have in the Scriptures nothing more than a human book that does, however, speak about certain divine truths. The Bible is much more; it is a book whose ultimate author was the Holy Spirit.

Those are some of the symptoms we need to watch for in ourselves. If we find ourselves falling into such ways of thinking in regard to the Scriptures, we need to pause and take stock of ourselves. We need to turn to the Scriptures themselves and in childlike humility ask: But what do the Scriptures themselves say? We note that all of the things mentioned have to do first of all with the view that is taken of the Scriptures, the manner of interpreting them. In this the “new” threat of Neo-orthodoxy differs little basically from the old threat of modern liberalism. Both undermine the final authority of the Holy Scriptures. And once we fall prey to that, no teaching remains certain anymore, and the certainty of our forgiveness and salvation is undermined.

So we need to watch. We need to try the spirits whether they are of God. But Jesus said to his disciples: Watch and *pray*. We shall want to pray God that He may open to us the Scriptures, give us the true understanding of them through His Holy Spirit. Although we shall not enter into a lengthy consideration of this, we do not want to be understood as though this were of lesser importance. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” It will also avail much in preserving for us, and our children the Christian heritage that is all-important for all men. Recognizing that

We have a sure prophetic Word
By inspiration of the Lord,

May we ever fervently pray with Luther:

Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.