

Warrior for the Word

The Life and Works of
Dr. Siegbert W. Becker
On the Battlefield of Biblical Inspiration and Inerrancy

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As the 20th century was born, America strived to put behind years of civil unrest and fratricide. It rushed to flip the bloodstained pages of its resent history to become again the land of hopes, dreams, and freedom. But as the 20th century entered into its teenage years, American's young men found themselves on foreign fronts, dug into muddy trenches, fighting for freedom itself.

The wars that occupied the next thirty years shot a bullethole in humanity's heart and the hopes and dreams of yesteryear were covered by a mushroom cloud of uncertainty. During those dreadful decades as brave young solidiers were trained and blood-drained, new allies gained and feigned, and weapons of mass destruction rained and reigned, lines were being drawn on a different battle front—a spiritual one.

Pastors and theologians of Lutheran churches and seminaries in America, armed to the teeth with Luther and the Confessions, combatted in a controversy over whether it was sufficient to say that “the Bible *contains* the Word of God or whether it was necessary for an orthodox Lutheran to confess that the Bible *is* the Word of God.”¹ The doctrines of inspiration and innerancy would soon become two of the great battlefields upon which the Christian Church of the next generations would find itself deeply intrenched in a civil war over the Word.²

Although the controversy appeared to end in a total victory for the forces of conservative orthodox Lutheranism the success was more apparent than real. The triumph “in many sectors of Lutheranism was a Pyrrhic victory and the doctrine of the Word of God, its inspiration, authority, and inerrancy, is still one of the great theological battlegrounds of our time.”³

¹ Siegbert W. Becker, “The Word of God in the Theology of Martin Luther.” [A paper read at The Saginaw Valley Teachers Conference, Millington, Michigan, on April 19, 1963] (WLS Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerTheology.PDF; Internet. 1.

² Siegbert W. Becker. “Luther on Inspiration.” [Read to a student group at Concordia Senior College, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on March 21, 1960] (WLS Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerInspiration.pdf; Internet. 1.

³ Becker, “The Word of God in the Theology of Martin Luther.” 2.

We “are living in an age of doctrinal confusion and doubt. So deep is the doubt and so dark is the confusion that the very existence of the living God is being brought into question by men who call themselves Christian theologians.”⁴ To many “the Bible, which is the only standard by which the church can judge the truth and validity of any teaching, is rapidly being shunted aside as nothing more than a compilation of ancient beliefs, many of which are no longer acceptable to modern, educated men.”⁵

We ought not to imagine, however, that our situation in these past generation^s is unique. The authority, inspiration, and inerrancy of the Word of God have been denied implicitly by every unbeliever from the beginning of time starting with Satan’s lies in the Gardem of Eden.

And so the “Civil War for the Word” wages on. On one side of the battle are those who say that the Bible is the inerrant and inspired Word of God. On the other side are those who still “value the Bible highly,” but see it as something less than the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

This is the “War for the Word” in which Dr. Siegbert W. Becker would find himself fighting among his own brothers in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the 1960’s and 70’s.

At a perilous time when many learned Lutheran pastors and theologians were enticed to join Satan’s side in the “War for the Word,” Siegbert W. Becker proved himself to be a tireless teacher of the Truth and warrior for the Word on the battlefield for the defense of biblical inerrancy and inspiration.

⁴ Siegbert W. Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God” [An essay delivered at the Nebraska District Convention of the WELS, Hoskins, Nebraska, July 12-13, 1966] (WLS Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerWord.pdf; Internet.1.

⁵ Ibid., 1.

A PERILOUS PREDICTION

In 1935, young Siegbert W. Becker, then a student at Concordia St. Louis, sat in the classroom of Dr. P.E. Kretzmann, taking part in a course simply called, “Inspiration.” During one class period “Dr. Kretzmann told his class that in the next 25 years the doctrine of plenary inspiration would become a battlefield for the Lutheran Church of America.”⁶

Although Becker and his classmates did not doubt their their professor’s prophetic intuition, they had the notion that the issues with the Bible such as inspiration were going to be a problem in the unionising United Lutheran Church in America (ULCA) , few among them “would have believed at that time that in the Missouri Synod itself voices would be raised against this Biblical teaching.”⁷

For over a century the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, stood firm and staunch against these onslaughts of infidelity. The great leaders and teachers, Walther, Stoeckhardt, Pieper, and Koehler, were uncompromising defenders of this doctrine... [A]nd out of their struggles for the verbal inspiration, the inerrancy, and the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures was born the first article of the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* which stresses that all the words of the Bible are the words of God.⁸

Unfortunately, just a few years after the *Brief Statement* of 1932, in 1938 the former ULCA adopted *The Baltimore Declaration*. After stating that, “the whole body of the Scriptures in all its parts is the Word of God,” the Declaration goes on to declare that one must make a distinction between the “more important” and the “less important” parts of the Bible.

Although their statement did not blatantly deny the doctrine of inerrancy or inspiration, Dr. Kretzmann’s prediction of just three years earlier came true. The yeast was spread among the ranks of Lutheran pastors, including those who preached and taught in the Missouri Synod.

⁶Siegbert W. Becker, “Attacks On Inerrancy and Inspiration.” [Presented at the Lutheran Free Conference, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 15-16, 1961] (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlsessays.net/files/BeckerAttacks.pdf; Internet. 1.

⁷Ibid., 1.

⁸Becker, “The Word of God in the Theology of Martin Luther.” 25.

Much of the reason that this heresy penetrated into the nucleus of once confessionally orthodox Missouri was the reorganization of the Synods' educational system. The reorganization, which began in 1947, placed too much power into the the hands of the presidents of Missouri's colleges and seminaries. This left even the "best intentioned Synodical officials... helpless in dealing with the men who control(ed)... the synodical insitutions."

"The voice of orthodoxy in the religion division of these colleges [grew] steadily weaker and the most blatant questioning of the historical accuracy of the Scriptures [was] tolerated. Students [became] more and more confused, for truth and error [were] in many cases accorded equal rights in the classroom."¹⁰

The yeast was now in the dough and it was beginning to grow in Missouri.

If there is one factor that particularly guided and directed the life and work of Dr. Becker, it was the Spirit wrought conviction that the Bible is the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God. This was evident in his teaching and preaching. It compelled him to leave a church body he deeply loved and to join one that shared this conviction.¹¹

During his later years of teaching at Concordia in Riverforest Illinois, Becker personally experienced what it means "to live in the church militant. He labored hard against the erosion that was undermining the doctrinal position of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. His was a strong voice opposing those who no longer held to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Holy Scripture."¹²

⁹ Siegbert W. Becker, "Why I Left the Missouri Synod." [Series of articles from *Lutheran News*; September 9, 1963-June 29, 1964] (Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlsessays.net/files/BeckerMissouri.pdf; Internet. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ Armin Schuetze, "Dr. Siegbert W. Becker." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Volume 81. Spring 1984 electronic edition. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998 (Logos Library System; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 81:4) 232.

¹² *Ibid.*, 243.

“The road which lead “ to Becker’s “final break with the Missouri Synod was a long one.”¹³ For years he battled against his own Missouri brethren as he “protested publically, at synodical convention and at pastoral conferences, and privately, to the administration of Synod and Concordia teacher’s college against the doctrinal aberrations which we more and more creeping into the Missouri Synod.”¹⁴

Becker stayed in the midst of war on the battlefield for inspiration and innerancy as long as possible and “tried for years to use the Synodical machinery” to bring Missouri back to the truth, “but to no avail.” There came a time when he became aware that he had done all that he could do and said all that he could say and now it was time for him to do the only thing left for him to do and say, “Good by.”

One of Becker’s chief reasons for leaving the Missouri was the way in which the synod dealt with Martin H. Scharlemann and his false teaching concerning the inerrancy of Scriptures.

In April of 1959, Scharlemann read a paper at the Northern Illinois District conference, tiled “The Bible as Record, Witness, and Medium,” in which he “attacked the innerancy of Scriptures and stated boldly that there were “many factual mistakes in the Bible.”¹⁵

In his paper and consequent writtings and debate, Scharlemann made much out of the fact that the word innerrancy is not found in the Bible. Although his paper, as he said, was only exploritory in nature, the words that were contained within the pages of Scharlemann’s thesis sought to destroy the very basis of the Bible’s truth and foundation.

¹³ Becker, “Why I left the Missouri Synod.” 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵ Martin H. Scharlemann. “The Bible as Record, Witness, and Medium.” [A paper read at the Northern Illinois District conference April 1959] Mimneographed copy available ~~from~~ Chicago Historical Insitute. 1-3.

Becker was not one to let false teaching persist among his brothers in Missouri.

[o]n the one hand, there is the command of Scripture which tells us to cover up the sins of the neighbor. On the other hand there is the clear command of the Bible, “Them that sin rebuke before all.” (1 Tim. 5:20). On the one hand there is the desire not to damage the reputation of anyone. On the other hand there is the clear call of God to cry aloud and spare not to show the children of God their transgressions.¹⁶

When Becker heard Scharlemann’s word^s at the conference he rebuked him in person, immediately. Afterwards, again and again Becker wrote to Scharlemann and requested a meeting with him to discuss his papers and teachings, with no real response. When this approach had clearly failed Becker appealed to the Scharlemann’s seminary faculty, who said they were dealing with the situation and that Becker needed to trust in the system.¹⁷

Becker eventually was called to appear before a board of seminary control members who ended up for the most part siding with Schalemann and finding no cause for allarm in his writtings or teachings. After several years of this, Becker became convinced that Missouri had lost its wa^y and this situation convinced Becker that it was hopeless to use the “synodical machinery for the correction of error.” During all this time, however he did “not break into public print,” but tried to settle the dispute in a fitting and orderly way¹⁸ to brings his brothers back into the fold.

Thoughout his stuggle with Scharlemann, Becker was a dedicated teacher of the Truth and demonstrated his skill as a warrior for the Word. In his dealings^{w i t h} Scharlemann and appeals to the synod hierearchy Becker grew in his understanding of the weapons used by opponents to the the innnerant word of God and developed a better understanding of the ^scriptural view of innerancy and inspiration from his study of God’s word^w, Luther, and the Confessions.

¹⁶ Becker, “Why I Left the Missouri Synod.” 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

A successful soldier in physical war is often the one who knows and understands his enemies and their weapons, the same is true in the War for the Word. Dr. Becker did not go into battle for innerancy and inspiration without at first understanding the enemies that he was going up against. In his writings, Becker showed that he had a thorough knowledge of the Word's enemies and their tactics. In clear language, he helped others understand these enemies as well so that they too could combat them with knowledge and understanding.

One of the primary wepons used against the Word in Becker's day was the **historical-critical meathod of biblical interpretation** and its descendants. This was an enemy weapon Becker had examined thoroughly to the point that he became convinced that those who have

adopted the historical-critical method are convinced that they have made spiritual progress. Like the persecutors of the apostles against whom the Savior warned His followers, they are convinced that by this adoption they have done God and their church a service. They believe that by shortening the battle lines they have made it easier for the church to defend its position against its enemies.¹⁹

Becker recognized this enemy to be "one of the more veiled denials of inerrancy." Its harmful tactic "is found in the repeated assertion that the Bible must be read as every other human book is read."²⁰

The proponents of the historical-critical method admit that theirs is a method of doubt. The result of the employment or this method has been hopeless confusion among the scholars. What one scholar holds to be very probable another considers to be very unlikely. The very great diversity of their conclusions drawn from the same evidence demonstrates how unreliable the method must be.²¹

¹⁹ Siegbert W. Becker, "The Historical-Critical Method of Biblical interpretation." [Delivered at the 1976 Nebraska District Convention, Hadar, Nebraska, June 1976.] (WLS Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlsessays.net/files/BeckerHistorical.pdf; Internet. 2.

²⁰ Becker, "Why I Left The Missouri Synod." 21.

²¹ Becker, "The Historical-Critical Method of Biblical Interpretation." 7.

To Becker “the one thing that stands out as a common denominator in all the various forms of historical-criticism, whether it be source-criticism, form-criticism, redaction-criticism, tradition-criticism... is always this... that the method sets the learned scholar above the Scriptures in the position of judge.”²²

“A hostile attitude toward inerrancy is part and parcel of the method is not only charged by its opponents, it is admitted by its defenders also.”²³ “[N]o one who accepts the historical-critical method can accept as true everything that is written in the Scriptures.”²⁴ “The fact remains that the doctrine of verbal inspiration and the historical-critical method are absolutely incompatible.”²⁵

The second weapon that Becker knew, understood and explained well to his allies is **Neo-orthodoxy** and its tactics towards the Word. Becker summarizes his understanding of the neo-orthodox philosophy well in the following statements:

1. “God, they say, does not reveal things to us, but he reveals himself...”²⁶
2. “God is himself not in words, or at least not primarily in words, but in acts, which are then interpreted by spiritually-minded men.”²⁷
3. “Neo-orthodox scholars are inclined to stress that the Word of God is the deed of God,²⁸ that the greatest deed or Word of God in the Old Testament is the Exodus, and the greatest deed or Word of God in the New Testament is Jesus Christ.”²⁹

“The neo-orthodox definition of truth makes it possible for men to read anything they please into the Scriptures and to read out of it anything that does not suit them.”³⁰

²² Becker, “Why I Left The Missouri Synod.” 17.

²³ Ibid., 15.

²⁴ Becker, “The Historical-Critical Method of Biblical Interpretation.” 7.

²⁵ Becker, “Why I Left The Missouri Synod.” 25.

²⁶ Becker, “The Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.” 25.

²⁷ Ibid., 25.

²⁸ Not satisfied with having introduced this confusion into the church’s theology, they go on to claim that this peculiar and confusing view is found also in the writings of Martin Luther.

²⁹ Becker, “The Word of God in the Theology of Martin Luther.” 3.

³⁰ Becker, “Attacks on the Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture.” 5.

Becker sarcastically states, “Neo-orthodoxy has been telling us for years that God can make his truth known to us through human untruths. What this means, of course, is that we should preach the Bible in all its glorious falsehood.”³¹

When modern, neo-orthodox theologians deny the verbal and plenary interpretation of the Bible and assert that it is full of errors, or at least mistaken notions, they soon feel free also to reconstruct Christ to suit themselves. Some of the things that the Bible tells us about Christ they will accept, others they feel free to reject, and still others they reinterpret and demythologize to their hearts content. Everyone is free to conceive of Christ in such a way that he meets his existential needs of the moment. The process of decay usually starts gradually, but picks up speed as it goes along. It usually begins with some such question as to the virgin birth and men begin to say that while they themselves still accept the virgin birth, yet they believe that we ought to be willing to recognize as brethren men who find it difficult to confess the historical truth of the virgin birth.³²

A third weapon that proponents of a “error” filled Bible use is variant readings. Becker understood that in a discussion about the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture one cannot just brush aside arguments about variant readings as irrelevant. We cannot simply treat this argument as if the variant readings did not exist. Indeed “[t]here was a time when the whole discussion of the variant readings could be confined to the seminary classroom with perhaps an occasional reference to the problem at pastoral conferences. Laymen quite generally concerned themselves very little with the whole question of the variations in the Biblical manuscripts.”³³ However things are different in the modern era.

With a vast array of mainstream books and articles being produced on the topic “variant readings have become one of the principal weapons in the arsenal of those who seek to undermine the full inerrancy and the verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.”³⁴

³¹ Ibid., 4.

³² Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God,” 7.

³³ Siegbert W. Becker, “Verbal Inspiration and the Variant Readings.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly Volume 71*. Spring 1974 electronic edition. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1998 (Logos Library System; Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly 71:4) 2.

³⁴ Becker, “Verbal Inspiration and the Variant Readings.” 169.

However, as Becker stated, “Conservative, orthodox Lutheranism has nothing to fear from the variant readings. These variations in the Greek and Hebrew text will not take our Bible away from us nor compel us to retreat from the doctrine we have proclaimed.”³⁵ In fact as Becker clearly explains, “[O]ur people deserve an answer to their questions, and we should be prepared to give them a reply that will not shake or undermine their faith in the reliability and trustworthiness of all the words and promises of God in the Holy Bible.”³⁶

Not understanding variant readings and translations shows that you do not value God’s Word highly. A warrior for the Word needs to understand God’s Word in the original languages not only so that they can speak the truth but also so that they can combat heresy.³⁷ When it comes to discussing variant readings, Becker summarized his advice with the following points:

1. The essence of the Word of God is to be sought in the words of the Bible.
2. Verbal inspiration does not mean that the truth can be expressed in only one way.
3. Verbal inspiration does not mean that all the words are always as precise as we might wish them to be;
4. Verbal inspiration does not mean that all the words are of equal importance in conveying the message.
5. Verbal inspiration does not mean that the reports as we have them are never summarized, truncated, or restated.³⁸

The same thing that is true of variant readings is also true of the translations. Our problem here is sometimes complicated by the fact that we here in America are so sure that everything worth reading has been written in English that we do not trouble ourselves to learn the speech of other people.³⁹

Becker noted that if we keep these points in mind the problem of the variant readings will be of far less consequence or significance⁴⁰ because the “message brought to us in the Holy Scriptures is not distorted nor vitiated by any of variants that could conceivably be correct.”⁴¹

³⁵ Becker, “Verbal Inspiration and Variant Readings.” 169.

³⁶ Ibid., 170.

³⁷ Ibid., 172.

³⁸ Ibid., 177.

³⁹ Becker, “The Verbal Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.” 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 177.

⁴¹ Ibid., 183.

KEEPING ALLIES CLOSE

A warrior will not often be victorious completely on his own. Although a skilled soldier ^{might} be able to stand up against many enemy attacks by his own strength, when a soldier has friends and allies to count on victory is more likely. Allies provide strength, support, and often guidance. Becker was aware that in the “War for the Word” good allies are important.

As he made his way on to the field to do battle he did not go on his own. ~~On his side~~ Becker had at his side—the Word, Luther, and the Confessions. At times the enemy would try to use these allies against him, but Becker’s relationship with them would remain true and he used their assistance in his debates and writings frequently.

In order to cast doubt both on the factualness and importance of this doctrine, Lutheran opponents to inspiration often cite the fact that there is only one passage in the whole Bible which speaks of inspiration and none that speak directly of inerrancy. Since the Bible uses the word “inspiration” only once, they suggest that it is unreasonable, even anti-biblical to conduct such heated and prolonged discussions on this subject. But as Becker explains,

Their argument ignores the fact that the Bible has a great deal to say on the subject matter itself... There are hundreds, even thousands, of passages in the Bible that speak of the inspiration of the words of scripture. Every prophetic utterance that begins with the introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord,” every passage that speaks of the words of God, every passage that tells us a certain message was spoken by the Lord speaks to us of the verbal inspiration of the Bible.⁴²

From his appreciation and dedication ^{to S} for scripture Becker understood that if verbal inspiration has any validity at all, and if God has indeed spoken to us in his Word, the Holy Bible, then the first question must always be: “*What does the Bible say about itself?*”

⁴² Becker, The Scriptures: Inspired of God. 35.

No human judgment and no rational argument, no matter how cogent, fitting, and persuasive it may be, can ever have the weight and the force of the Scripture's own testimony about itself."⁴³ The good Doctor Becker said, "If we believe and teach that the Bible is inerrant and verbally inspired we should do this on the basis of what Scripture teaches."⁴⁴

"Now when we ask what the Scriptures themselves teach in regard to their verbal inspiration, it is difficult to know where to begin, because the evidence is so voluminous and so varied that it would be impossible to treat all of it in the time assigned to this paper."⁴⁵

Becker then went on for many pages giving scriptural support for inerrancy and inspiration beginning in the Old Testament with Moses and Jeremiah and culminating in New Testament with Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

In the case history of Moses, Becker explains, "Here the doctrine of verbal inspiration is set forth in its very simplest and concrete form... [T]hat God put words into the mouth of his holy prophets, that God told them what they should say, that God used these men as his mouth through which he spoke to the people."⁴⁶ Becker urged, "[T]his is the way the Bible regularly speaks of inspiration."⁴⁷

In reference to Moses, Becker provides many convincing Biblical accounts in which the Lord told him not only what to say, but also what to write down. Becker also showed that the book of Jeremiah abounds in commands and promises "that make it crystal clear to anyone who is willing to take the Bible at face value that the words of Jeremiah are the words of God."

⁴³ Becker, "Luther on Inspiration." 1.

⁴⁴ Becker, "Attacks On Inerrancy and Inspiration." 1.

⁴⁵ Becker, "The Verbal Inspiration of The Holy Scriptures." 2.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

When Jeremiah was persecuted by the children of Israel, he comforted himself with this assurance that he had the words of God. One day he complained bitterly about the undeserved cursing that was directed against him, and he expressed his sorrow over the fact that he was a man of strife and contention, that he had to be involved in so much controversy, that his pain was perpetual and his wound incurable, but in the midst of all this self-pity he suddenly recalls the promise that the Lord had given him, and he says, "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart (Jer 15:16)."⁴⁸

Becker notes "the assurance that God gave him (Jeremiah) at the beginning of his ministry. In addition to this the Lord gave Jeremiah the promises. 'I will cause thee to hear my words (Jer 18:2),' and 'I will make my words in thy mouth fire (Jer 15:4).'"⁴⁹

Becker then shows that in his letter to the Galatians, Paul "states categorically that he did not receive the Gospel from men, that it was not taught to him by any man, but that God Himself revealed it to him (Gal 1:11-17). In his first letter to the Corinthians he claims that he preaches the wisdom of God which was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost. He begins his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper with the words, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you (1 Cor 11:23)."

Although Paul is credible, for Becker the story of the inspiration in the New Testament really begins with the Lord Jesus. Even though many are quick to point out that the Lord Jesus never wrote anything, "[h]e did lay great stress on the very words which he spoke. He expected the Jews to believe them and to give them the same reverence and respect that they pretended to give to the words of Moses."⁵⁰

Becker's case studies from the Bible for Moses, Jeremiah, and the Apostle Paul are convincing and well organized with a vast amount of scriptural support.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Becker, "The Verbal Inspiration of The Holy Scriptures." 7.

⁴⁹ Becker, "The Verbal Inspiration of The Holy Scriptures." 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

However, even with all this said, Becker thought that a word of caution is in place here. He said that those “who wish to stand foursquare for the doctrine of the truth and inerrancy of Scripture and who are justly displeased with those who want to say less than the Scriptures say, must also be careful not to read into the Scriptures more than they assert.”⁵²

We are indebted to Dr. Siegbert Becker, professor of New Testament and Church History at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wisconsin, for clearly pointing out that verbal inspiration does not depend on the one passage... that uses the word “inspiration, but is taught by all the sacred writers from Moses to Malachi, from Matthew to John. This doctrine is the warp and woof of the fabric of Holy Scripture. Especially telling are his many examples of incidental expressions and events in the Holy Scripture that support this doctrine.⁵³

A second ally of Dr. Siegbert Becker was the Lutheran Confessions. Although these too his opponents tried to use as a weapon against the verbal inspiration of Scripture. To justify their departure from the Lutheran position on the doctrine of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, many “modern Lutherans argue that there is room in Lutheranism for a divergence of opinion on this matter because the Lutheran confessions do not include an article that deals specifically with this doctrine.”⁵⁴

It has been said by men in high position in the Lutheran church that professors and pastors and teachers who deny the verbal inspiration of the Bible and the inerrancy of God’s holy Word cannot be subjected to church discipline because they have not violated their confessional oath.⁵⁵

Dr. Becker rightly found this to be a dangerous stance and “points out that even though the Lutheran Confessions have no separate article on Inspiration—it was not questioned at the time the Confessions were written! Yet a denial of this doctrines leaves the Lutheran confessions in tatters.”⁵⁶

⁵² Becker, “Attacks on Verbal Inspiration and Inerrancy.” 6.

⁵³ Harold E. Wicke, Scriptures: Inspired of God. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1971) preface.

⁵⁴ Becker, Scriptures: Inspired of God. 9.

⁵⁵ Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God.” 2.

⁵⁶ Wicke, Scriptures: Inspired of God. Preface.

To their argument Becker responds:

While it is true that there is no article dealing with the doctrine of the Word in the Lutheran confessions, yet the conclusion that therefore there need be no agreement between Lutherans on this teaching displays a Romanizing tendency unworthy of any Lutheran. It implies that no teaching of the Scripture is binding on a Lutheran until the church has ratified and validated such a Scriptural doctrine by including it as an article in the Lutheran confessions.

Becker assumed that the reason that there are not any articles in the Confessions on the inspiration of Scripture is because “Roman Catholics, Zwinglians, Calvinists, and Lutheran all operated with the premise that the words of the Bible were the very words of God.”⁵⁷ In the controversies that took place during the early years of the Reformation and in the aftermath the verbal inspiration of the Bible was taken for granted.

St. Augustine confessed it; the Roman Church gave at least lip service to it; Erasmus did not doubt it; and after the Reformation, Luther, Calvin, and the pope would have had little difficulty in drawing up a document on inspiration and inerrancy which would have been more satisfactory than the pronouncements of many a Lutheran seminary faculty today.⁵⁸

Several times in the discussion of the Lutheran Confessions Becker makes the unnerving observation that there was at the time of the writing of the Confessions “greater agreement between Luther and Zwingli than there is today between many churches and synods that bear the name Lutheran.”⁵⁹

Although Becker held Luther closely as a third ally, unfortunately, many modern Lutheran theologians, in an effort to justify their own unbelief and apostasy, “cite father Luther as one who did not believe in the doctrine of verbal inspiration. This, they say, was an invention of Chemnitz and Gerhardt and Calov and the other theologians of a later generation.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Becker, Scriptures: Inspired of God. 10.

⁵⁸ Becker, “Attacks On Inerrancy and Inspiration.” 1.

⁵⁹ Becker, Scriptures: Inspired of God. 10.

⁶⁰ Becker, “Luther on Inspiration.” 6.

Erring theologians quote Luther to the effect that whatever does not bring us Christ is not Scripture. Some are willing to admit that the Bible is without error when it speaks about Christ and our salvation, but they say there are many parts of Scripture that have nothing to do with Christ and are not necessarily God's Word. Luther's Works are used to support their theory.

In Becker's observation much of the confusion in the church over Luther's position on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Holy Bible comes from the fact that men do not read Luther. They instead read the works of those who write about Luther, who in turn often simply repeat the erring conclusion of those whose books about Luther they themselves have not read.⁶¹

Becker concluded that "[t]his doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture was important to Luther because of its relations to the assurance of the child of God. He found in it great comfort of his own heart."⁶² To Becker and Luther, "this confidence that accepts and believes everything that God says in the Bible is the very essence of the Christian faith. The words and promises of God, who cannot lie, are the only source of comfort and assurance that the Christian has."⁶³ Real comfort can be found only in Scripture which is God's Word.

Becker admits that "while some of these words of Luther, when viewed out of context, have a strange sound, yet in not one of them does Luther directly and in so many words reject either the plenary nor verbal inspiration of the Bible nor does he admit that there are any errors in the Scriptures."⁶⁴

To these enemies of the faith Becker says, "They ought to try reading the words of Luther in context." If they would they would "find great comfort and much instruction in them."⁶⁵

⁶¹ Becker, "Luther on Inspiration." 2.

⁶² Ibid., 11.

⁶³ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 14.

LESSONS FROM AN OLD WARRIOR

Becker learned much about the “War for the Word” from Dr. Martin Luther. He learned that one must remain firm on all teachings of the Bible and not allow even the smallest speck of heretical yeast to work its way into the dough of true doctrine.⁶⁶ From Luther, Becker discover the true place of reason in the inerpretation or scripture and the place of reason in religious teaching.

Becker also came to understand from Luther that when the study of Hebrew and Greek is neglected the Gospel is apt to be lost in its truth and purity.⁶⁷ Luther stressed the importance of studying the original biblical languages, something that Becker did throughout his life.⁶⁸

To his students, Dr. Becker was an inspiring example of a man who used his excellent mental gifts in the Lord’s service to search out the meaning of Scripture from the original text while retaining a child-like faith in what Scripture says.”⁶⁹ “He could readily quote from the English Bible, more often than not also the Greek of the New Testament.”⁷⁰

Finally from Luther, Becker gleaned that

biblical inerrancy is above all important because it undergirds our conviction that the words and promises of God which tell us of our salvation in Christ are absolutely reliable. If it were not for the constant attacks that are made on the Scriptures and the repeated charges that it contains mistakes, we probably would not emphasize the doctrine of biblical inerrancy to the extent that this has been done in recent times, and it is the opposition to biblical inerrancy that must in large measure bear the blame if the central doctrines of the Gospel are sometimes crowded into the background. Nevertheless we must constantly be on our guard against the danger of which Luther warns us.⁷¹

One warrior from the Word accurately learned many valuable lessons from another great warrior for the Word. Luther was always one of Becker’s greatess allies and tutor.

⁶⁶ Becker, “Luther on Inspiration.” 8.

⁶⁷ Becker, “Reason as Instrument.” 38

⁶⁸ Schuetze, “Dr. Siegbert W. Becker.” 243.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 243. Becker valued training in the languages so much that in lieu of his vicar year of seminary training, Siegbert studied Greek and Latin at the University of Minnesota, receiving an MA in 1937, and graduated from the seminary the following year.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 243

⁷¹ Becker, “Luther and Inerrancy.” 4.

BATTLE STRATEGY

When it came to the battle for Biblical inspiration, in his papers and discussions Becker used a series of questions to help guide his discussion. These questions helped him understand the position of the other side and their stance on Scripture. In essence, these questions served as his playbook or tactical manual in the war on the Word. These questions are:

1. “Yea hath God said?” (Did God really say that?)
2. “In what sense is the Bible the word of God?”
3. “What do you think of Christ?”⁷²

“*Yea hath God said?*” (Did God really say that?) is the question that Satan asked Eve in the Garden of Eden and it is still the same question that Satan is tempting many Christians with today.⁷³ If Satan can convince one to doubt in God’s Word, then he can lead them to unbelief.

Becker eloquently summarizes this accordingly:

In the modern denials of this doctrine and in the hidden and hypocritical attacks on it in our generation, we hear only the echoes of the hissing of the old serpent who led the mother of us all astray by leading her, first, to doubt whether the words by which she was to guide her actions were really and truly the words of God, and then, to reject in unbelief the words of the Lord by which He clearly threatened her with death if she disobeyed His command. It was, above all else, her failure to take the words of God seriously, and to believe what He had said, that brought sin into the world and death to us all.⁷⁴

The next question “*In what sense is the Bible the word of God?*” Is explained with another question, “When you say that the Bible is the Word of God, you don’t really mean to say that God said these things that are said here, do you?”⁷⁵ This is the another attack that Satan uses to get believers to loose faith in God and his Word. In essence this question is very much like the very first question asked about God’s Word, “*Yea, hath God said?*”

⁷² Becker, “Attacks on the Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture.” 3-8.

⁷³ Becker, “Luther’s Concept of the Word of God.” 1.

⁷⁴ Becker, “Luther’s Concept of the Word of God.” 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 22.

Becker sensed that at the moment a theologian feels compelled to ask these question, “he is already drifting away from the simplicity of a childlike faith.”⁷⁶ Eventually these two questions lead to another question that goes to the very heart of faith, “*What think ye of Christ?*”

“If we cannot rely on the documents when they tell us what Jesus said, how shall we trust them when they tell us what Jesus did?”⁷⁷ “When men cut themselves free from the Scripture, the Christ they believe in becomes a product of their own imagination, and any resemblance between Jesus of Nazareth who meets us in the pages of Holy Writ and the ‘Christ of faith’ becomes purely coincidental.”⁷⁸

What think ye of Christ? He said, "Thy Word is truth." Did He himself speak the truth? And if we are not willing to believe what he says about the Scriptures, why should we believe what he says about himself, about sin, and redemption, and salvation? And even if men are not consistent and do believe what he says about these matters, the fact still remains that by viewing his attitude toward the written Word of God as inadequate, they claim the right to sit in judgment on the judge of all the earth.⁷⁹

The opposition says, “What does it matter if we lose an infallible... inerrant Bible? After all our faith must be in a person and not in a book.”⁸⁰ To which Becker responds, “But the real Christ, the Christ in whom you and I believe, cannot be divorced for the book in such a cavalier fashion... When men say that our faith must be in the living Christ and not in dead words of a book, they not only undermine the foundation of our faith, but they rob us of Christ himself.”⁸¹

It does not take a great deal of intellectual acuteness to see that the two questions, “Yea, hath God said?” and “What think ye of Christ?” are inextricably interwoven with each other and a wrong answer to the one will, in the end, always bring with it a wrong answer to the other. Either Jesus is what the Bible says he is, or he is someone whom we can never know. Either God reveals himself to us in the Bible, or he does not reveal himself to us at all as the Redeemer of the world, and if we lose the inerrancy of Scripture, we will also eventually lose the infallible Christ.⁸²

⁷⁶ Becker, “Attacks on Inerrancy and Inspiration.” 5.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁰ Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God,” 6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6.

⁸² The State of the Church in Respect to the Doctrine of Scripture” [The Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture and

VICTORY IS VITAL

Dr. Becker's concern for Scripture was concern for his salvation. It was in Scripture that he, a sinner, found his Savior, his only comfort also in the closing weeks of his life. In a last letter to a friend he expressed it with child-like simplicity. His prayer and confession was this: "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are my glorious dress."⁸³

For Becker, Christ is the object of the Christian faith. We trust in him for our eternal salvation. However it is impossible to believe in Christ, at least it is impossible to have a truly Christian faith in Christ, without also having faith in the promises of God, for the promises of God are found only in the Bible.⁸⁴

Faith in Christ, then, is faith in the words and promises of God. It is here especially that the doctrine of Verbal Inspiration becomes important, for it assures us that we actually have the words and promises of God in the Bible. There can be only faith with a promise. The Lutheran Confessions rightly say that where there is faith there must of necessity also be a promise.⁸⁵

If our faith is to be the kind of faith by which Abraham praised God, it will have to be the kind of faith that refuses to call God a liar. If it is to be the kind of faith by which Abraham was justified, it can only be based on the words and promises of God. They must be the object of our trust. But if the words and promises of God are not found in the Bible, then where are they found? Children of God will always turn to the Christ of Scriptures and say with Peter: "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life?"⁸⁶

Dr. Becker's zeal for the Word was a zeal for his Savior and his salvation. His dedication to the Truth was based on his dedication to Jesus—the Way, the Truth and the Life. His zeal and dedication serve as a fine example for defenders of the faith today.

Antitheses, River Forest, Illinois] (WLS Essay File, accessed 3 October 2008); available from www.wlssays.net/files/BeckerState.pdf; 4.

⁸³ Schuetze, "Dr. Siergbert W. Becker." 232.

⁸⁴ Becker, *The Scriptures: Inspired of God*. 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS

Becker understood that the enemies ^{of} to the Church today are often found within the walls of the church itself. Often we spend much time talking about those outside of the church who are attacking, however as Becker notes, the opposition facing Christianity and Lutheranism today comes from within the ranks of those who call themselves “believers.” When we see what is

happening to Christian theology in our time, we ought to realize what is really at stake in the modern attacks which are being made on the Word of God also in the seminaries of the Lutheran Church by Lutheran teachers. It is well for us to remember that these attacks on the Word are being made in the name of Christ by men who claim to be followers of the Lord Jesus. The greatest enemies of the Word of God are not found in the ranks of atheistic communion, from which may God preserve us, but they are found in the colleges and the seminaries of the Christian Church. We ought not to imagine that this is new or strange, however. The men who howled for the crucifixion of our Savior were the leaders of the church to which had been committed the oracles of God the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament.⁸⁷

[We] are in the battle and it behooves us with all meekness, fear and trembling, and with an earnest prayer to the Lord of the Church to conduct this struggle with all our might, knowing that it is only the grace and mercy of God that can restore to our church what we are in the process of losing.⁸⁸

When we in the Wisconsin Synod see how those who once stood shoulder to shoulder with us in the defense and proclamation of the Gospel have turned aside from their former position, we need to take warning from their example and remember the words of the apostle, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” What has happened to others can also happen to us.⁸⁹

On September 1, 1984 our heavenly Father called Dr. Siegbert William Becker out of the church militant into the church triumphant. Nearly seventy years old, he had served in the public ministry for 46 years and entered upon his retirement at the conclusion of the 1983–84 school year... The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod lost an eminent scholar, lecturer and author, a faithful student of Scripture, an inspiring professor and teacher, a minister of God who used his excellent gifts to serve his Lord with humble confidence.⁹⁰

He was a Teacher of the Truth and a Warrior for the Word.

⁸⁷ Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God.” 7.

⁸⁸ Becker, “Attacks on Inerrancy and Inspiration.” 1.

⁸⁹ Becker, “The Doctrine Of The Word Of God” 2.

⁹⁰ Schuetze, “Dr. Siegbert W. Becker.” 243.

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