

The Old Gospel for a New Age: The Relevancy and Sufficiency of the Scriptures for the Space Age

By Frederic E. Blume

At the time when the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod took occasion to give a variety of expression to its heartfelt gratitude for the many blessings showered upon it by the Lord of the Church during the first hundred years of its existence, we with considerable searching of self declared that our church's motto and watch-word was: *Continuing in His Word*. Rather than its being a mere slogan or rallying-point at the time, it was intended, a quarter century ago, that *Continuing in His Word* should be for our Synod a sobering reminder of what had in the century past been God's gracious guidance of our church body both with regard to its doctrinal stand and its development as a growing and expanding confessional church. It was to be a stern reminder that the present was filled with temptations, with regard to both doctrine and practice, to abandon or by commission or omission to dull the incisiveness of the position with which the WELS had become identified. In it was also included the prayer that the God of All Grace, Who had led our fathers to accept and proclaim a grammatical-historical understanding of the Scriptures as the only approach to it consonant with the very nature of the Bible itself, would in the coming day of growing and ever more militant unbelief continue to with us as we saw also our God-given task to be identical with that spoken through Isaiah so long ago:

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes (Isaiah 54:2)

Today, as we approach the hundred-and-twenty-fifth anniversary of our synodical existence, midst intensification of work in missions and education at home and expansion into new areas of work (charities), new fields, even new districts, and all that in many areas way beyond the confines of the continental United States, to say nothing of what used to be thought of as our peculiar domain: the Midwest, the Near Far-West, the Pacific Northwest, plus a segment of Arizona, it well behooves us, as we go about our God-given task of determining what according to our best insights is best for the building-up of the Kingdom of God and of then implementing such determinations, to pause and once again direct the question to ourselves, individually and as a functioning church body: *Are the curtains of our spiritual habitation such as the Lord would have them be; are the cords sufficiently long to carry out His will; are the stakes sufficiently strong to hold this our spiritual habitation firmly in the place where it has always been as the warning blasts of the approaching storm now whistle about us?*

Our theme, therefore, "The Old Gospel for a New Age" will in this year of grace have a continuously new meaning, and when we ask the questions whether the sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testament Scriptures still have any relevancy in and provide adequate answers to the many questions raised regarding the terms of our existence in this space age, we will be dealing with matters of vital importance to each and every one of us, as human beings on this earth, as men and women who in sinful rebellion against a loving Father in heaven have heaped guilt upon ourselves but who because of His grace in Christ stand forgiven before Him and in fulfillment of His wonderful plan, in Christ, again appear in robes of righteousness before Him, as more-than-conquerors, as kings and priests in His sight.

The Relevancy and Sufficiency of the Scriptures for the Space Age: Where are these being denied?

Since our Synod came into being, the direction from which the charge that the Scriptures are no longer relevant nor sufficient comes has changed considerably, yes, alarmingly. For it used to be the case that attacks against the Church, its beliefs, and its Bible came in the main from persons outside the pale of the Church: persons in the public eye, scientists, philosophers, educators, historians. Occasionally people who mounted

some pulpit or occupants of a theological chair at some college, university, or seminary would mouth these sentiments coming from the outside, quite regularly passing them off as discoveries of their own. But commonly, the people who launched their attacks on the Church and its beliefs were definitely not thought of as being “churchmen.”

Here we recall principally the avowed agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, a Union colonel in the Civil War, who especially in printed lectures attacked Christian beliefs. Then, first thought of among naturalists who preached an evolutionary theory as the explanation of the origin of the forms of life, there was Charles Darwin, with his revolutionary *Origin of Species* in 1859 and the *Descent of Man* of 1871. In the latter he applied to the human race the conclusions of the first book, which had dealt in the main with shellfish and other simple life forms of seawater. The work of Darwin greatly popularized a notion that from ancient times on has dwelt in the heart of unbelieving man, namely, that whatever is, came into the form in which we know it today because there resides within matter the power to effect changes on itself, that God and matter are in some way identical, a notion that in its crassest form we know as pantheism.

Thus the naturalists who promoted the evolutionary doctrine advocated a naturalistic and mechanical and utterly pagan explanation for life as we see it in its varied forms as a replacement for the divinely inspired Biblical one. Most baneful of all, however, has been the influence of evolutionists of a different order: men who spent their lives not in some biological laboratory where their vagaries could well have gone unnoticed, but rather in the limelight of public notice, as teachers and educators, as professors of philosophy and ethics. Here the name of John Dewey especially comes to mind as that of one whose destructive force, from outside the church, remains in evidence to this very day.

Born in 1859 in Vermont and trained at Johns Hopkins University (Ph.D., 1884) he taught first in several Midwestern universities (Michigan, Minnesota, from 1894 till 1904 at the newly organized University of Chicago, where he taught philosophy and together with colleague Tufts wrote a textbook on *Ethics*.)¹ From 1904 till 1929 and his retirement as emeritus professor he was in the philosophy department of Columbia University in the city of New York. After his retirement he continued to pour forth a stream of lectures, articles, and books on philosophical and educational topics. As at Chicago, the influence from the philosophy department was especially strong in the field of education. For the first half of the present century the schools of education at Chicago and Columbia trained just those people who were to be the leaders in, form the curriculums and establish the basic points of view for what we think of as the common educational system of our country. Persons holding doctor’s and master’s degrees from these two centers of educational studies have not only manned the classrooms of America’s colleges and universities, but they have been precisely the people who headed the teacher training school for workers in primary, secondary, and college-level education.

Any history of modern thought, philosophical or educational, will bear witness how pervasive the influence of John Dewey has been. His outlook in the life sciences was that of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer. More important to us is his attitude in philosophy, ethics, and education. To John Dewey there were no absolute values anywhere, just as there was no such thing as an Absolute Mind. Every problem in ethics and education was to be solved by the individual’s addressing himself to it without reference to any supernatural origins or anything like divine authority. The soul was but an integrated animal organism, that is, the human body functioning. The responsibility of educator and philosopher was to better the social order, but nowhere was the individual to find any Absolutes that could serve as a point of reference outside himself for an evaluation of his stance, his accomplishments, or his responsibilities. In school pupils were to work especially with their hands in connection with the things that interested them, but never was there to be any authority either expressed or exercised lest a *trauma* be inflicted on the *psyche* of the child or pupil as the case may be.

The application of these principles, in normal training schools and in the classrooms of our nation, aided and abetted at home by principles in child care and rearing as advocated by a certain Benjamin Spaack, has given us a generation of revolutionary brats that drew in with the contents of their nursing bottle the notion that they could get anything they wanted if they just yelled long enough and loud enough, to whom anything that smacked of an ideal outside their own wishes was to be rejected as part of the establishment that was to be

fought at all odds. And just in this year we have been introduced to a new method of rebellion against all absolutes when the current Spaackian-Deweyesque generation divested itself of the one concrete absolute all of us have known since right after our birth—the clothing that covered our nakedness—and went streaking through various segments of the human arena. Pity for these victims of the Heideggerian doctrine of “thrownness” was matched only by disgust at the behavior of those who were alleged to be viewers at the scene.

Of the political and social revolutionaries who have attacked the church and its beliefs we need but mention Karl Marx with his “dialectical materialism.” Marx still believed that there was an absolute idea somewhere in the universe. To him, as to many men of the nineteenth century (for example, the rationalistic Thübingen school of theologians headed by Ferdinand Christian Baur) the absolute principle of thesis, antithesis, synthesis preached by Hegel was the explanation for why things were as they were in this world. To him, somewhere out there in the recesses of the universe there was a something, an Idea, that was able to show itself valid over against the nitty-gritty hard facts of daily existence. By the interplay of these forces Marx thought that revolutions could be effected and the social order bettered. We all know what he predicted the end of religion and the capitalistic society in league with it would be.

Vicious and insidious as these attacks on the church, the Bible, and on Christian belief in general were, they were all launched by men operating from outside the organized church. In confronting them believers at least knew in which direction to turn to meet the deep guile and great might of the old evil foe. Today the case is quite different. It is from within the church, by churchman, theologians, advocates of new social and situation ethics, all the way up to the “god-is-dead” theology of an Altizer at old Emory University (a Methodist foundation) that the denial is being shouted and maintained that the Scriptures are still in any meaningful sense relevant to life in the jet age or in any way sufficient to answer men’s questions or to solve his problems while living in a time where travel in space is much less exciting than would be the hoot of the whistle on a steam locomotive running along a railroad track.

The Current Attack on Scripture’s Relevancy and Sufficiency

It would be way beyond the allowable scope of this essay to cite and document the various allegations that are being made today. Sufficient for our purposes will be to describe them in impressionistic fashion and to indicate where lies the principal thrust of the attack. Such attacks may be pointed either at the doctrine the Bible teaches or against the validity of the Bible as God’s revelation to man of His thoughts of grace concerning him.

Cardinal Doctrines Under Fire

“The very picture the Bible gives of the relationship between man here on earth and someone known as ‘god’ is degrading to me, to my dignity as a human being.” The complaint is couched in various terms, but its true nature and intent is not hard to recognize. From the time of the temptation of Eve and her and Adam’s fall until the last trump shall sound, the heart of sinful man has always rebelled against the thought of man’s utter dependence on God, his creator, preserver, redeemer, and sanctifier. As was Eve, so are we still attracted by the thought of becoming as gods, knowing good and evil. Surely here is a working of the father of lies, who in the beginning posed as God’s equal if not superior (*you will not die*) and who sees the temptation to strive for equality with God as one that continues to have the same allurements it had for Eve.

The scene in the Garden—Eve, the serpent, the tree, the eating—is the focus of an attack not only on the account as such, but also on its essential meaning. The historicity of the account is of course almost universally denied in the score of “*Wissenschaft*”—the word today is the historical-critical method. Depending upon whom you are talking to, it is either a fable (for only there do animals talk), a myth (a story told to explain the unexplainable and one that therefore holds a deep theological truth that is to be incorporated into my existential viewpoints), or an etiological tale (a story concocted to explain the obvious, here, the ice that runs through the veins of all women and some men at the very sight of that slimy, creepy, crawly thing I call a snake). As to the

meaning of the Genesis account of the fall, it is again universally not recognized as that fatal step of rebellion against God, the step that has led to the utter corruption of human nature as such, and to that complete change in the very nature of the earth God had created for man's blessing. "And behold everything he had made was very good." Instead, now man wrings from a stubborn ground in competition with thorns and thistles in the blinding sweat of his brow his daily bread. And if left to himself, man can but continue to sin, constitutionally unable to choose the good and God-pleasing.

In the third place, one hope held out to our first parents in their dire need is likewise held up to ridicule. The Seed of the Woman—The Serpent's Head Crushed—The Heel of the Woman's Seed Wounded so as to Shed His Blood? "What a ridiculous scheme for bringing help to anyone! The shedding of blood certainly cannot help anyone—it can only harm the one whose blood is shed. This basic idea of your Blood Theology can be but a throwback to some primitive barbaric ideas about the life being in the blood that comes to expression in the bloody animal sacrifices of many pagan peoples of the ancient world."

Fourthly, self-styled "theologians" of our day point fingers of scorn at the very idea of a vicarious atonement, the thought that someone else stepped in and set to right all the things that were wrong between me and the God whom I had perhaps offended by paying too slight heed to His wishes. "How could something that happened way back there, now almost two thousand years ago, have any meaning for me now and even in the hereafter?" is smugly asked by so many who would be wiser than God. And of course they are far from being alone. How to make his own way to heaven has been the theme of so much of sinful man's speculation. What is reported of the perverse thinking and frustrated doing of the men on the plains of Shinar who would have built a tower to reach to heaven so as to make a name for themselves and prevent their being scattered over the face of the earth, has set the pattern for man's plans and actions. Even in the matter of their eternal welfare men have consistently replied: *I'll do it my way!* Accordingly the rationalist's trilogy of slogans has in great measure summarized what the mind of man has devised as the final answer to his deepest needs, the three concepts, first, that there could well be a *God* who is some way stands in relation to my life, dwelling as he does in the uttermost recesses of the universe, One who perhaps set the machinery of the universe in motion but who has very little direct meaning for my life as it is today. Secondly, as a moral being, I will hold high the banner of *Virtue* and always strive to do the good, the noble, the right. Finally, noble creature that I am, there surely will not be enough rewarding experiences for me in this time to recompense sufficiently for all the nobility I feel and think. There must consequently be somewhere an *Eternity* where just recompense can be made. That eternal life may of course be no more than the ideas of heaven reported to have been held by a British student of the classics, whose idea of bliss was to sit at a table with all other Hellenists and to all eternity keep on reading the Greek classics!

Occasionally another type of offensive is launched against Scripture's teaching, a fifth in our list, but one made and often repeated in professional circles. Both educators and psychiatrists have been numbered among those who see in the Christian religion the principal cause of most of the emotional and mental problems of the human race. It is just because—they argue—people have from childhood on up had the idea drilled into them that misbehavior here leads to eternal hellfire there that mental and emotional breakdowns result. The notion is often put forth that if only churches of all kinds were forced to close their doors then there would no longer be need for clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and the institutions where they practice. While this attitude may today not any longer be so regularly expressed in the crassest form given it above, the basic concept is still with us: "remove from man's thinking and feelings the idea that he has responsibilities to any 'establishment' in any form in which it may occur, and most of man's inner tensions and with them his feelings of hostility will likewise be gone."—These thoughts are all so far out in left field that it hardly seems worthwhile here to look into them any further.

There is however another left-field drive that we must needs take a closer look at; namely, the assertion of the deleterious effects of a "dead orthodoxy." This we make number six. And first a discussion of the meaning of terms is in order. In any proper sense, orthodoxy cannot ever be dead. Orthodoxy, yes, but not "orthodoxy," for the word itself means a correct, proper, and true reading, understanding, and confessing of the

truth of God's Word. Since this Word is itself Life and Truth, the understanding and confessing of its intended sense must surely be anything but "dead."

However, when what we look upon as orthodoxy is pronounced "dead," it is generally one, or both, of two other considerations that are coming under attack. For often when men attack our "orthodoxy", what they really mean is the teaching of Scripture that forms the very heart of that teaching, the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This doctrine, centering as it does in Christ, is the cover that holds all the sixty-six books of the Bible together. It includes the *sola gratia, sola fide, sola scriptura* of our confessions, and no doubt it is because we refuse to budge a single inch in our stand that this it is that we believe, teach, and confess according to the Scriptures that our position in this neo-orthodox and existentially minded time looks like ossification, a petrification in one single position. But when we remember that the essential position of these same critics is that doctrine—or the Bible—is not a rock on which to *stand* but a stone on which to *walk*, then we are proud to confess with Luther, **HERE WE STAND!**

On the other hand, in this day of a general *ecumania*, where a confessionless Christianity is held up as the ideal, then our confessional position will be felt to be strangely out of step with the times. **SO BE IT**, for it is. For rejecting as we do the ecumenically popular historical-critical approach to the Bible where most things are contingent and relative, and insisting on the historical Biblical realism of Luther and our fathers, it is easy to see why our stand should be felt to be beneath all criticism, hardly deserving of any refutation at all. [As when I asked my friend from Portland why his countrymen called their state Or'g'n and not O-r-e-g-o-n as we did when we as schoolboys whooped it up for the slogan: "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight!" He replied that out there, when anyone asked such a question, every true son of the Beaver State would just turn and walk away.]

What we need to bear in mind is that any confessional statement is merely a declaration of what we understand the Scriptures to teach. When the position is taken that there can be no certainty here, then it can at least be comprehended without being understood that a position like ours will be thought of as the result of a terminal sclerosis of the arteries leading to the brain.

At the same time we need to be on our guard against any sort of orthodoxism. I use the word to mean an approach to revelation that sees the books of Scripture merely as a catalog of divinely revealed doctrinal propositions in the abstract. These are then operated with in coldly mathematical and logical fashion. They are defined, classified, graded, divided and sub-divided. At best, since it is God's revelation one is dealing with, the results could well be acceptable and only the method be wrong. At worst,—and here must lie the word of warning for our stoutly confession church of today—when one for too long overlooks the true nature of the Bible as God's living revelation given in a living situation through the heart, mind, tongue, and pen of living men who were His chosen instruments of His revelation, then the danger is present when it begins to be realized that the former time-honored method was but half of the story, that the pendulum swing too far in the other direction, that the time-honored content as confessed in olden days be down-graded with some slogan like "*we want the KHRYGMA, NOT CREEDS*" (cf. the slogan of pietism: we want deeds, not creeds), that Scripture be seen as literature alone and not as doctrine couched in a highly complex, greatly varied, and yet—because it is God's own—completely wonderful Library that IS his revelation.

The sad experience of a former sister-synod in this regard must serve as a constant reminder both of where the truth and where the dangers here lie.

Two other items should be mentioned as points where in contemporary thought the message of the Bible is attacked and the Scriptures are held to be no longer relevant and sufficient in this space age. The first of these (number 7 in our list) is Bultmann's oft-repeated assertion that the New Testament needs to be demythologized because its basic assumption is false, namely that our universe is a three-storied affair—an earth with the heavens above and the nether regions below. Now it is of course to be granted that in this matter as in so many others Scripture does not speak in metaphysical absolutes (the way things *in aspectu aeternitatis et dei* actually are) but rather how they appear to be to us and how we in ordinary understanding speak of them. (Christ ascended to heaven and descended to hell: *hating* father and mother is spoken of as a qualification for discipleship). I cannot for the life of me see, even if it were true that the Bible teaches this doctrine of a

three-storied universe (*which of course it does not do*) neither this nor the thought of four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12) would in any way have any influence on the Bible's teachings. What Bultmann really means is that the real situation is that the universe is a one-story structure, with an impenetrable roof over it and an impervious floor underneath, for he confidently believes that twentieth century *Wissenschaft* has established that there should be no room in modern man's thinking for any supernatural influences on man in this earthly existence, either for good from God and angels above or for evil from Satan and devils below.—To all this we can but reply that from every point of view, Scripturally and humanistically, it is just plain stupid to disagree with the thought that there are *things in heaven and earth that are not dreamt on in our philosophy*.

Our last item in this canvass of objections to Scripture's content because of alleged irrelevancy and insufficiency is that to follow Scripture means that one's thoughts are turned heavenward and not to the problems of this earthly existence where man's ultimate concerns are.

We must stress to begin with that such a statement is simply untrue. It is not the case that the only purpose for being on this earth is to die a blessed death. Such an end is of course what we all pray for. But the aim of all of our life is to lead it IN CHRIST, in intimate union with Him in faith, led by His spirit, guided by His Word. In such a life *we taste e'en now the hallowed bliss of an eternal home*, which will be there not only tasted but fully realized in his presence together with all his angels and saints.

For the life I have now on this earth, if it be in Christ, and the one I shall lead in His presence in a blessed hereafter are but one and the same life, in time here, to eternity there. The fellowship I enjoy with Christ's saints here on this earth, my joy in carrying out His holy will, be that in efforts to extend His kingdom or in the common garden-variety of everyday living where I create opportunities for myself to demonstrate to all the world that in Christ I love my neighbor as myself, the joy I know when I hear in Scripture again and again the thoughts for my salvation and blessing that have been in the heart of God—yes, and just for me—since before time began, this is indeed to know the hallowed bliss, even here in this life, of my eternal home.

Anyone who alleges that the Bible fails to turn my thoughts in the direction where my ultimate concerns are simply does not know either the Scriptures or the Christian human heart. But more of this in the next part of our discussion where we take up the allegation that the books of the Scriptures, as we know, read, and understand them, are not relevant and sufficient in the contemporary scene because of the claim that *the Bible read as it reads is not God's revelation to man of his thoughts of grace concerning them*.

The Bible's Shortcomings from the Historical-Critical Viewpoint

We are here to broach the subject variously titled: the new hermeneutic, the historical-critical method, understanding the Bible for what it really means; there are others, but I think you get the point.

Even outside the men who once wrote and those who have ever since read and believed the Bible there have been articulate thinking persons who have truly seen that the answers to man's ultimate concerns, the responses to his basic concerns of 1) where do I come from; 2) what, really, am I doing here; 3) whither am I bound, answers that in the time of the writing of John's Gospel were all subsumed under the term he adopts for the historical Jesus, the word LOGOS, "The Word," must all come to man from without himself. In these matters it is impossible that man raise himself by his own bootstraps. Even Plato, in his *Phaedo* (85D) where he has Socrates discussing with his friends the question of departure from this life, has his spokesman declare (in this case Simmias, with whom Socrates agrees) that only revelation of some kind has the key to this problem.ⁱⁱ And the latest rage in philosophical circles, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), as much a mystic as a philosopher and mathematical genius, maintained in his basic *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that "our sense of the world must come from outside the world."ⁱⁱⁱ He saw very clearly that human beings, in the variableness of their human situation, are unable by unaided reason to arrive at absolute standards of truth or of what is right or wrong. Such absolutes must lie outside the sphere of what actually happens.^{iv} Unfortunately, Wittgenstein, having entered the right door, did not come out at the right place. His linguistic analysis did not lead him to recognize that in the Bible there is the one divinely given revelation of absolute standards of truth and ethics.

Thinking men, in search of the truth, in both the ancient and modern worlds, have, reluctantly perhaps, had to admit that ultimate religious truth must come to man from the outside. And yet in the critical thought that centered on the Bible the insistence has been that man must find *within himself* the answers to what is absolutely true and absolutely right. For since the opening of the nineteenth century the people whose names loom big in the history of religious thought and Biblical interpretation have indulged in the game they call Comparative Religion, in German *Religionsgeschichte*. In this activity all religious literatures of all peoples and nations are put on the same level. The writings of the Hebrew historians, prophets, and poets and the first-century writings of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ are put on the level as the so-called “sacred books” not only of the East, but of the West, North, and South as well. For it is argued that a nation’s religion, like its form of government, its poetry, its music, and its characteristic life-patterns are all products of one and the same genius, the spirit of that people. Some peoples had a knack for literature, like the Greeks; others for law and government, like the Romans; some, like the Hebrews, had a genius for religion, and therefore what they produced was perhaps worth a second look, but essentially what the Hebrew prophet preached, what the Christian apostle taught, what the Hindu wise man chants, or the ancient Pythia muttered at her Delphic oracle—all these were but segments, warp and woof of one cloth, religious products of a pious self-consciousness that in some way or other finds itself in the immediate presence of its god, regardless of whether that consciousness has been brought on by manifestations like those to Israel at Mount Sinai, by the chanted repetitions of the liturgy of some cult, or by means of the use of some awareness-elevating drug like LSD or mescaline. Wherever worshiping self-consciousness has expressed itself, there will be found something of value as religious truth, and the Old Testament and the New Testament are no worse, but certainly no better than all or any of the rest.

Let us realize fully what has been happening here. Despite Plato and Wittgenstein, the world’s philosophers have tried to set forth some absolute principle, some point on which to build their system of thought, apart from divine revelation. Hegel thought he had such a one in his notion of the three-fold waltz-step forward movement of all things in all environments, his already-mentioned thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Soon, however, men saw that this proposition was not applicable to us human beings as we looked out on life and tried to understand and explain it. For Hegel thought of us as things, and we are not things. Then came the existentialists, today with the foggy figure of Martin Heidegger at their head, who gave up all hope of finding any absolute, any “place on which to stand,” and substituted the thought of a world in which all things are relative and in which the individual determines what the nature of his particular world is to be through the decisions he keeps on making about it. The twentieth century has thus seen the enunciation of a philosophy of life made completely out of the utter hopelessness of man’s own confused existence.

But this is precisely what the people of this world have always been doing: trying to make sense out of their own confusions. And these are the things that have been put down in the religious literatures of the world and have, by modern thought, been put on a par as to their religious value with the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.

This was, however, only the beginning of woes. *Religionsgeschichtler* have gone on to make odious comparisons between some parts of the Bible which they termed barbaric like bloody sacrifices and circumcision and have contended that in the Old Testament man is but groping his way from a stage of primitive superstition to an ethical monotheism, but that in the process he has often come up with things that are vastly inferior to the more civilized products of more cultured peoples.

And the Old, and finally also the New, Testaments thus produced, are but the canonization (reception as authoritative) of a whole string of documents that come from who knows where. Rather than being an answer to the ultimate questions of my existence, these documents—the books of the Old and New Testament canons—says criticism, merely reflect the religious aspirations of some Semitic nomads and some Jewish and Hellenistic dreamers who had strangely come under the influence of a tradition about a Jewish mystic, who had proclaimed strange notions about a near approach of a “Kingdom of God” on earth, but his dreams failing him, had died a disappointed and sadly disillusioned prophet, victim of a Roman government that knew only too well how

religious dreaming could eventuate in political rebellion; so it had crucified him. The reports that circulated later that he had appeared alive to certain of his followers were but the hallucinations of a fevered imagination if not indeed the shifting *phantasmagó Æria* of diseased minds.

A more restrained, but no less inaccurate, view puts it this way that the Scriptures represent what a worshipping church of Old and New Testament times thought, dreamt, felt. It was this church that created the Bible and its doctrine. The Bible is nothing but, as the Germans say, a *Gemeindetheologie*, a set of religious thoughts created by and for the worshipping congregation of Israel in the desert and the communities both Jewish and Hellenistic that gathered about the memories (mostly manufactured) of a Joshua of Nazareth of whom it was suggested that he could have been or maybe even was the Messiah, the Christ, of Jewish and to some extent of non-Jewish hopes.

Even so, according to the latest vagaries of criticism in both Old and New Testaments, the text of the Bible as we have it does not adequately represent what it was that was thought, felt and aspired to in the days of old. For in the first place, it is imagined that all this religious material (narratives, liturgies, reports of preaching, miracle stories, and such) passed through a long stage during which these materials were passed on and about in oral form. As such they could be, and were, altered, amended, changed even to the extent of having their direction reversed, to suit the needs and interests of the person or group which was manipulating them. Sooner or later, of course, these materials came to be written down (just why nobody seems to have explained, since everybody was having such a hilarious time with them in their oral form!), and both in the oral and written stage it is assumed that an extensive editing process went on. At this stage the Germans insert their *Redaktionsgeschichte* (editorial process), during which a ghostly army of “redaktors” selected what suited them and to a great extent editorialized on what had been chosen, always with the intention of promoting interests of their own, much as our modern media select and editorialize in order to produce the effect they want to see created in their audiences, an effect that may be far removed from the effect that would have been created had the matter been reported in factual, straight-forward fashion. But from all these wild fabrications, criticism today draws one profound conclusion: that the Bible materials are not reliable historical sources for the periods of which they treat, but are first rate historical evidence for the periods *in* which they reached their final form, that is, the synoptic Gospels cannot be relied upon to give us reliable facts about life, preaching, works, passion, and resurrection of Jesus, but can be relied upon (provided the critic knows how to sift his material) to furnish us with data regarding how people talked about Jesus during the final third of the first century, a third century, and more after His crucifixion, and moreover, precisely why they did so!

There is None Other Than the Old Gospel Also in this Age of Space

The list of specifics in the foregoing brought against the relevance and sufficiency of the Old Gospel for also this space age of jet travel has not of course been exhausted in the above enumeration. It could be extended almost *ad infinitum* and I'm afraid also *ad nauseam*. Neither would it be to the point to examine them further in detail and in juridical fashion convict them of falsehood. Enough has already been shown, by merely describing them, to establish that they all collapse under the weight of their own absurdities. It would be more to our purposes to demonstrate precisely what it is that we mean when we maintain the relevance and sufficiency of the Scriptures for the jet age.

Basic to all thinking here must be that doctrine of God which the Apostle Peter states in all its basic emphases at the opening of his first epistle (a letter, you will remember, Martin Luther reckoned among the *fürnehmsten Bücher* of the New Testament) (First Peter 1:3-6):

Blessed be the god and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, wherein ye greatly rejoice ...

With these words Peter, directly and by implication, expresses that thought on the basis of which every life of “authentic being” must be lived here on the face of this earth. It is that of a personal God who is on the one hand a “God of power,” the omnipotent creator of the universe, all materials, forces, and relations (the “natural laws”), the maker also of man and the environment in which He placed him; but He is also the God of all mercy, the God of our salvation (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah), to whom in His thoughts and plans for my blessedness in time and eternity I stand in direct relation in an attitude of total dependency. Both my physical and my spiritual life come entirely from him.

All this is abundantly clear from what the Scriptures teach. If I will look about me and within my own heart, I will find that some of these truths will likewise be suggested, though much more vaguely and incompletely.

But the prophets and apostles make it crystal clear that my existence in this world is entirely due to a God who made me and placed me into this environment as my home, a world that was “very good,” perfectly suited to its intended purpose.

This perfect life in God’s presence and that perfect environment in which it was lived were however both spoiled when sin entered into the world, by the disobedience of Adam and Eve in their act of rebellion against their Lord and Maker.

This their sin was however not a passing weakness, a disability to be overcome by certain remedial measures, but it was the total corruption of their very natures. The Lord had said: *The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*. The “death” referred to by the Lord whose very being is Life and Salvation is not merely to “cease continuing to be” but rather that total separation from God in all its aspects that is known by Satan and all his angels. And this death and this rebellion, as part of their very natures, was passed on by Adam and Eve to each and every one of their descendants, the whole human race. For today still, by nature, every son and daughter of Eve stands in violent rebellion against the thought that man is not the captain of his soul (the master of his own fate). Eve acted on that rebellious thought. She was to be the mother of a race of beings like herself, continuing in the image of God, in a life of wonderful and joyous communion with her God, but still one that knew Him as her God and herself as His creature. Instead, she grasped at the straw of the devil’s hateful lie, hoping through this act of rebellion in some way to become the progenitrix of a race of beings that as gods would be knowing good and evil, all things. Actually, in acting thus it was Eve who was the first to take the “existential stance” that it is I who am the one who is to determine all the relations in which I stand. Today our philosopher theologians like to think of that emotionally disturbed Dane of mid-nineteenth century Europe, Soren Kierkegaard, as the one who first thought of this as the highest level of “authentic existence;” actually it was our first mother Eve who first of all did it. What people today like to speak of as the “demands of an authentic existence” you and I and all who have remained true to the confession, based solidly on Scripture, of Martin Luther have always known at the workings of Original Sin, the seductive face of the Old Adam, the lineaments of which all of us share.

We must not neglect to point out that it was precisely in this connection of man’s fall into sin that the God of Our Salvation gave his first proclamation of the Gospel that promises the Savior from sin, the Seed of the Woman, God’s and Mary’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

To reveal to man the absolute truth of his origin, the true nature of his present state and the reason for it, God’s own eternal plan for the salvation of man from the sin into which he had so knowingly and willingly plunged, what man’s hopes for the future could be, and the eternal, divine reasons for all these things—to make known all things—, God selected a way whereby he could clearly, emphatically, and reliably tell man of it in a way that was a miracle in itself and open to him alone: He called men into his service, the prophets and apostles of Holy Writ, and took them so completely into his service, filling them with, and equipping them by means of, His Holy Spirit, that the words they spoke and wrote were in all truth the very Words of God. While they

continued their customary of thought, speech, and action, it was He who prompted them to write, in his wonderful way giving them the very materials about which, and the very words in which, they were to speak.

You will notice that I am alternating references to the Word of the Lord as written with references to it as spoken. Since there has been a deal of loose talk on this matter in recent times, and since we are here thinking of the relevance and sufficiency of the Scriptures, the Word of God as *written*, it could be helpful to clarify the issue. Modern theology has gone to excess in its emphasis on the fact that words, any words, have a force within themselves, a force usually referred to as the word's "dynamic character." The trouble is that our moderns do not distinguish between the dynamic of any word of men and The Word of the Lord, which is a dynamic force indeed. The Old Testament came, in its outward aspects, from the ancient Near East. Now in the non-Israelite culture and thought-world of that Near East any word was felt to have a resident power in it when it was associated with magic and practices of incantation and fortune-telling. That pagan world of a variety of Semitic and Hamitic cultures felt that there was some vast impersonal power in existence, like a vast spiritual powerline, that could be tapped, manipulated, handled, and directed by the correct use of mere words. The magical papyri give us many examples of this belief: the proper word, uttered in the proper circumstances could win for you the bride of your choice, for your horse the "win" spot in a horserace, for your country victory over its enemies, for your enemies victory over you if they could just learn what was the proper word that was your real name, a name that you of course would keep a secret. But all that is pagan hogwash. When it is the Word of the Lord, this word is not conceived of as operating magically, by a power that is in it merely because it is a "word." When the Lord speaks, his word is truly power-laden. And his is the only word that is a power that brings to pass what He speaks, that makes stand where He wishes because He has commanded it. In the Old Testament the "word" is a power because it is the Word of the Lord.

And that power of the word of the Lord is the same whether the word is spoken or written. Thus in the Prophet Jeremiah (36:2,3) the written words of the prophet are meant to be an instrument for conversion that is equally as powerful as were the original spoken words. Both are the word OF THE LORD, and herein lies their dynamic. Again, in the twenty-ninth chapter of his book, Jeremiah identifies the written message of his letter to the captives in Babylon with the Word of the Lord (vv. 4,8,14,16,17,20).

Since about 1800 modern theology has been doing its best to obliterate the direct connection between the Word of the Lord, this Word as then written by His prophets, the same Word as used and testified to by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel message concerning Him in the books of the New Testament AND the words of the Scriptures as we know them today. But to those who will without prejudiced preconceived convictions read the words that stand there, there will come the testimony of God's Holy Spirit ringing loud and clear within the heart. *This is the Word of God—This His Word is Truth*. And all manner of historical study and archaeological investigation has done nothing but second that conviction (*testimonium animae*). Examples are numerous: it was long held that, in the evolution of religions, polytheism came first only to evolve into an ethical monotheism such as was Israel's. The case is found to be just the reverse: the universal worship of the one true God, of whose worship the Biblical priest-king Melchizedek was no doubt the last surviving example, *degenerated* into the polytheism that we know in pagan worship. For years it was argued that the Gospels came into existence in quite a mechanical way: that somebody hid fitted the contents of a "Sayings Source," a book in which was contained a copy of the sayings of Jesus ("Q"), into the framework of the Gospel of Mark, perpetrated other manipulations, and come up the Gospel of Matthew on the one hand and the Gospel of Luke on the other. "Ya see," men said, "here is proof positive that the gospels were compiled as we have said they were and not written by the divine inspiration of the evangelists as you people who take and read the Bible as it stands there have claimed they were." In 1945 there came to light in upper Egypt a whole library of heretical "Gnostic" writings that had been hidden away for centuries at a place now called Nag Hammadi. Many of these writings are copies of works thrown out of the ancient church because they were the product of false, very destructive teachers. Many are called "gospels" but are really nothing but collections of sayings which these false teachers ascribed to our Lord but were certainly never uttered by Him. And now we see that this

supposed-to-be-so-wonderful “sayings source” is but a scrap of a copy from a page out of one of the heretical books, not worth even the papyrus it was copied onto.

Our Lord Himself vouched for the worth of the Old Testament Scriptures. And there is no fact of ancient history that stands on firmer grounds than does the direct connection that existed between the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the life and work of His apostles and the reports of them in the canonical books of the New Testament. A case in point here is that of the Beloved Disciple, the Apostle John, at Ephesus and the work of Irenaeus, a most prolific Christian writer from the later years of the second century who lived and worked in ancient Gaul, the present France. There is a direct stream that connects Irenaeus not only with a knowledge about John at Ephesus but also with the New Testament writings that came from and surrounded the Apostle of the Lord at this metropolis of the then Roman province of Asia.

Another matter the moderns have pointed to repeatedly that is supposed to downgrade the value of the Bible both Old and New Testaments are the twin items of redaction and pseudonymity. The first we have already dealt with; much of what is in both Old and New Testaments is at best of literary historical value (that is, of no religious or theological value at all) because the matter there presented has been so often and so variously worked over, each time by someone with an axe of his own to grind, that the resulting waste basket could not be taken seriously by anyone interested in the subject about which the writing treats. The argument for the other consideration, that of pseudonymity, runs in a different direction. Here it is asserted that in the days before copyright laws it was perfectly respectable and acceptable for someone to filch the work of another and put it out as his own, or, what supposedly happened more often, to compose a work of one's own, lifting materials from other more or less worthy writings, with a lick and a promise of an editorial finish and generally with the original seams left brutally showing, to issue such a writing under the name of some important and well-known figure in Bible history: Enoch, Solomon, Bartholomew, Thomas, and many others. Here it is taken for granted, of course, that the believers of Bible times, especially the Christians of the first generations of New Testament history were the most easily duped fools that ever lived on the face of the earth, and that when the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven all the eyewitnesses of his earthly career were swept away into some other realm of existence so that there was no one to check on any statements that were made and that the first Christians simply gobbled up everything that was handed them.

There is proof positive both from the New Testament itself and from a reliable outside source that exactly the opposite was true. In his letter to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:2) the Lord himself gives his testimony to the church at Ephesus that *they had put to the test those that said they were apostles and were not and had found them to be liars*. Reference here must be, not to persons who near the end of the first century would try to claim to have been numbered among The Twelve AND THOUGHT THEY AT THIS LATE DATE COULD GET AWAY WITH IT, but rather to pseudonymous writings, no doubt gospels, acts, epistles, and revelations that were pure fiction but which made the claim to be of apostolic origin. That there were many such we know only all too well; a considerable “apocryphal New Testament” has survived to this day, but when the genuine apostolic writings were assembled these fakes were emphatically denied admission. Not as has sometimes been put, were they “excluded” from the New Testament: they simply never were in it.

Not only when applied to authorship was pseudonymity taken seriously; even fictitiousness of contents was found reprehensible when that concerned key figure in the history of the church. Well known among the ancients was a rambling, romantic, but much read compilation called *Acts of Paul*. What has been known as *Acts of Paul and Thekla* was plainly a selection of episodes from the former work. The Latin Christian writer Tertullian (On Baptism 17) reports that the presbyter in Asia who had produced the document was removed from office, not because of false doctrine in it, but because he had taken it upon himself, by means of fiction, to add to the prestige of Paul, I have read much in these Acts and must confess that as such the Asian presbyter was an excellent press-agent. But evidently in early Christianity press-agents, good, bad, or indifferent, were not wanted for the apostles on whom Christ built His church.

I cannot refrain from closing on the note that it is just the “existential stance,” the doctrine that all values have their origin and fulfillment in terms of my own existence, the notion that is the formal principle of The

New Hermeneutic, alias The Historical-Critical Method, is basically the same diabolical thrust that has already laid its axe at the roots of civilized life as we know it and threatens the family, the home, the school, the government, since it is so utterly dis-establishmentarian. In plain language, where the Lord of Heaven and Earth has appointed his representatives to act, there this creeping cancer of a modern philosophy is bent on annihilating the establishment that is God's representative. Like a prevailing philosophy of every other age, this doctrine does not need to be learned. It is caught like the measles, sucked in with the air we breathe, learned by merely being exposed to contemporary music and TV commercials. It is a philosophy of life that is its own objective (witness the ideals of commune-life) and like the proverbial dog goes merrily on chasing its own tail. It prates a great deal about "getting involved," getting dreadfully busy about the doing of "your thing." Just being busy with it is what counts. You in principle do not ask where all this leads, since to the existentialist there is no past and no future, only now, and what he wants to make it out of the frustrations of his own existence. As the existentialist baseball umpire is reported to have said: *There is neither ball nor strike until I call it.* A graphic incorporation of this ideal was the figure of the go-go dancer one used to see every so often on the television screen: busy in all departments, she yet was going absolutely nowhere.

Sad indeed to see these thoughts working themselves out in this sinful world. But we know if Satan were not at work in this way, he would be up to something else, in his ongoing battle against God and that God's Christ. Alarming however is the fact that the existential leveling principle has been taken over as a fundamental viewpoint in modern theology. Just as in its secular aspect all differences in level are to be evened out: those between male and female, parent and child, pupil and teacher, students and their schools, government and the governed, so there is to be a leveling process between those who gave us the Bible and us who today read it. For the Karl Barth, who rode the theological saddle in the 1950's, said so often in his voluminous works (and today, even though the wind is blowing more from the Bultmann crowd than from the Switzerland of Barth, men are still acting on Barth's principles) that so far as authority went the prophet Jeremiah, the apostle Peter, and the preacher in the pulpit on Sunday morning all stood on the same level! In such a climate the notion that also God and his creatures are to be put on the same level lies not very far in the distance. The thought was already bluntly expressed by the Serpent in the Garden with his: *Ye shall not surely die* and was echoed in the thinking of Eve when she found the suggestion that she and her progeny might *be as gods, knowing good and evil*, a mighty tempting prospect indeed!

In this miserable world in which we live, is the Bible as a Book and in its teachings still relevant to the contemporary scene, and is it sufficient to meet the proud challenge Satan continues to issue *in deep guile and great might?* The Scriptures *are* relevant and sufficient. *One little word can fell him.*

Some Practical Concerns

In view of what has been said about the Bible and our own church's attitude toward and application of its teachings to the contemporary scene, I should be shirking a grave responsibility as convention essayist if I were to neglect to pinpoint a few quite run-of-the mill, even pedestrian concerns that seem to me to call for attention at the moment. You must pardon me for not dwelling on details but only indicating where my concerns lie.

As we complete a century and a quarter of existence as a Synod, I trust that you share with me the awareness that we are finally punching our way out of that paper sack in which, for whatever reasons there may have been, we in the past have often quite willingly consented to see ourselves viewed as isolated. The specifics we shall omit, but that a new day is dawning I believe a few catchwords will indicate: *Alaska, Africa, Canada, South Atlantic, Colonial; World Missionary Conference; Hong Kong; Japan; editorship for The Northwestern Lutheran alone; burgeoning area high schools; new approaches in our system of higher education; emphasis on publication of Christian literature of all kinds.* Again the list could be extended. Perhaps you will not agree that this or that item is a *good* sign. That wouldn't matter either. What does matter is that we realize that our church has entered upon a new phase of its growth, one that is both inward and outward. Not that change is

necessarily good. I do not find that we have really changed in anything essential. But we are using more and more the avenues opened to us, and the tools that lie at our command, *Sonst, surely, wollen wir beim Alten bleiben*. But in a quite practical way, on the threshold of 1975, where should we look?

I. If we are to retain our identity, that is, during the second hundred years continue putting *Continuing in His Word* first, we shall have to continue a very positive emphasis on that which, as our Lord teaches, must remain a vital factor in any situation where Christians are living and working together. I refer of course to a spirit-inspired and Gospel-directed fraternal discipline exercised in all Christian love. I am sure you have heard, as I have, and perhaps repeated many times that one-word attempted explanation for the sad state of affairs that today exists in our former sister Synod: that word generally goes something like: *the total breakdown of discipline*. I should be very unwilling to evaluate the cogency of this word as an all-sufficient explanation. I'm sure it is, in part at least, an oversimplification. But that there was great failing in this regard was absolutely clear to anyone who took part in the joint meetings of the doctrinal committee of the synods that comprised the old Synodical Conference of North America. In the meetings held during the 1950's this joint committee was given the task of resolving the differences on the question of fellowship that had been triggered by the appearance of the Common Confession. Two doctrinal statements were drawn up and agreed upon, one on Scripture, the other on the Antichrist. It was in this connection that the question, in all seriousness, came from a very high synodical position: "But what do you do when the doctrine that is being taught is not that which it should be?" (I cannot vouch for the exact wording, only for the sentiment). At this juncture a highly-respected member of the committee, a district president of many years' standing, called for the floor and opened with the word: "Haven't you people ever heard of *Lehrzucht*?" At length he lectured that august assemblage. Others of us tried to supply concrete details by explaining what would happen if such a thing occurred in our midst. And yet, some time later, when our WELS committee lodged with the Synodical Conference a specific complaint against a St. Louis professor who had published in a theological journal that is universally read an article in which he applied the technique of *Formgeschichte* to a saying of our Lord and came up with the conclusion that Jesus had not spoken these words at all but that they had gotten tangled up in the process of transmission and had actually been spoken *by* the opponents of Jesus and *about* Him, our representations before the floor committee at the Synodical Conference convention fell on deaf ears. I still get powerfully riled up when I remember the incident and consider what has happened since then at the institution that once knew C.F.W. Walther and George Stöckhardt. The climate of the times must certainly impress on all of us the ongoing need for a sound, evangelical doctrinal discipline. I am going out of my way to speak of that here, but I am aware of how our synod operates. Doctrine and practice are the concern of the districts, each of which comes to a head in the duly elected district president. And each and every pastor here present is a potential holder of this responsible office.

At the same time I am confident that we, in our traditional Wisconsin rugged individualism, will not flop over to the other side of the scale and begin engaging in doctrinal witch-hunts. Any church body that is as strongly confessional and as stoutly conservative as we are (I like the word *bibelgläubig* much better) needs a constant reminder that both feet were meant for keeping on the ground.

But believe me, brethren, as one who has, during the past forty-four years, wandered quite extensively, both formally and informally, over the history of the church it dare never be a question whether or not we are going to exercise doctrinal discipline.

There is another type of discipline that we as a church must exercise, this one in particular in the case of called ministers of the Word, teachers, pastors, professors (I include among pastors all executives in whatever capacity). And in the present it would seem that special heed should be paid to two qualifications for the exercise of the public ministry of the Word that the Lord Himself names; the first, "apt to teach"; the second "beyond reproach." The first of these of course implies that the one who is to teach others must himself be taught. There could be no more clear directive to us that we maintain high standards of both content and method in those schools where our future ministers of the Word are being prepared for their heaven-given assignment. The ultimate purpose of such training will of course have to be given a priority "A" rating: feeding the lambs,

shepherding the sheep of Christ. But when this feeding and shepherding is no longer in evidence or is in fact something quite different from what it should be, I would in the first place plead for patient understanding for the difficulty and often unpleasantness that confronts those who by virtue of their call are obligated to act and perhaps reach grave decisions in any particular case. We may experience considerable empathy for the person concerned. And yet there must always also be this other concern: what of the lambs that are not being fed? the sheep who cannot find their shepherd? the flock endangered by a ravaging wolf and yearning for the shepherd to gather it and protect it? I hold no brief for or against anyone or anything, but as this world becomes increasingly more secularized, all of us, and we dare not omit our theological seminary where our pastors receive their terminal training for a life of service in the public ministry, must remain steadily aware, in all good conscience, how important it is, and this too in doctrine and in practice, that as Paul says, our “overseers” be “apt to teach.”

Another requirement that is mentioned by Paul, and the only other one we should want to discuss here, is that the overseer be “blameless.” The English word is of course an inadequate and misleading rendering of the Greek that Paul used; his word must mean something like: “one against whom a complaint may not justifiably be lodged.” Thoughts that would demand such a high standard of conduct of the overseer so that no one, at any time, could find anything to criticize could not have entered St. Paul’s mind. The Corinthian correspondence alone shows that there were all kinds of people finding all sorts of fault with Paul, and yet he continued in his apostolic office. I am not sure just how many of the social graces Paul would have wanted to include in this requirement, but I like to think that the Apostle would have included this that no public servant of the Word should be thought of as being egregiously lacking in this regard when, in the matter of the accepted standards of polite society, he is compared with the way the persons in public life in his community handle themselves, perhaps the superintendent or principal of the local high school, the cashier in the local bank, the manager of the local seed and feed store. Whatever the details here may be, I’m sure that Paul would expect the leader of a congregation always to be, and conduct himself as, a gentleman. For here is one title that can safely be ceded to Paul: “Christian Gentleman.” Correspondingly, all foppery, dandyism, and crankisms will by their very nature constitute something close to what is called “blame.”

Yet, the gentleman is first and foremost a man in the accepted sense of the word. That is, the leader of a flock of Christ must, in general, meet all demands that, in outward matters, are made by any employer, be that a single person or a corporate undertaking. It must be simply unthinkable that irresponsibility with regard to attention to duty that would lead to any secular employee’s dismissal should be tolerated anywhere in the public ministry of the Word. My years of experience in the ministry have shown me that our people will be very tolerant of what could be some of the poorest preaching ever to be inflicted on the long-suffering. Notice, *tolerant* is the word I used. *Put up with it* they may.

And when I speak of “poor preaching” I am thinking not only of the servant of the Word whose pulpit presence may be far from what it could be, whose sermons seem to be an on-going tug-of-war between himself and his text, and who seems to have to struggle to make his points clear. Provided the effort has been put forth, in the right direction and in the requisite amount, there is every chance in the world that his pulpiting could readily be made to warrant a much more acceptable rating were he given a little understanding help, some positive encouragement, and a little time for an already-begun maturing process to run its course. If he is a bachelor, it could be that a good wife (who is always the preacher’s nearest and dearest critic) is all he needs; or if he already is blessed with a help meet for him, that she be encouraged and emboldened to exercise in the sanctity of the family circle the built-in critical faculty every wife possesses. Rather, the “poor preaching” I am thinking of is achieved by the person who fancies himself a pulpit knight in shining armor and who Sunday by Sunday castigates the shortcomings of the world at large and of his own people in particular and in whose efforts the sweetness of the Gospel message of a Savior from this sin is sounded in much muted fashion if at all. Such sermons are tremendously easy to prepare: an eye roving over the landscape can without estimable effort accumulate enough homiletical material for at least forty minutes of sleeve-shaking. And commonly, people will love it! Many of them will be able to think of kinds of people to whom every word would apply. They will

come away, thinking and saying, *What a wonderful preacher it is that we heard today!* Aye, just there's the rub! What they should be saying is: *What a wonderful Savior it is that we heard about today!* And since it is so, what they have heard has to be labeled "poor preaching," something people may indeed be tolerant of, put up with.

They may put up with it, but not with the kind of inattention to duty that the business world will not stand for either. Surely, the unforeseen occurs, accidents happen. But consistent tardiness, a consistent record of non-performance or, worse still, non-effort in areas included in the definition of the call into the public ministry, habitual procrastination and a readiness to defend something that is patently reprehensible—these matters and their like must call for patient, evangelical, but firm and decisive handling. Let us continue to pray for the grace of understanding and tolerant firmness for the subject, and the grace of joy in accepting Gospel-inspired correctives for the object in instances of this sort.

II. Another matter of a practical nature that faces our church at this time is the choice of an adequate replacement for the time-honored *Lutherbibel* of our fathers—and to come to think of it, that includes your essayist who learned his first catechism, first *Biblische Geschichte* (Ernst's!), first hymn verses, and first Bible passages, and learned to lisp them, in the accents of Martin Luther. You are well aware, I am sure, that our Synod, its Praesidium, and the Seminary faculty have now for quite a number of years been engaged in a most time-consuming and exhaustive study of all contemporary versions in search of an acceptable one. It is especially our publication agencies that are in the bind at present: what text is to appear in the material we as a Synod print? Believe me, if I had the answer I would be only too happy to give it to you, especially when I remember that it is now exactly twenty-two years that I have been deeply involved in the study and comparison of English New Testament translations that were made by others. Regularly, the answer has been: *Yes! But!* The translation in which I had some part, *The New International Version—New Testament*, by the New York Bible Society, has at the request of the Commission on Christian Literature's Bible Translation Seminar been intensively studied by the Seminary faculty. Every word of it was scrutinized in the light of the original apostolic text. There are places where one could, or must, raise an eyebrow or go even farther. But such instances are much less frequent than we expected them to be, by far less numerous than were those noted for any of the other versions studied, and we covered all the main ones. I personally have the feeling that the answer may not be a straight-line simple one, rather one with a variety of facets, some of them perhaps suggested by the resolutions of the Bible Translation Seminar last January.

But in this matter too, both feet are for keeping on the ground. It will help us and our people if we will strive to get clear on just what a Bible translation is. It's the form of the Divine Word changed into our speech. *THE divinely inspired Word* must remain the Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek written by prophet and apostle. Rendered into our speech, that Word is still the Word of God, if the rendering is adequate and faithful to the original. Taken by itself any translation is an impossible task, and, because of basic differences in the way different peoples look at things and express themselves, cannot ever *exactly* be the equivalent of the original. But this last cannot ever be expected of it. Here Luther has with many examples and by means of much discussion shown us to say: a good translation is one that as adequately as may be expresses in the new language the thought that is contained in the old one.

Let us remember: the outward form of the Divine Word and the Divine Thought of our God contained in it are not two different things. They are but the two sides of the same coin, and only to our peril would we stress either one to the neglect of the other.

Naturally, in a matter like this feelings are often, and violently, aroused. And it is not altogether bad that it should be so, for herein we have a matter before us where everyone so intensely *cares*.

Let us continue to pray for the kind of solution on our Synod's part that succeeds in keeping an eye on all these objectives at once. Only God can grant that kind of solution.

III. In closing I should like to quote from a statement made by our beloved and revered Seminary teacher, Professor Johannes P. Meyer in his commentary on II Corinthians. In commenting on the words *every height erected against the knowledge of God* he discusses this "knowledge of God" and in doing so, comes to give

expression to what we may well call an answer to the question: “What in the light of God’s Word is really ‘authentic being’?” We may take it as something we should always keep in mind as we now continue our assigned tasks in the furtherance of the Kingdom of God and responsibly use the Holy Scriptures as God’s Revelation of His Holy Will to us, a revelation that is still completely relevant to, and totally sufficient for, the needs also of this space age. We quote *Ministers of Christ*, page 229:

This knowledge of God is not a mere intellectual acknowledgment that there is a God, Creator, and supreme Ruler of the universe; it is not a mere admission that God is Triune, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. IT IS A PERSONAL MEETING OF GOD AND CONTACT WITH HIM THROUGH THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS WHICH HE IMPARTS TO THE HEART, AND THE SERENE PEACE OF CONSCIENCE WHICH ACCOMPANIES THAT FORGIVENESS AS ITS FRUIT. All of this God announces to us through the Word of His Gospel and seals to us by means of His Sacraments. It is a personal contact which God establishes by kindling faith in our hearts through His aforementioned means, a faith which appropriates the proclaimed forgiveness, All of these different factors taken together constitute a UNIT BLESSING, which the Scriptures call the “knowledge of God.” Wherever this knowledge of God is established, there Satan has suffered a defeat; a stronghold, a high fortress has been wrecked, and his kingdom begins to crumble. Paul’s Gospel warfare accomplished just that since the day that God commissioned him as His standardbearer in this campaign.

Frederic E. Blume

Notes

ⁱ William Kelley Wright. *A History of Modern Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan, 1941, pp. 530-559.

ⁱⁱ *Phaedo* 85 C,D. (*Loeb Classics*) “I think, Socrates, as perhaps you do yourself, that it is either impossible or very difficult to acquire clear knowledge about these matters in this life. And yet he is a weakling who does not test in every way what is said about them and persevere until he is worn out by studying them on every side. For he must do one of two things: either he must learn or discover the truth about these matters, or if that is impossible, he must take whatever human doctrine is best and hardest to disprove and embarking upon it as upon a raft, sail upon it through life in the midst of dangers, unless he can sail upon *some stronger vessel, some divine revelation*, and make his voyage more safely and securely.”

ⁱⁱⁱ D.J. O’Connor (ed.). *A Critical History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Free Press, 1964. pp. 536-545.

^{iv} Merrill C. Tenney (ed.). *The Bible - The Living Word of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968. pp. 206 f.

^v R.C. Zaehner. *Mysticism—Sacred and Profane*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957. pp. 1-29.