



"Meditate
upon these things;
give thyself
wholly to them;
that thy profiting
may appear unto all"

I Timothy 4:15

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THE DANGER OF GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM*

Our times beg for the authority of truth. Unfortunately, expert answers to questions are all too often smokescreens of humanistic confusion. There's no comfort when the ultimate authority for life and the discovery of truth is man himself. There is a vital need for man to navigate according to "fixed stars," something outside of himself, to deliver the final authoritative word on how things are, or how things ought to be. Thousands sit regularly in pews across our country, firmly convinced that they are being fed the truth. They are in fact being poisoned by a calculated and systematic destruction of the comfort and authority of God's Word.

The Roman Catholics have mixed their pernicious semi-Pelagianism with heavy doses of ecclesiastical oppression. Grace with man helping is not grace. Grace mediated necessarily by professional clergy is a slavery which vitiates free and unlimited access to God's Gospel. God's authoritative Word is forced to share the dais with the pronouncements of a man who allegedly decrees infallibly on matters of faith and morals.

Contemporary holiness groups and Pentecostals have also added their subversive footnotes to the pages of Biblical tampering. The pre-eminence of the conversion experience, coupled with charismatic glossolalia, has replaced emphasis on the effective redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The indwelling Spirit is made to contradict His own Word, as the subjectives in the psychology of conversion ease out the objective, historical, space-time phenomena concerning Jesus' doing, dying, and rising as recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

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Modernism has made Christianity unrecognizable in relation to its historical foundations. "Science" and reason have replaced faith. Secular humanism has become its formal principle. The supernatural is untestable, and therefore it is unreal, according to this perspective.

The Lutheran Church is a means-of-grace church. She historically considers the objective Gospel as the tool of the Holy Spirit to create and sustain faith unto eternal glory. The Gospel of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ is communicated to mankind in Word and Sacrament. The Good News is the message (material principle, the "central theological thought which controls the entire doctrinal system."¹). The Holy Scriptures are the vehicle which transmits the message (formal principle, or the "source and norm of ... doctrine"²). Lutheran worship and instruction revolve around the Gospel in preaching, singing, absolving, counseling, etc. From this perspective, all who claim to be Christian are such only on the terms outlined in the Word itself.

The 20th century has witnessed an erosion of the formal and material principles among the confessions of major Lutheran church bodies.

"... only one in ten LCA and less than one in five ALC clergymen view the Bible as God's Word and entirely true. More than three-quarters of the LCA and more than half of the ALC clergy indicate that belief in the virgin birth of Christ no longer is necessary to be a good Christian. Nearly a third of the LCA clergy say that belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is not essential to salvation."³

These new confessional positions were not assumed over night. In *The Battle for the Bible* Harold Lindsell argues convincingly that any breach in the concept of inerrancy and infallibility regarding the Scriptures follows a predictable pattern whose logical conclusion is Unitarian Universalism. The first data to be challenged are the historical and factual information of Scripture. Pretty soon first this and then that doctrine tumble down until there is an ultimate rejection of the basics of

Christianity. This progression has also begun in the Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod [hereafter: LCMS].

Nor has this error proceeded any differently from other false doctrines. Challenges to the authority and inerrancy of Scripture seek toleration along with the truth. When attempts at discipline do not reject the challenge, the errorist seeks the right to propound his position (in the name of love, of course). Finally the error gains respectability, and the former confessional standards are soon forgotten.

Throughout history there have been continuing skeptical blows on the veracity and reliability of Scripture. Prior to the age of Rationalism all were consistently rejected. Christianity did not shrink from the necessary inference that, since God is faithful, His Word is truth and does not err.⁴ Now the pages of the two recent centuries of church history include the products of man's attempt to make Scriptures more palatable to modern, intellectual, rational human beings: accommodation theory (Semler); naturalism (Paulus); moral interpretation (Kant); thesis, antithesis, synthesis (Hegel); higher criticism (*Formgeschichte* and *Religionsgeschichte*); demythologizing (*Schriftganzes*, *Entmythologisierung*, Bultmann) — to name a few. And now we can add gospel reductionism, or, as it is sometimes called, gospelism. All are variations from the concept of Biblical inerrancy. All impose unwarranted assumptions on Biblical interpretation. Their difference is the extent and degree they vary from historical, evangelical, Biblical Christianity.

MISSOURI'S MISERY

For most of us an awareness of the concept of gospel reductionism arose in connection with our knowledge of doctrinal and disciplinary problems in the LCMS. Many lived through the tense years of Synodical Conference attempts to solve the problems both the WELS and the ELS were having with the LCMS. Ultimately faithfulness required separation and suspension of fellowship. Others have witnessed the effects of gospel reductionism in other Lutheran church bodies. This present analysis discusses primarily the application of gospel reductionism by the "moderates" in the LCMS.

Dr. John Tietjen, former president of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) and presently president of Concordia Seminary in Exile (Seminex), confesses, "I fully accept the authority of the Bible. I am totally committed to the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God." Alone, this is an admirable statement. But a bit later on in the same article he says, "Isn't the Bible an issue at all in the Missouri Synod controversy? Not the authority of the Bible! Interpreting the Bible is an issue. There is disagreement over what is legitimate in biblical interpretation. The role of tradition in biblical interpretation is an issue."⁵

Interpretation is the issue; but it is not the only issue. Does the approach to interpretation affect the concepts of Biblical authority and inerrancy? What happens when the products of interpretive study differ concerning the same Biblical data? Harold Lindsell observes, "The relation between interpretation and inerrancy is such that certain interpretations can in effect deny inerrancy."⁶ An interpretation which denies the historicity of Adam is not only a question relative to the first chapters of Genesis. It also doubts the Mosaic assertion of known offspring of Adam. Luke's genealogical table would be all wrong (Luke 3). He specifically identifies Adam as a historical person. Paul's whole presentation of original sin fails if Adam is fictional (Romans 5).

The apologists for verbal inspiration and Biblical inerrancy must bear the invective of the "liberated" who hurl ugly words like "bibliolatry" and "biblicism" as terms of reproach. The impression sometimes is unfortunately given by those who defend Biblical inerrancy and the authority of Scripture that they have made the doctrine of Scripture the material principle of their faith. This promotes dead orthodoxy, and it creates an unnecessary tension between the Bible and the Gospel: the Bible is important because it transmits the Gospel; the Gospel is important because it is in the Bible. The gospel reductionism reaction to any real or supposed biblicism is that "the Gospel be used as the norm of theology in such a way as to suggest that considerable freedom should be allowed within the church in matters which are not an

explicit part of the Gospel."⁸

The public media further cloud the issue by allowing only two alternatives for interpreting the Bible. Either one "takes it literally" or not. It is true that quite a number of theologians define "literal sense" as the intended sense, which then includes all the figurative language when that is the intended sense. Contemporary proponents of verbal inspiration have consistently moved to use the word "literary" to define their interpretive approach. The wisdom of such a distinction becomes evident when the issue of facticity or historicity requires literal understanding and is contrasted with those portions of Scripture God intends to be figurative.

WHAT IS GOSPEL
REDUCTIONISM?

Evidence:

"It is our conviction that any effort, however subtle, to supplement the Gospel so that it is no longer the sole ground of our faith or the governing principle for our theology is to be rejected as un-Lutheran, contrary to our confession, and injurious to the mission of the Church."⁹ [Emphasis added.]

Gospel reductionism, or gospelism, is an approach toward the study of Scripture which makes the Gospel "virtually exclusively normative in such a way as to detract from the normative authority of the whole Scripture."¹⁰

It takes a bit of courage to object to an apparently fine-sounding statement which makes the Gospel a governing principle for theology. Who wants to appear anti-Gospel? The appeal of the whole approach involves its seemingly orthodox-sounding assertion of faithfulness to the Lord and His Gospel. Yet this definition has been asserted so that varying interpretations of other Biblical material are acceptable so long as the Gospel is not injured.

Is the Gospel normative in Scripture? Certainly the Bible teaches the doctrine of justification by faith. Law and Gospel are vital concepts for the proper under-

standing of the Holy Scriptures. These concepts are derived from Scriptures themselves. As such, they are controls over everything which contradicts or weakens the doctrine of justification or the distinction between Law and Gospel. "But they are not principles for interpreting the message of Scripture; they are the message of Scripture."¹¹

The Gospel, therefore, is not normative for theology as the fundamental premise from which all other Biblical assertions are provisionally or historically conditioned. Saying that the Gospel is pre-eminent in Scripture does not detract from the normative character of all of Scripture, nor can concern for the truth of the Gospel as such undermine other messages and information which the Scriptures themselves assert to be true. Maintaining the distinction of Law and Gospel at the expense of Scripture, calling them humanly conditioned reactions to the activity of God, undermines the essential character of the Book by using part of its information to question or destroy some other part.

It becomes a matter of vital concern whether the Book from which the vital soteriological information comes is sometimes undependable. This casts the whole soteriological outlook into doubt. If it can be questioned that Jonah was not actually swallowed by the gigantic fish, then it can be questioned that Jesus was not accurate in His understanding of the Old Testament account, since He repeats it as factual and the basis for a sign of His resurrection. If the historicity of the creation or the Red Sea crossing is doubted, then certainly the fact that the just shall live by faith can be doubted. The information comes from the same source.

Gospel reductionism has not adopted all the radically secular approaches of most modernists. Theirs is a mediating position which has not completely rejected the possibility of finding truth in Scripture. Nor have understandings about the deity of Christ and His resurrection been discarded. Moderates in the LCMS controversy would still be conservatives by most modernists' standards. But the seeds for continued erosion of Biblical revelation are present. Although they still hold to the

objective nature of Gospel preaching for the forgiveness of sins, the methodology to deny it is already present. Truth will soon be conceived in connection with the subjective, personal encounter rather than the objective, propositional expression of God's desired, intended communication with mankind.

The Gospel can be considered normative in Scripture only in the sense that "it absolutely prohibits understanding of any passage to teach salvation by works. It is not a norm in the sense that the center of Scripture becomes a device to sanction a view of the Bible and method of interpreting it which virtually denies that the whole Bible is God's inspired, authoritative Word on all matters concerning which it speaks."¹²

Furthermore, gospel reductionism unnecessarily creates a tension between God's revelation and concrete, historical facts. God has acted in history. His intervention in the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets, and others actually happened. Later generations considered what God had done earlier as reported in the Scriptures to be factual information and as such communicated the promise of the Messiah in those earlier contexts. They had no trouble with a theocentric view of history. And they recognized that God's activity was soteriological and teleological in character.

Gospel reductionism doubts the historicity of many of God's interventions, suggesting that they are neither accurate nor necessary to the understanding of divine revelation. If only the Gospel is maintained, then other peripheral matters can solicit any variety of reaction, even rejection. Gospel reductionism does not cast suspicion on the historical events concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. No one, not even the rankest atheist, denies that Jesus died. Regarding the resurrection, however, we hear a new, rather strange sound!

Evidence:

"Any attempt to make the Promise depend on the historical authenticity of every detail of the Scriptures destroys the Promise. We begin by lis-

tening to the Promise and hearing the message that 'Jesus died and rose for me.' If we keep asking, 'Did Jesus really rise?' we will never hear the Promise. For proof of the resurrection will not lead us to believe the Gospel or trust God. Yes, we affirm that Jesus rose and that His grave was empty. But what counts is God's Promise that Jesus Christ died and rose for us and for our salvation."¹³

The apostle Paul says that without genuine, real resurrection, that is, return to life after death, there is no "Promise." Our resurrection depends on the historical authenticity of Christ's resurrection. God binds together His soteriological information with the historical events on which they are based. Why create tension between Gospel and history when none has to exist — or does?

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM IS
REALLY NOTHING NEW

Living in the 20th century
provides a vantage point of
history which vindicates Solomon's observation, "There's no new thing under the sun."¹⁴

The Word of God, whether written or oral, has been attacked, ridiculed, and otherwise disbelieved from the beginnings of human history. Attempts to stray from the intended sense of the Holy Scriptures or any of its parts are nothing new.

The early Christian community had to deal with some hermeneutical approaches which cast suspicion on the authority of Scripture. Origen tried to accommodate the interpretation of Scripture with the Greek understanding of reality and ended up seeking meaning in allegorical interpretations. For him the Bible spoke in symbols and it was up to the interpreter to find those intellectual gems interspersed in the Biblical record. Origen was the prominent scholar of the School of Alexandria. Philo and Clement also distinguished themselves there.

But, as has already been stated, the church rather consistently returned to more sound interpretive methodology. To combat the Alexandrian school, there was the School of Antioch. Men like Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom (Golden Mouth), and even Jerome (of Vulgate fame) regularly rejected the allegorical, three-storied-

universe approach to the study of Scriptures.¹⁵ They went back to the interpretation of the Bible in its historical and grammatical contexts. For them the only allegories in Scripture were the ones God used and explained. In these early first-millennium centuries the literal-historical method of interpretation was the principle exegetical method of the Christian Church.¹⁶

As the years moved on, there was more and more pressure to have an external authority fix the meaning of Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church became that authority. Now Scripture was not only studied on its own merits, but interpretations were also examined according to the traditions of the church. Already in the year 200 Tertullian argued for the church's authority to interpret Scriptures, especially when heresy is involved. Orthodoxy became the norm for the interpretation. A difficulty naturally arose when someone thought the traditional interpretation weak or inaccurate. Attempts to alter these official understandings precipitated the ire and weight of ecclesiastical machinery to stamp out any variant from its norm. Early scholars began writing "official" interpretations into the margins of their Bibles — *catena*, or glosses. Luther declared them invalid.

Nor was the church spared another resurgence of allegorical methodology as a valid hermeneutical tool. A Latin couplet illustrates how each verse of Scripture was to be viewed in a four-fold sense:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*

The letter shows us what God and our fathers did;
The allegory shows us where our faith is hid;
The moral meaning gives us rules of daily life;
The anagogy shows us where we end our strife.¹⁷

In contrast to allegorizations of this era is the modified, literary sense approach of St. Thomas Aquinas. He wrote in his *Summa Theologica*, "Since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of the holy scripture is God, it is not unfitting,

as Augustine says, if even according to the literal sense one word in holy scripture should have several meanings."¹⁸ For him the literal sense was the basis for other meanings.

The period of the Reformation had a revolutionary effect on the subsequent eras in the history of hermeneutics. Martin Luther's approach to Scripture as God's Word is well-known to Lutheran interpreters. For him the Bible was in all its parts God's Word. "The Scriptures have never erred. ... The Scriptures cannot err. ... It is certain that Scripture cannot disagree with itself. ... It is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself, only that it so appears to the senseless and obstinate hypocrites."¹⁹ For Luther, Scripture was Christological in both its informative and soteriological purposes. Luther deferred from all the allegorical schools by insisting that the Scriptures have only one meaning. He himself made use of allegories which corresponded to those God uses in the Scriptures. He rejected traditional interpretations when they were wrong. His whole hermeneutical approach is evident in part of his answer to the Diet of Worms in 1521:

"Unless I am convinced by the testimonies of the Holy Scriptures or evident reason (for I believe in neither Pope nor councils alone, since it has been established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures adduced by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God (for it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience), therefore I cannot, and I will not recant. Here I stand. God help me. Amen."²⁰

Present day gospel reductionism regards Luther as the father of their hermeneutical methodology. This, however, is not the case.²¹ For Luther personal experiences were controlled by Scripture. Luther was always concerned that what he thought and what he believed was what God wanted him to think and believe. He did not make his existential life the critic of Scriptures, nor did he consider certain word-event confrontations self-authenticating in his personal experience as the author-

ity for his behavior.²² His Christological emphasis never detracted or conflicted with Scripture's factual and historical assertions.

Luther's challenge to the Roman Catholic hierarchy was successful. During and after his time others moved to challenge the authority of the Roman Church in a variety of social, political, and theological circumstances. The Reformation became a world-event. And now a new ingredient was interjected into the discipline of interpretation. Reason was set up as an autonomous agent. The so-called scientific approach to the study of the Scriptures began its development after the Reformation era.

In the century after Luther Thomas Hobbes stated, "When God speaketh to man, it must be either immediately, or by mediation of another man. ... To say that God hath spoken to him in the Holy Scripture is not to say that God hath spoken to him immediately but by mediation of the prophets or of the apostles or of the church, in such manner as he speaks to all other Christian men."²³ Grant comments, "Here Hobbes anticipates the modern theory that the Bible is not itself the revelation of God but the record of that revelation."²⁴

Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677) followed with an attack on what he considered the bondage of reason and the mind of Christians. He considered the Scriptures an attempt of the faithful to produce a philosophical footing for their message by following the lead of early Greek philosophers. In seeking to liberate men from the formal assent to Scriptures, which he viewed as lacking the living faith, he advocated reading the Bible "afresh in a careful, impartial and unfettered spirit, making no assumptions concerning it."²⁵ At every place where a passage of Scripture appeared irrational, he felt free to disagree, or attribute the statements to disillusioned writers: "I found nothing taught expressly by scripture which does not agree with our understanding, or which is repugnant thereto ..."²⁶ Spinoza was the most important advocate of the pre-eminence of reason over against the Scripture, stating that its message had no authority over his mind. Everything in Scripture which

appeared unreasonable must be allegorized.²⁷

The acknowledged father of the modern historical critical methodology is Johann Salomo Semler (1725-1791). In his critical study of Scriptures he tried to chart a course between what he considered the rigidity of Orthodoxy and the radical assertions of rationalism. He operated with basically two hermeneutical imperatives: that the exegete must get at the intended sense of a passage in its historical setting, and that the meaning had to be translated into a contemporary idiom for the proper understanding. This sounds admirable, at first notice. But Semler allowed that a historical study of a text may be undertaken from extra-Scriptural sources. "Semler believed that an understanding of the origin of the canon would shake to its foundations the doctrine of verbal inspiration as held by Orthodoxy."²⁸

Arguments about accommodation theories raged during Semler's time. Even Orthodoxy presented something on accommodation which stated that the Holy Spirit accommodated Himself to the style, language, and personalities of the hagiographers. There were many, including Semler, whose view of accommodation went beyond this. They maintained that Jesus and His apostles accommodated themselves to the contemporary ideas and general understanding of their audience, even if those were in error.

Earlier, historical-critics were either outside the church or constituted a despised minority within it. From the time of Semler the concept of historical-criticism as a valid hermeneutical methodology gained respectability. The first fatality from its assumptions was, naturally, the doctrine of verbal inspiration, which was viewed as oppressive to reason and the results of natural science.

During the 19th century historical-criticism was re-defined, restated, and refined to exclusive use among many Bible scholars. During these years we meet men like Schleiermacher and Ritschl, who combined the rationalism and supposed subjectivity of the Lutheran Reformation. Schleiermacher popularized the idea that Scripture must be interpreted and criticized like any other purely hu-

man book.²⁹

The Tuebingen school spread its influence through men like F. C. Bauer, who tried to accommodate Hegel's approach to history with the development of dogma and the transmission of the Bible. The results were confusing. During this century the documentary hypothesis, which has ruled historical-criticism to this day, was developed by Graf and Wellhausen.³⁰ The Pentateuch was assumed to be the work of a compiler. The five books of Moses were supposedly redacted from four sources: J (Jahwist), E (Elohist), P (Priestly), and D (Deuteronomist).

All kinds of "criticisms" have developed from these earlier models: textual criticism, literary criticism, historical criticism (as a separate discipline), form criticism, redaction criticism, content criticism, tradition criticism. These disciplines, singularly or in combination, constituted a deliberate and continuing hermeneutical methodology which undermines the Scripture's own statements of its character. This brief recital of hermeneutics' past is intended to show that the present applications of gospel reductionism principles are really nothing new, but modified presentations of various historical-critical material coupled with favorable allegorical interpretations. Even the plea that historical-critical methodology is neutral fails, since conclusions from its use with "Lutheran presuppositions" still result in a conflict regarding the historical and doctrinal information in the Bible.

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM UNDERMINES THE DOCTRINE OF VERBAL INSPIRATION AND ITS COROLLARIES

Over two thousand times in the Old Testament it is written: "Thus says the Lord!"³¹

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."³²

"And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for

what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe."³³

"... and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness."³⁴

"In our teaching and preaching we rely wholly upon the Bible, the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We regard this Book of Books as the Word of God, verbally inspired and wholly without error as written by holy men of God."³⁵

"Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, it goes without saying that they contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth, also in those parts which treat of historical, geographical and other secular matters."³⁶

The Scriptures are a divine book with God as their author. They are Christological and soteriological in nature, having as their end the salvation of mankind through faith in Jesus Christ. As such, they present a striking unity of thought regarding this salvation from beginning to end. Although saints have explained Scriptures to those who are ignorant or weak (Philip to the Ethiopian), the Bible does not require any middle men, or professional clergy, or ecclesiastical authority, for its interpretation. The Scriptures speak clearly in a condemnatory word (Law) and a saving word (Gospel). God provides a specific rescue. Man's worst problem is his sin and the consequent death. God forgives sins because of the blood of Jesus which He imputes to all (justification, reconciliation). The believers are beneficiaries of His decree.

The Scriptures also bear their human imprint. The Scriptures are an ancient text, written in known language over a period of years as men were moved by the Holy Spirit to do so. We read a human text. The Holy Spirit

used men of like ability, passions, and circumstance as we — neither treating them as automatons (puppets) or assassinating their rational powers for the transmission of His Word. The weaknesses of the saints and the hagiographers themselves are not shielded from our notice. Furthermore, we read a historical text. It treats of historical, space-time phenomena, which occurred over a period of years. The text itself and the variety of translations have a historical development which can be traced and analyzed. And finally we read a literary text which follows the rules of language and communication. Words have meanings and connotations. They occur in relationships to one another in sentences and paragraphs. Language is sometimes figurative; the native meaning of the words does not convey the intended sense. A variety of linguistic forms are included: metaphor, simile; allegory, parable; typology; euphemism, irony, sarcasm; hyperbole, symbol, etc.

Gospel reductionism defers from these descriptions. It hasn't gone completely to the radical conclusions of most historical-critical methodology, which denies any supernatural intervention in the transcription of Scriptures because divine phenomena cannot be scientifically investigated. Gospel reductionism's mediating position says that certainly God was active in history, and the Scriptures are the witness of the faithful to His divine intervention. The Holy Spirit added His impetus from the oral tradition to the final version of the redactors. Scriptures are deemed an errant book — not free from defects or inadequacies — and subject to the limitations of any human book. Use of adjectives like "inspired" and "inerrant" in connection with Scriptures as the Word of God do not appear in context with the historical definitions quoted above.

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM REJECTS
THE PRESUPPOSITIONS (APRIOR-
ISMS) WHICH THE SPIRIT CRE-
ATES FOR SCRIPTURE'S INTER-
PRETERS

The goal of Scriptures
is to make men wise a-
bout salvation through
faith in Christ Jesus
(2 Timothy 3:15). We
find Scriptures stating

the impossibility of human beings having that wisdom or
acquiring it in some way by their own initiative and in-

genuity.

"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."³⁷ "... and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."³⁸ Also read Ephesians 2:8,9.

Part of the assurance which the Holy Spirit bestows when He uses the Gospel message to convert a recalcitrant soul is that the Gospel information is true and factual — both the historical accounts and the theological descriptions. Only he who is converted understands Scripture's essential meaning. Many meanings are available to an unbeliever. His interpretations are suspect, however, since the soteriological meaning of Scripture requires the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Even the presupposition that is the Gospel is subject to distorted meaning and will be considered legalistically until the Spirit has done His work.

The Holy Spirit creates the assumptions necessary to read and interpret the Bible properly. He binds men to the historical accounts regarding the Word made flesh. He brings the revelation of almighty God Who interprets the historical information about Christ so that it achieves its regenerative goal. The very information which creates faith bears a fruit in acceptance of the vehicle that brings the faith-creating Gospel as the very Word of God. A believer's justification by faith is also a perspective for interpreting Scriptures.

The Scripture tells of God's intervention in history, particularly with His unique Son, Jesus Christ. It also speaks of many other interventions where the natural is superseded by His supernatural activity. The Holy Spirit creates a faith in God which posits all possibility in heaven and earth to Him. Miracles are possible because of who the living God is. Any system of interpretation which limits the possibilities of God either in connection with conversion or concerning the reality of other supernatural events has a presupposition which is blatantly contrary to the witness of Scripture itself.

Gospel reductionism apparently doesn't want us to dwell on the authenticity of miraculous details. Evidence:

"The miracle accounts of the Scriptures are neither scientific reports nor tests of just how much we are willing to believe. These accounts, like the miracles they relate, are designed to lead human beings to the Creator and Redeemer behind the accounts. Only through the eyes of faith can His presence there be seen, and only from the perspective of the cross can the ultimate purpose of all miracles be discerned. To edify the Church, we ought to focus on this central meaning of the miracle accounts for us instead of dwelling on the authenticity of isolated miraculous details."³⁹

Even if we weren't to "dwell" on facticity or authenticity, may we ask simply whether or not a reported miracle actually happened? Moderates in the LCMS have denied various accounts of miracles, considering them homiletical devices for the presentation of a Gospel truth. The record is reduced to its Gospel content, very often at the expense of historicity.

We are concerned that a certain "scientific" conceit overtakes the interpreter using the gospel reductionism approach. They have not yet gone as far as Johann C. K. Hoffman, who stated that the only scientifically correct method for interpretation draws on the "pious self-consciousness of the theologizing individual."⁴⁰ Gospel reductionism still uses the word "norm" in connection with the Scriptures; and definitely in connection with the Gospel.

Gospel reductionism also alludes to a concept that modern man has superior mental capacity. Ancient assertions are often invalidated by the supposed defects of the primitive mind.⁴¹ Evidence:

"This historical character of the Scripture means that we cannot demand that the biblical authors possess the same knowledge of science or geology as we do, or that they operate with the same

criteria of what is history or accuracy. The reliability or 'inerrancy' of the Scriptures cannot be determined by twentieth century standards of factuality. Nor do the Scriptures link the work of the Holy Spirit with this kind of 'inerrancy.' The purpose of the Spirit imparted by our Lord is to lead us into the whole truth about what God was doing in Jesus Christ. ..."⁴²

Again the Gospel reduced allows a prejudice regarding the hagiographer's intellectual capacity. And I am completely at a loss to account for a 20th century monopoly on what is a "fact." Events are not altered because of the century in which their historian happened to live. Did something happen or didn't it? Was it recorded as having happened or not?

Finally we notice a reluctance to accept any explanation which might be offered to rectify two apparently contradicting Scriptural accounts. For the most part the quiet discipline of Gospel harmonization (and other parallel accounts) is avoided.

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM Evidence:
REDEFINES "INERRANCY"

"Any tendency to make the doctrine of the inspiration or the inerrancy of Scriptures a prior truth which guarantees the truth of the Gospel or gives support to our faith is sectarian. ... Similarly, any approach to the Scriptures which focuses on the need for historical factuality rather than on the primary need for Christ leads us away from Christ rather than to Him. ... The fact that a given biblical episode is historical is not important in and of itself."⁴³ (Discussion Four.)

This seems typical of the gospel reductionism approach to "circumvent the problem of the Bible's historical accuracy by shifting the emphasis to the power of the Word."⁴⁴ The concept of inerrancy and infallibility is restricted to the ability of the Gospel (or the Word) to carry out its purposes. Notice in the recently quoted paragraph the unnecessary tension created by beg-

ging the question. Certainly, historicity is not an end in itself. But one cannot use such a proposition later on to deny a historical account by saying that historical episodes are not important in and of themselves.

Inerrancy as a corollary to the doctrine of verbal inspiration follows quite naturally from the fact that the Bible is God's Word. God doesn't make mistakes. The autographs of His book were without error. Gospel reductionism generally ridicules this posture by saying that applying inerrancy to the autographs withdraws the evidence from investigation, since the originals no longer exist. It betrays the continuing effort to question the character of the divine record. In the end any use of the concept of inerrancy in connection with Scripture by gospel reductionism will mean something less than the absence of all inaccuracies and discrepancies.

Harold Lindsell spends an entire volume documenting this proposition: "... once infallibility is abandoned, however good the intentions of those who do it and however good they feel their reasons for doing so, it always and ever opens the door to further departures from the faith."⁴⁵

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM EFFEC-
TIVELY UNDERMINES THE AU-
THORITY OF SCRIPTURES, IN
SPITE OF STATEMENTS TO THE
CONTRARY

The authority of Scriptures is two-fold. Since God is their author, they possess intrinsically (1) His power to save through the preaching of the Gospel (causative authority), and (2) the right to establish the standard of doctrine and life for the people of God (normative authority).

When Dr. Tietjen interviewed Dr. Arlis Ehlen regarding the latter's doctrinal position, he summarized the meeting this way: "I have had a number of doctrinal discussions with Dr. Ehlen in recent months. In those discussions he has specifically affirmed the authority of Scripture in its entirety and all its parts. He has stated that he affirms the facticity of what the Scripture intends to present as facts."⁴⁶ Dr. Ehlen's "doctrine" involved the denial of practically every miracle

in the Bible except the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those he rejected evidently fit into the category of those which Scripture did not intend to present as facts.

Gospel reductionism accepts the authority of Scripture when it comes to the power of the Word to engender faith, but it does so at the expense of the plenary, normative record of other factual information.

Other authorities are sometimes given equal weight. Gospel reductionism "tends to think there are more absolutes in science than in the Bible ..."47 A believing scientist knows that there is nothing in Scripture that denies known scientific facts. Antagonism arises when the evolutionary theory imposes its presuppositions on the conclusions about the origin of the universe and man. Some have been deceived by the supposed scientific aspects of the theory of evolution. Evidence:

"God the Father is indeed the Source of all life and the Creator of all things. But precisely how did our world take shape when He first created it? Did He create then the way He does now? Was His creation of the universe instantaneous or was it a lengthy process? Those are mysteries that have engaged the minds of scientists, the imagination of poets, and the faith of worshipers for centuries ..."48

Such syncretism is dishonest. Theistic evolution is an abominable attempt to wed two entirely different species of authority. How can there possibly be a Christian adaptation of an atheistic theory of origins? If a Christian has a problem with six-day creation, he might wonder what took God so long!

In gospel reductionism it has become axiomatic that secular history must validate the historical record of Scripture. Secular historians such as Josephus are read with equal authority and insight as Luke, Matthew, Mark, John. The sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt is doubted because none of the obelisks, pyramids, or other stone used to record history makes mention of Joseph or Jacob and his family. For years before the 20th century skep-

tics doubted that there ever was a person named Belshazzar. Archeologists have unearthed a record of his existence. Bible believers knew it all the time. We don't need the documentation of paleontology and archeology or any other -ology to decide what is factual or historical in connection with the Biblical record. If God says it is, then that's the way it is. It is heart-warming to know, however, that finding after archeological finding has vindicated the Scriptural record, so expanding our knowledge of Biblical data.

As our confessions say: the Bible speaks factually also on matters of peripheral concern — geography, history, science, etc.

THE CONCLUSIONS OF GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM VARY FROM THOSE DERIVED FROM THE USE OF THE GENERAL RULES OF HERMENEUTICS

A. We derive the meaning from the text.

This involves application of proper literary

and historical principles of interpretation. When the text is read, it is to be taken literally, unless there are clear indicators that it is to be read in some other way. There's no question that a parable constitutes a figure that will require a search for meaning apart from the details of the physical descriptions. In most cases in Scripture the meaning of the parable is told by the Savior or the holy writer, so that there is no doubt concerning its meaning and implications. Many using gospel reductionism consider the account of Jonah a parable (they might even use the word "myth") from which a lesson is to be learned. They interpret allegorically. However, there is nothing in the text of Jonah to indicate that the events recorded are to be taken any other way than literally. Even Jesus refers to the fact of Jonah's entombment in the fish's belly to establish the duration of His own entombment in the earth.

Any book begs to be considered on its own merits. To impose a meaning on it other than its obviously intended one does the author an injustice. Again the gamut of divine possibility is limited if a presupposition of the interpreter has already decided that nothing is true which does not fit present scientific and humanis-

tic molds.

B. *Sensus literalis unus est. Unus simplex sensus.*
There is only one simple (literal) sense.

Gospel reductionism has not fallen into the trap of earlier allegorists. But there is still a problem. What happens when two interpreters come up with different conclusions in the search for the simple sense? Evidence:

"Others in our Synod maintain that Genesis 2-3 is not an eye-witness report or a historical account similar to modern historical annals. They contend that the evidence within the text itself indicates that it is an ancient theological document which uses the narrative form. This text is more like a sermon than a news report. Anthropomorphisms, symbols, and theological reflection are integral to the character of these chapters. Thus any effort to press the details of this narrative according to the yardstick of modern historians is not consistent with the intent of the passage. The writer of Genesis 2-3 is proclaiming the truth about Everyman (ha'adam, 'the man') and every woman (Eve, 'Mother of all that live'). The intended addressee in this narrative is first of all Israel. In Adam and Eve all the men and women of Israel could see themselves. But we too are addressed, for in that account our native sinfulness is revealed."⁴⁹

The homiletical treatment of our sin and where it came from is certainly suspect if the historicity of the first ones who sinned is doubted. Evangelicals would be criticized for asking if the Red Sea crossing took place as described by Moses. The attention is to be on the lesson — of deliverance under the mighty hand of God — not an argument about the historical accuracy of the record. But to deny that it took place, saying that instead the children walked through shallow waters of a reed sea, rather than on dry land between walls of water on each side, casts doubt on the Deliverer Himself and suggests that He not only didn't do it the way He had it reported, but perhaps even couldn't!

We are ready to admit that there are many difficult passages in Scripture where the "simple" meaning is difficult to come by. Nor will we for a minute admit that the body of doctrine somehow frustrates the search for new insight and understanding of our living God and His communication. There are many open questions and permissible exegetical latitudes which do not violate Scripture's authority and inerrancy. These are our problems, not God's. However, this will never excuse us from rejecting those conclusions of whatever hermeneutical approach where violence is done to the clear, simple, literary meaning of a text of Scripture.

C. *Scriptura Scripturam interpretur. Scriptura Sacra sui ipsius interpres.* Scripture interprets Scripture (itself).

Any book begs for a similar hermeneutic. The terms "analogy of faith," "analogy of Scripture," "totality of Scripture," and "rule of faith" have caused a great deal of misunderstanding in the history of interpretation. Biblical Christianity rejected *Schriftganzen* (totality of Scripture) years ago when it surfaced as a proposed hermeneutical perspective. *Schriftganzen* was a ruse to make the testimony of an experience about the whole Scripture pre-eminent over individual passages. The experience was to be sought in Scripture's entirety rather than in particular "texts" taken from it. It is the hermeneutics of the broader context. Among others, Schleiermacher set moderns to looking for "the organic whole of Scripture" over against a proof-text dogmatic.

It is my judgment that gospel reductionism follows a similar path. The Scriptures are reduced to their Gospel content. When the Gospel content becomes normative to the extent that it denies the historicity and facticity of various accounts, the principle that the whole is different from its parts has taken its toll. Inerrancy is reduced to the effect of the Gospel preaching. Historical accounts are allegorized or stripped of their supernatural or "mythological" content.

Regarding the *analogia fidei*, one finds varying statements. Some have rejected the principle since they

see in it the abuses that are connected with *Schrift-ganges* and other subterfuges. However, there is a place for the "analogy of faith (Scripture)" when it is described as the use of clear passages to explain unclear passages treating of the same subject. So Scripture interprets itself. We have learned to appreciate the insight of Luther in a couplet regarding this principle: "The Old is in the New revealed; the New is in the Old concealed."⁵⁰

GOSPEL REDUCTIONISM IS ALLIED
TO THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL
METHOD FOR INTERPRETATION OF
SCRIPTURE

Evidence:

"In and of itself
so-called 'historical-
critical' methodology
is neutral. The find-

ings of those who use such methodology will be reflected in their presuppositions. ... Basically all the techniques associated with 'historical critical' methodology, such as source analysis, form history, and redaction history, are legitimated by the fact that God chose to use as His written Word human documents written by human beings in human language ... Neither the Sacred Scriptures nor the Book of Concord enjoins a particular method as the only way of interpreting the Scriptures. When we use 'historical critical' methodology we do so on the basis of Christian presuppositions. So employed, it has brought great blessings to the Church and deepened the Church's appreciation of the written Word of God."⁵¹

The historical-critical method was developed to circumvent basic Christian presuppositions. This allegedly neutral methodology has produced the following in the LCMS:

A. "A false doctrine of the nature of the Holy Scriptures coupled with methods of interpretation which effectually erode the authority of Scriptures."

1. Gospel reductionism (gospelism) is advanced, which makes the Gospel "virtually exclusively normative in such a way as to detract from the normative authority of the whole Scripture."

2. The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation is defended as a desirable approach to that discipline.
 3. "The majority of the St. Louis exegetes allow the possibility that many of the Old and New Testament stories are not really historical ..."
 4. The practice of interpretation may involve questions of historical fact when an interpreter decides that the intent of the Biblical author does not require any event to have been historical.
 5. Although many of the faculty allow that miracles may have happened, to question their authenticity is allowed, as an appeal might be made to their use as a literary device.
 6. Some have suggested that many of the words attributed to Jesus in the New Testament were never spoken by Him, but were additions of the church later on in history.
 7. Many of the moderates do not accept that there are any (or if there are, very few) direct prophecies of Christ, the Messiah, in the Old Testament. They regard most Old Testament prophecies as referring to someone living in the day of the prophet or king.
 8. Many assert that believers in Old Testament times were saved by a general belief in the goodness and forgiveness of God, rather than by faith in Christ.
 9. Many seminary professors affirm multiple authorship of books of the Bible where the Scriptures themselves assert or name a particular author.
 10. Many assert that redactors (editors) altered the text of many of the books, a work regarded as coming from the Holy Spirit. The Bible is considered God's Word, and a book subject to the errors and limitations of others produced by human authors, since all men are fallible.⁵²
- B. "A substantial undermining of the confessional doctrine of original sin by a *de facto* denial of the historical events on which it is based."
- C. "A permissiveness toward certain false doctrines."
1. "The possibility that Christ in at least a portion

of His teaching may have been a 'child of his day' and consequently in error in His understanding of items such as the story of Jonah or the authorship of books of the Old Testament ...

2. "The possibility that the evolution of man is a viable theory (theistic evolution) and may stand on equal footing with the doctrine of special creation as set forth in the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.
 3. "The probability that the Biblical story of the fall of man (Adam and Eve) is taken as only a symbolic account explaining man's sinful nature.
 4. "The possibility that the denial of the historical virgin birth of Christ (as a biological miracle) may not need to be labeled as a false doctrine unless this denial also involved a denial of the deity of Christ or otherwise hurt the Gospel.
 5. "The possibility that a person could be regarded as a legitimate member of the Christian community even though he interpreted the resurrection of Christ as a spiritual resurrection rather than a physical resurrection.
 6. "A willingness to approve of intercommunion involving the admission of non-Lutherans to the Lord's Supper provided they affirm a faith in the Real Presence."
- D. "A tendency to deny that the Law is a normative guide for Christian behavior." The professors contend that the Law has basically only two "uses": (1) political — curb; and (2) theological — mirror, which shows sin and need for a Savior. "This approach comes very close to what our Confessions condemn as 'antinomianism,' introduces a subjective element in the determination of God's will for Christian behavior, and appears to open the door for 'situation ethics.'"
- E. "Conditional Acceptance of the Lutheran Confessions."
- F. "A strong claim that the Seminary Faculty need not teach in accord with Synod's doctrinal stance as expressed in the Synod's official doctrinal statements and resolutions."53

Now we hear of the ordination of women and pan-Lutheran fellowship. Those who have used historical-critical methodology have consistently come up with conclusions which differ from historical, evangelical Christianity.

The scissors and paste effect of historical-criticism must not be confused with the valid study of textual criticism, a discipline which seeks to establish the actual text God inspired from the myriad extant manuscripts. Nor do we shy away from historical material which corroborates or even contradicts Biblical accounts. The difference with us is that we maintain the accuracy and authority of the Scriptures on all matters of which it treats — whether the sublime realities of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the genealogies of His parents, or the cloak of Paul.

CONCLUSION Some have predicted that the LCMS will be the first major denomination ever to thwart the inroads of modernism and liberalism in a church body. That remains to be seen. Missouri's problems extend farther than elimination of the Elimites from their membership. They still must deal with the self-professed neutrals in their synod. They are trapped in a fellowship with TALC which allows among other things the very hermeneutical methodology which they are fighting to eradicate from their own synod. Problems have reached such a state that we seldom hear of those old nemeses: scouting, military chaplaincy, limited fellowship, etc.

At any rate, there is a lesson for us. The present problems in the LCMS go back to failure to discipline those who signed the St. Louis Union Articles of 1938 and A Statement of the 44. It was suggested by the signers that fellowship with the ALC was "possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church."⁵⁴ It was also during the 1940's that many of the professors who later taught at Concordia Seminary were sitting at the feet of professors in schools where verbal inspiration hadn't been taught for decades and the historical-critical method was assumed to be the only proper hermeneutical approach.

Gospel reductionism is an accommodation of the crass rejection of the Bible as God's Word with the more evangelical regard for at least some of its elements involving divine controls. Not all the moderates in the LCMS view the controversy similarly, nor do they come to the same conclusions. There is, however, a unanimity in their hermeneutical assumptions and the descriptions of their approach to the study of Scripture.

Christians are being persecuted in our days. The arena is no longer a Coliseum filled with blood-thirsty crowds seeking entertainment from the torture of Christians. Now battles are waged on an intellectual level. We must bear the stinging sarcasm of the "liberated" who regularly suggest that apologists for plenary inspiration and Biblical inerrancy are anti-intellectual, scholastically archaic, and mentally defective. Honesty requires that each realize that a disagreement exists which interferes with their organic fellowship. However, a compulsion to maintain a "true visible church" on earth has found many compromising confessional integrity or hurling invectives at those who don't happen to agree. Fellowship does not exist even though organizational unity is preserved and the restrictions of its expression are overlooked. We prefer and respect a stated and known disagreement to slights about intelligence, suspicions of motives, and demeaning of ancestry.

So we continue to contend for the faith. God has given us His Word. It is not the ink on paper that saves. It is not the water all by itself or the bread and wine which bear miraculous powers. It is God's Word which is powerful to create and sustain faith and to provide a standard to which our every thought is brought captive in obedience. The Bible is God's revelation, not just a record of it. He tells it as it is. He does so in ordinary language involving rules of grammar. We take the Bible at its word, understanding what is literal to be fact, and what is figurative in the evident intent God gave it in a figure in the first place. The books are internally consistent. God doesn't make any mistakes.

Michael Sydow

FOOTNOTES

1. F. E. Mayer, *Religious Bodies of America*, p. 38.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Lawrence Kirsten, "The Lutheran Ethic," quoted in *Christian News*, Oct. 11, 1976, p. 1.
4. Robert Preus, "Notes on the Inerrancy of Scripture," *A Christian Handbook on Vital Issues*, p. 502.
5. John Tietjen, "Piercing the Smokescreen," *Christianity Today*, April 11, 1975, pp. 8-9.
6. Harold Lindsell, "Who is Right in the Missouri Synod Dispute?", *Ibid.*, p. 11.
7. Theodore Engelder, *Scripture Cannot Be Broken*, p. 368.
8. "Gospel and Scripture," *The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations - LCMS*, p. 4.
9. "Faithful to Our Calling; Faithful to Our Lord," by the former Concordia Seminary Faculty, reproduced in *A Christian Handbook of Vital Issues*, edited by Herman Otten, p. 821.
10. J. A. O. Preus, *Report of the Synodical President to the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod*, CPH, p. 23.
11. Ralph A. Bohlmann, "Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions," *Aspects of Biblical Hermeneutics*, CPH, p. 44.
12. "Gospel and Scripture," *op. cit.*, p. 12.
13. "Faithful ...", *op. cit.*, p. 824.
14. *Ecclesiastes* 1.
15. Body, soul, spirit.
16. Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 101.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
19. Engelder, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
20. A composite.
21. John Lau, "Gospel Reductionism," *Journal of Theology*, June, 1974, pp. 1-10.
22. John Warwick Montgomery, "Hermeneutics Today," *Aspects ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
23. Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 145.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
28. Fred Kramer, "The Introduction of the Historical-critical Method and Its Relationship to Lutheran Hermeneutics," *Aspects ...*, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
29. Grant, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 161f.
31. Lindsell, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
32. 1 Peter 1:20-21.
33. 1 Thessalonians 2:13.
34. 2 Timothy 3:15-16.
35. *Statement of Faith and Purpose*, CLC, Part II, p. 4.
36. *Brief Statement*, "Of the Holy Scriptures," Par. 1.
37. 1 Corinthians 2:14.
38. 1 Corinthians 12:3.
39. "Faithful ...", *op. cit.*, p. 823.
40. Raymond Surburg, "Hofmann Redivivus," *Christian News*, April 26, 1976.
41. Robert Preus, *op. cit.*, "Inerrancy," p. 501.
42. "Faithful ...", *op. cit.*, p. 826.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 824.
44. "A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation" — A Report of the CTCR of the LCMS (CPH), p. 17.
45. Lindsell, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
47. Walter Lang, "The Science of the Bible," *Christian News*, May 1, 1976, p. 9.
48. "Faithful ...", *op. cit.*, p. 822.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 823.
50. L. Fuerbringer, "Theological Hermeneutics," p. 16.
51. "Faithful ...", *op. cit.*, p. 826.
52. Michael Sydow, "Misery in Missouri," summarizing and quoting from J. A. Preus, "Report ..." (Cf. Footnote 10 above).
53. J. A. O. Preus, *op. cit.*, p. 24 [Numbering changed].
54. "A Statement," signed by 44 LCMS clergy in 1945.



U P D A T I N G R O M A N C A T H O L I C I S M

(Continued)

As readers of previous articles in this series have noticed, it is not possible to speak for long about the Roman Catholic Church without referring to the Pope. Over the years, many extravagant claims have been made for the person occupying the office of the Pope. The Catholic Church attributes to her popes all of the spiritual and temporal powers conceivable by humans. The Constitution of Pope Pius XII, issued on December 8, 1945, sums it all up in a few words: "The Roman Pontiff has full and absolute jurisdiction over the whole world."¹ James Cardinal Gibbons says: "You cannot, therefore, be a true citizen of the Republic of the Church so long as you spurn the legitimacy of its Divinely constituted Chief. ... Christ says to every Christian: Here, my child, is the Word of God, and with it I leave you an infallible interpreter, who will expound for you its hidden meaning and make clear all its difficulties."² It thus becomes clear that the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope are inseparable realities.

These amazing declarations (and many others could be quoted) rest upon the Roman Catholic doctrine of the power of authority exercised by the Pope over the whole Church. This practice of papal authority was originally conditioned especially by two events: the concept of Roman law, and Christ's words to Peter in Matthew 16:18ff. Let us examine these in detail.

<p>CONCEPT OF ROMAN LAW</p>	<p>Long after the collapse of the Roman Empire, the effect of its political life and legal code remained a dominant force in the life of its citizens. Gradually the Church structured itself along the same lines. But not until the 9th century did the papacy, in theory and practice, develop to a point where the Church was directed by the total authority of the Pope. From Pope John VIII (872-882) to Vatican Council I, the doctrine of papal authority increasingly took on the appearance of an irreversi-</p>
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ble dogma of faith. That dogma first caused a split between the Church of the East and the Roman Church of the West, and later played a major part in making necessary the Lutheran Reformation.

At the time of Vatican Council I in 1870, the papacy was more dictatorial than at any other time. The bishops then declared:

"And so, if anyone says that the Roman Pontiff has only the office of inspection and direction, but not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, not only in matters that pertain to faith and morals, but also in matters that pertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the whole world, or if anyone says that he has only a more important part and not the complete fulness of this supreme power; or if anyone says that this power is not ordinary and immediate either over each and every Church or over each and every one of the pastors and the faithful: let him be anathema."³

What this Vatican Council I decree meant in actual practice is reflected in the following statement from a catechism for non-Catholics:

"When you become a Catholic you place yourself under the authority of the Catholic Church in religious matters. To place yourself under the authority of the Catholic Church means that you recognize the Catholic Church as the only Church established by God in the world. You promise to obey the Church in all matters of religion. Therefore, you must believe what the Church believes in the way that the Church believes. You must worship God as the Church worships God. You must obey all the laws of the Church, for you recognize the Church's power to make laws over you — even laws which are not directly given by God. Placing yourself under the authority of the Catholic Church means that you recognize the Pope, the bishops and pastors as the actual successors of the Apostles — according to their office they have the same power that Christ gave to

the twelve Apostles. You must obey them in your belief and in your actions."⁴

This instruction to non-Catholics staggers the mind of men and women who are at home in the Gospel. It means that a small group of men, governed by an all-powerful authoritarian, insists that all Christians everywhere must believe, must obey, must behave, and must accept whatever laws they make, even if those laws are not given by God! The right to question or appeal the directives of this hierarchy dare not be tolerated. In reaction, one instinctively thinks of our Savior's words: "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ" (Matthew 23:8-10).

MATTHEW 16:18ff The second basis for establishing papal authority is the interpretation given to the words addressed by Christ to Peter in Matthew 16:18ff. and in John 21:15-17.

It is said that in Matthew 16:18ff. Christ promised the primacy (first place) of jurisdiction to Peter alone. The RSV Catholic Edition reads: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." And it is said that Christ gave to Peter alone full jurisdiction over all the faithful, when He said after His resurrection: "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep."

Thus the primacy of Peter the Apostle and the continuation of the papacy in Rome are defined in the Canons annexed to the first 2 chapters of the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (Eternal Pastor):

"If anyone shall say that Blessed Peter the Apostle was not constituted by Christ our Lord as chief of all the Apostles and the visible head of the whole Church Militant: or that he did not re-

ceive directly and immediately from the same Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of true and proper jurisdiction, but one of honor only: let him be anathema. ... If anyone shall say that it is not by the institution of Christ our Lord Himself or by divinely established right that blessed Peter has perpetual successors in his primacy over the universal church: or that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in this same primacy: let him be anathema."⁵

Concerning this two-fold interpretation of Scripture, the author of the afore-mentioned catechism for non-Catholics explains:

"Thus Christ made Peter the rock, or foundation, of the Church, which all the power of hell can never push over. Such was the strength of the authority Christ gave to Peter. Christ gave Peter the keys of the Kingdom of heaven and the power to bind and loose on earth; in other words, He gave Peter supreme authority in His Church. Christ could not have stated more forcefully that Peter was to be the head of the Church. With these words Jesus made Peter the first Pope. St. Peter's authority did not end with his death. Christ wanted His teaching, His grace, His commands to be brought to all men of all times. Christ set up a Church which would last forever, which even hell would not destroy. But if the Church was to last forever, when Peter died his supreme authority had to be handed down to another man. The Apostles understood this — that the Church was to last forever and that it would always have a supreme head. And so when Peter died, Linus was elected the second Pope; Cle-tus became the third, and so forth. Thus the supreme authority in religion has been handed down through the history of Christianity; there has always been a Pope. Just as there is a list of the Presidents of the United States, so there is an unbroken line of Popes, 262 in all, for almost 2,000 years — from St. Peter to Pius XII."⁶

Luther assailed this false teaching of the ministry

of the Keys also in his Small Catechism. He wanted Christians to know well, from childhood on, that the ministry of the Keys had not been given only to Peter as the first Pope, and to his successors in such an office, but, as he says: "The ministry of the Keys is the peculiar authority of the Church, given by Christ to His Church on earth, to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent. Where is this written? Thus writes the holy Evangelist John, chapter twentieth: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost! Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

The Keys of the kingdom of heaven were therefore not given only to Peter, but to the whole Christian Church on earth. And since Christ's Church consists only of those who believe in Him, this cannot be applied to any visible Church denomination or earthly organization. Any believer has the right to say to any repentant sinner: "Your sins are forgiven in Jesus Christ." And any believer can say to any unrepentant sinner: "Your sins are not forgiven until you repent." This is what is involved in the precious doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. We do not wish to be robbed of this privilege by those who claim the right only for themselves, and thereby turn the Gospel into Law.

MORE PAPAL AUTHORITY An appeal to Scripture was made in order to ascribe a three-fold role of authority to the Pope. To justify his teaching authority, the words of Matthew 28:20 are quoted: "Go, therefore, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Also Luke 10:16: "He who hears you, hears Me, and he who rejects you, rejects Me."

To justify his ruling authority, Matthew 16:19 is quoted: "And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

To justify his sanctifying authority, John 20:23 is quoted: "Whosoever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven."

The emphasis in all of these texts is upon a spiritual ministry. Since all believers in Jesus Christ are spiritual priests in the sight of God (1 Peter 2:9), these passages give them appropriate directives as to how they can exercise this spiritual priesthood. To apply them primarily to Peter and the Popes is surely an unwarranted application of Scripture.

All of the above-mentioned powers of authority were reinforced by the doctrine of papal infallibility, as adopted by Vatican Council I. The doctrine itself lends great support to the papal office and has been used to denounce heresy and remove heretics from the Church. By the same token, the expanding of this three-fold authority was used by the papacy to gain dominion over large territories. The Catholic theologian, Dr. Hans Küng, explains in his book, *The Church*, that "the road of unevangelical spiritual dominion" gradually replaced the path of the shepherd's pastoral ministry to the people of God. He says:

"The successors of the Galilean fishermen became secular princes with extensive lands, rich sources of income, and an army. ... Then finally, in the ninth century, Pope Nicolas I ... set himself up as lord of the whole earth."⁷

Having traveled this road of unevangelical spiritual dominion, the papacy was further strengthened by the adoption of various titles. The word "pope" was a title given at first to bishops, abbots, and in some places to ordinary priests. By the end of the 10th century, Pope Gregory V demanded that the word Pope be the exclusive title given to the bishop of Rome. Shortly thereafter Gregory VII "solemnly declared that no one else in the world deserved this unique name."⁸

The title "Vicar of Christ" was evidently picked up from old Roman legal and military practice. From the time of Charlemagne, the Latin *vicarius Dei* was restricted to the emperor. It was Pope Innocent III who took over this imperial title, since it seemed to be an ideal expression to set forth the supreme spiritual and secular power which he claimed. Thomas Aquinas introduced

this title into the dogmatic theology of the Roman Church in the 15th century.

The title "Pontifex Maximus," or Supreme Pontiff, was originally the title of pagan priests, and then of the Roman Emperor. It wasn't until the time of the Renaissance that it was reserved exclusively for the popes.

These titles reflect not only the growing power of the papacy but also its departure from the spiritual nature of that ministry to which Christ had called the Apostles and their followers. As a result, spiritually minded men sought to restore to the Church a God-pleasing ministry of the Word, dedicated to the salvation of blood-bought souls. But the inflexibility of the powerful authority usurped by the papacy led to the separation known as the Reformation. Vatican Council II faced this separation and sought to alleviate it by reformulating the nature and mission of the Church. Instead of emphasizing the juridical powers of the Pope, this Council directed attention to the pastoral mission of the hierarchy to the whole people of God.

VATICAN COUNCIL II The definition of the primacy of the Pope made by Vatican Council I was not withdrawn or changed by Vatican Council II.

In fact, it reaffirmed what Vatican Council I had said, and did nothing to repudiate the use of any of the titles already mentioned. Nor did it rescind any doctrine previously promulgated by any earlier Council. Vatican Council II tried to stress that part of the papal responsibility which had become obscured in principle and practice at nearly every level of Church life. The bishops set forth seven corrective measures in this regard:

1. The Church is the whole People of God and the Pope holds his office only as part of that new messianic people.

2. The ministry of the papacy is not to rule a dynasty, but to nurture the life of this People of God.

3. The Church is not just universal, but is the local churches as well. That is to say, the local pastor has his own proper authority to be recognized and shared

by the Pope.

4. The Pope, instead of being called "head of the Church" (a title belonging to Christ alone), is addressed as "Shepherd of the whole Church." Not that the Council repudiated the doctrine that the Pope is the visible head of the Church, but that it wanted to bring about a change in emphasis.

5. Bishops receive their full authority through their ordination, not as a result of their papal appointment. But no bishop can exercise his authority unless he is in full accord with the pope.

6. The Pope and the bishop must act in union with each other. The Pope is not totally independent any more than are the bishops.

7. The whole system of Church government is subject to reform by practical measures.

So, if we try to define the difference between Vatican Council I and II, one might say that Vatican Council I took a hardline stance against reformers and their heresies. Hence they tended to establish the power of papal authority by every available device. Vatican Council II, however, felt that greater danger arose from within the Church itself, and sought to modernize those aspects of the system which hindered them in carrying out that kind of ministry which they envisioned in modern society.

CONCLUSION There is nothing in Scripture to support the claim that Peter was designated by Christ to serve as the first Pope, nor that he was to be followed by a continuing line of successors to rule the whole Church, nor that the bishop of Rome is indeed the true successor of Peter. When one studies the history of the papacy and the conduct of popes toward those who have challenged their use and abuse of papal authority, one must say that history itself has destroyed the validity of the claim to be the Supreme Pontiff ruling over all of Christendom, or the true shepherd of God's people. Cardinal Baronius, recognized as an outstanding papal historian, wrote that

"... in a list of fifty popes, there was not one pious or virtuous man among them; that for long

periods of years there was no pope at all, and at other times two or three popes at once; also that there were more than twenty schisms, one of which continued for fifty years, the popes of Rome and of Avignon excommunicating each other, and yet conferring orders on their several clergy."⁹

It might also be noted that for seven centuries the churches of Christendom went on record denying the right of any exclusive authority or jurisdiction over all other churches. An ecumenical council held at Constantinople in 692 A.D. made 102 canons, one of which, the 36th

"... granted the churches of Constantinople the same privileges as the church of old Rome, the same authority in ecclesiastical affairs, and the second place in honor. ... A position of power, of jurisdiction, was sternly denied them. Neither friend nor foe can lay his finger on a genuine canon, decree, or resolution of any general council during the first seven hundred years after the Savior's death, giving any preeminence in legislative, judicial, or other departments in which power is accustomed to be exercised over Christendom, to the Pope of Rome. There is not a scholar in the Christian world today who pretends to show such a decree, canon, or resolution. These great ecumenical councils, then, that are led by the Holy Spirit, for seven hundred years knew nothing of the spiritual supremacy of the bishops of Rome."¹⁰

While Scripture is silent about Peter's being the first Pope and about his successors' continuing this office, Scripture does indeed have something to say about the papacy. Paul the Apostle could see the beginning of papal influence already in his day, and therefore wrote concerning it. We recall being told of a devout Christian woman who read the German version of Paul's words, and whose immediate response was: "*Das ist der Papst!*" Paul's words which she had just read were in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12, where we read:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away

first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time (Beck: And now you know what's holding him back so that he will be revealed when his time comes). For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceitfulness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

In conclusion, we can do no better than to urge our readers to refresh themselves again with a reading of the Smalcald Articles, to which we subscribe because they are in agreement with Scripture. In Article IV (Trigl., p. 475) we read: "This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ, because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God."

(To be continued)

A. Schulz

FOOTNOTES

1. Henry F. Borleis, *The Pope Speaks* (Philadelphia: Geo. F. Ferguson Co., 1956), p. 128.
2. James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (New

- York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons), 110th edition, pp. 97, 110.
3. Neuner-Roos; Karl Rahner, ed., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church* (Staten Island, N. Y.: Alba House, 1971), p. 226.
 4. Parish Priests, *Instructions for Non-Catholics* (Forest Park, Ill.: The D. Farrell Co., 1954), p. 4.
 5. Denzinger-Schoenmetzer, *Enchiridion* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), pp. 3055, 3058.
 6. *Instructions for Non-Catholics*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
 7. Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), pp. 466-467.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
 9. Henry M. Woods, *Our Priceless Heritage* (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Evangelical Press, 1941), pp. 58-59.
 10. William Cathcart, *The Papal System* (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1872), p. 50.



BOOK REVIEW

Remember Thy Creator, by G. Richard Culp (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 207 pp. Paper. \$3.95.

From time to time one hears of enlightened Christians who, like the Apostle Paul, began as foes of Christ and His work. The transformation of Dr. Culp from evolutionist to creationist and then into a man confessing faith in his Savior is again a striking example of the work of the Holy Spirit. The book grew out of talks given by the author to numerous groups, when he was encouraged to expand on many of these topics. Its basic direction is to refute evolution, which "... has been a powerful force in unsettling young people and in destroying their faith in the Word of God, turning them away from the message of redemption through the sacrifice of Christ."

The book has sixteen chapters, which cover such topics as animal instincts, vestigial organs, Geology, and Anthropology. Of particular interest from this reviewer's standpoint are chapters 12, 13, and 16. Were it not for these, one would feel that the contents of the book could be found elsewhere in print.

In chapter 12 the author discusses the theme: "Evolutionist's Weaknesses." The value that lies in his presentation is the result of his experiences as a student at Purdue University and the University of Michigan, where he obtained his B.S. (Biology) and M.S. (Botany) respectively. He saw the reasoning of the evolutionist first-hand and illustrates common situations confronted by the undergraduate and graduate students in these areas. For this reason the book may be especially helpful to young people who are faced with problems of this kind.

In chapter 13 is discussed the concept of "Theistic Evolution." In showing the fallacy of this abortive compromise, he says, "... the effects of theistic evolution on a man are profound. His personal religious standards, his zeal for testifying for Christ as his Savior, and

his beliefs in the absolutes of the Bible are all weakened. One who doubts the Genesis account will not be the same man he once was, for his attitude toward Holy Scripture has been eroded by false teaching." We wholeheartedly agree.

In the same chapter the author adds comments on social effects of evolution. His remarks are brief, but his observations on the loss of Biblical standards and the resultant effect on the moral and social standards of our country are evident in many ways to everyone.

Finally, chapter 16 gives a summary of the history of the American Scientific Affiliation, its takeover by creation-evolutionists, and the resultant pull-out and beginning of the Creation Research Society by creationists. For those not aware of some of the tenets of these groups, this can serve to enlighten one on the subject.

One naturally compares a book of this kind with others already on the market; yet each author has his distinctive style, and his own experiences and insights into the subject will not always be that of another. Two aspects of this book set it apart from others like it and thus make it a worthwhile addition to the field and suitable for church libraries as well as suggested reading for the high school and college student. One can summarize these two aspects as a shining forth of the author's confessed faith in Christ, and the use of his own experiences and contacts to illustrate how evolution has inculcated its theories on many and is seldom questioned by most.

On the negative side, a rather brief remark in the section on Genetics would seem to indicate a wrong stand on election. Apart from this, *Remember Thy Creator* can be read without special concern for author bias, as is often not the case in books of this kind.

J. Pelzl





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