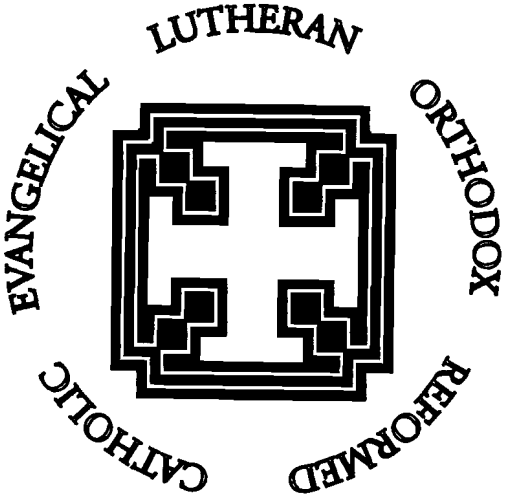
The BIBLE in the CHURCHES

How Various Christians Interpret the Scriptures



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LUTHERAN INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

by

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What proof do you have? What evidence do you have? With such questions you are raising the problem of authority. And ultimately any discussion of the problem of authority leads to the question of final authority. What is your final authority? Archimedes said that if you would give him a place to stand on and a lever long enough, he could move the world. Christians will state that their final authority is God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, or the Bible. All Christians hold *sola scriptura* to be the final authority, even though *sola scriptura* may be modified by words such as "and Christ," "and tradition," "and experience," or "and reason."

Sola scriptura is the claim, yet what this claim means needs to be sorted out. One cartoon shows a package descending from the sky suspended from a parachute. The label on the package says "Holy Bible." Another cartoon has God sitting on a cloud and speaking through a megaphone; four tubes descend from the megaphone to earth, where Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are sitting at desks writing down what they hear. We smile and dismiss such cartoons as caricatures. But at the opening lecture on the Bible at a Lutheran seminary the teacher picked up a Bible, placed it on the floor, and actually stood on the Bible for several moments. He intended to dramatize the fact that he took his stand on the Bible. The students were horrified for to them it was sacrilegious to use the Bible like this. After all, the Bible is a "holy" book, sometimes even venerated in worship. Somehow this paper and ink is different from all other paper and ink! Or is it? Has a concept of material holiness crept in from the Old Testament, where certain objects may not be touched or even looked at because they are holy (cf. Num. 4:15, 19-20; 1 Chr. 13:9-10)? Here authority has been understood as raw power. Only God, of course, has raw power in the ultimate sense, for he is omnipotent and no one can compete with his power.

At the other extreme *sola scriptura* means no more than that the Bible is an important document but one among many important documents. There is no word from the Lord, from outside of myself. Ultimately I have to depend on myself, my reason, my feelings, my experience, or my conscience. At this point the uniqueness of the Bible is lost because of "historical criticism." Historical criticism, to be sure, must be defined. First of all, what is "historical"? Second, what is "criticism"? If historical means that there is no word from God, that the only authority I have is my experience, then I am caught in relativism, for reason, feelings, experience, and even conscience vary in my own life and in the course of history. If criticism means that I am the judge of all that is or is not, then I have made myself the final authority for all things and once again have fallen into relativism. According to this, the most virulent definition of historical criticism, the Bible has authority only to the extent that I give it authority.

It is important to note that other definitions of historical criticism are possible and even appropriate. What is needed at this point is that you and I react to the assertion that there is no word from the Lord, that the Bible is not unique, that I am the final authority. We know that we are more uncomfortable with this assertion than the other extreme. Lutherans take the Bible very seriously, holding that it is the "only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged" (*Formula of Concord*, Epitome, 1). Lutherans differ, one must quickly interject, on how to apply this principle; some Lutherans even hold a view of the Bible which looks very much like fundamentalism, although the vast majority do not belong in this camp. But there can be no doubt about the centrality of *sola scriptura* in the Lutheran tradition.

I. How is the Bible Different?

Lutherans differ on how the Bible is different even while agreeing that the Bible is the sole authority for all proclamation, teaching, and life in the Church. No official Lutheran teaching on the inspiration of the Bible exists, even though some have tried to derive a doctrine of inspiration from the Lutheran Confessions. There is no official Lutheran list of the books of the Bible, and for that reason the canon of Scripture is in principle open for Lutherans; in fact Lutherans operate with the same basic canon that most Protestants use, and it would be false to imply that Lutherans have had any desire to add to the canon.

A. Is the Bible Different Because It is Inspired?

Lutherans take the Bible very seriously because it is the only source we have for God's word. But why only the Bible? What makes it different? Because the difference is not in the paper and ink and because the same words and sequences of words are used as in other literature, what possible claim can be made that the Bible is different? As is well known, the claim is that the Bible was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and therefore the Bible is unlike all other books. Other religions also claim their holy books are inspired, but Christians claim the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of the one true God.

Every Christian holds that the Bible is inspired. The question is "how"? Various theories of inspiration exist, and each claims to describe the method the Holy Spirit used. No theory denies the Holy Spirit. For example, because Christians hold that everyone received the Holy Spirit through baptism, some would hold that the Holy Spirit continues to inspire the writings done by Christians. At the other extreme are those claiming that God gave the words, inspired someone to write, and that person simply held the pen.

There is no one biblical theory of inspiration; in fact, the Bible contains several theories of inspiration. Thousands of passages state "the Lord said," "thus says the Lord," "the Lord spoke," "the Lord spoke to," and the like. The difficulty is that what is meant is not obvious. Was the Lord speaking in such a way that everyone standing about heard? Or was the Lord speaking in such a way that the prophet alone heard, and in this case were sounds heard or were ideas registered? If ideas, were they filtered through the prophet's mind, or were they ideas the prophet could write down without being altered by the prophet's historical context? In all probability most of the writers of the Bible did not agonize over such questions but simply assumed that what they said and wrote was inspired by God. At times, to be sure, when it was a question of true or false prophecy and teaching, they did agonize and even provided certain kinds of answers (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 1 Kings 22:28; Gal. 1:6-9).

In the history of the first giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai the writer describes how Moses wrote down the words of the Lord, yet in the same chapter the Lord says he has done the writing (Exod. 24:4, 12). In the history of the second giving of the Ten Commandments the Lord writes on the two tables of stone, yet Moses later in the chapter is the one who wrote on the two tables (Exod. 34:1, 28). How does one sort out the theory of inspiration in

these passages? Only with great difficulty can a theory be proposed unless one resorts to complex explanations or unless editorial interference is suggested. In 2 Kings 3:15 the prophet asked for a minstrel to be brought; when the minstrel played, the prophet was inspired. This fits in with the mantic theory of inspiration in the ancient world. The musician was possessed and in this way inspired by the spirit. The prophet in turn could be inspired through the musician (cf. 1 Chr. 25:1). In Zech. 13:4-6 lacerations have been used by the false prophets to produce prophetic ecstasy, but the practice is found in official religious life as well (Jer. 41:5; cf. 1 Kings 18:28-29).

The most famous New Testament passage dealing with inspiration is 2 Tim. 3:16: "All scripture is inspired," according to the translation found in the King James Version. But the New English Bible translates: "Every inspired scripture has its use." This is at least a very acceptable version of the Greek text and brings out the fact that "scripture" in this context means the Old Testament. When one recalls the radical freedom with which New Testament writers make use of the Old Testament, one must be cautious about any theory of inspiration which would imply that the text was thought to be so holy that it must not be interpreted except in a very literal fashion. The adjective translated as "inspired" simply means "God-breathed," and no particular theory of inspiration is implied by the word. In 2 Pet. 1:21 prophecy is not from human efforts, for prophets are those "moved by the Holy Spirit." Obviously this means that prophets are those guided by the Holy Spirit, but in what way and to what extent is not defined.

Paul distinguishes between God's words and his own words (1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 12, 25, 40), but he does not describe how this is done or what makes God's words different. What does Paul mean when he writes "we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13)? Who is the "we" in this passage? Is it Paul, or is it an editorial "we," or is it all true Christians? Furthermore, what "words" are meant here? Are these Paul's words in this letter, or the words he uses in preaching, or is it the words used by true Christians when they testify? Similar questions arise with a phrase like "in the Spirit" (Matt. 22:42; Rev. 1:10) and the assertion that the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). How does the Holy Spirit do this, and to what extent? The conclusion from looking at the Bible on inspiration is that since no monolithic theory of inspiration is found in the Bible, the approach to the Bible should be doxological, that is, we can only approach the Bible with

praise and thanksgiving because it bursts every category and theory we might have.

A brief survey of the theories of inspiration in church history shows how theories developed according to the historical context. Inspiration in the Old Testament usually meant that the personality of the writer was not overpowered by the Spirit but rather interacted with the Spirit. Christianity, however, came from the strand of Judaism called Hellenistic Judaism, which had appropriated the Hellenistic idea that the inspired writer has been used by God the way a musician uses a lyre or a flute. This mantic view of inspiration can be found in Philo, Josephus, 4 Ezra, and the Talmud. Christians used the analogy of the lyre or flute up to and including Irenaeus, but because of the rise of Montanism, which also claimed that its prophets had been mantically inspired, the mantic theory of inspiration came to be a sign of false prophecy. The mantic theory continued to be used as an apologetic device in battles against heresy, but during the Middle Ages for the most part a theory of inspiration was not emphasized because the tradition of the Church was the basis for authority.

The change at the time of the Reformation was not a new or renewed theory of inspiration. Luther took the Bible very seriously, as did others before him, yet he also could use the Bible very critically, as is well known, for example, from his statements about the Epistle of James as an "epistle of straw." The Lutheran *Book of Concord* did not prescribe any formal doctrine of inspiration for Lutherans. In the polemics of the second generation of the Reformation, however, mantic views of inspiration returned, for example, in Flacius Illyricus, who held that even the Hebrew vowels are inspired. During the so-called period of Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century, polemic fronts hardened and mantic views of inspiration became very important, notably in Gerhard, Calov, and Quenstedt among the Lutherans, and Voetius, "covenant" theology, and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* of 1675 among the Reformed.

The synthesis which Orthodoxy tried to establish failed, for the modern world was breaking through. Not only had voyages of discovery found there are strong religions elsewhere in the world and Copernicus shown that human beings are not the physical center of the universe, but the Age of Reason culminating in Kant's philosophy raised questions about the place of religion in the total scheme of life. The French Revolution in 1789 challenged traditional political, social, and religious authority. In the nineteenth century Darwin produced a theory of evolution, questioning the uniqueness of hu-

man beings. Toward the end of that century Freud developed models of the human mind which challenged traditional views of human consciousness and drives. In this century Einstein's theory of relativity, Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, nuclear weapons, landing on the moon, and genetic engineering, to name but a few in a long list, have been further shocks to traditional authorities and beliefs.

Traditionalists, faced with what they perceived as relativism, scientism, historicism, secularism, and atheism, reached for traditional weapons. Roman Catholics worked out and then finally in 1870 defined papal primacy and infallibility. Anglicans produced the Oxford Movement. In the nineteenth century some Lutherans, such as Vilmar and Stahl, emphasized the Lutheran Confessions and a high view of the minister's authority. But the mantic theory of inspiration also was a major weapon Lutheran traditionalists made use of as they defended what they perceived as the true faith under attack by error. Other Lutherans adopted Reformed "covenant" theology ("salvation history"), according to which revelation takes place through the historical events themselves and therefore attacks made on the written text cannot affect the "inspired" events; already Bengel in the eighteenth century was famous for following this line of thought, and it continued in the nineteenth century in such theologians as von Hofmann, Rothe, and Mencken. A different tack was taken by Schleiermacher, who held that the Holy Spirit is identical with the spirit in the Church; for this reason the spirit which guided the apostles when they wrote is not essentially different from the spirit which guides each Christian today. The apostles, to be sure, would have a stronger measure of the spirit because they were closer to Christ's spirit.

Variations on these theories of inspiration continue today; no one theory dominates. All would contend in some way that the Bible is both human and divine, but whether this would be by analogy with Christ's humanity and divinity, an analogy already suggested by Chrysostom in the early church, would be a matter of dispute because not all would agree that since Christ's humanity is without sin, therefore the Bible must be without error. Does the fact that Jesus lived without sin mean that while walking he could not stub his toe on a rock?

B. Is the Bible Different Because It is Canon?

The problem of the Bible as canon is the unexamined ecumenical problem, a land mine waiting to explode. The general question of

the relationship between the Bible and tradition, to be sure, has been discussed, as for example in 1963 at the world conference of Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. But in spite of basic differences that exist among churches, ecumenical dialogues have simply assumed a consensus exists on the nature and extent of the canon. At stake is not only the fact that some hold the Apocrypha to be canonical and others do not. Rather, the nature of the Bible itself is decisive for all other theological questions. It can be said that Lutherans hold to the fact but not the extent of the canon because Lutherans are not tied to a specific list of books in the Bible. Yet what does it mean to hold to the fact of the canon? Within the Bible itself the word is used (Gal. 6:16; cf. Rom. 6:17), but how "canon" applies to the Bible is of course not spelled out.

The problems are complex. How do we deal with the fact that 1 Enoch 1:9 is quoted as prophecy in Jude 14-15? In 1 Cor. 2:9, using the technical formula "it is written," which indicates authoritative scripture, Paul cites a passage not in the Old Testament. The letter of 1 Clement, written A.D. 95-96, the letters of Ignatius, written about A.D. 110, and the Didache, also written about A.D. 110, are not included in the New Testament canon, but 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, written during the same period, are included. First Clement and the Didache were, after all, in some early lists and collections. What if the lost letter to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16) were found? Would we include it in the canon and if so, how would we decide? Would anything except an ecumenical council be able to make such a decision?

Lest we fall into the mistake of simply asserting that the canon is the canon is the canon and therefore the nature of the canon is self-evident, it is important to become aware of the various attempts in church history to define the canon.

1. What is canonical is determined by orthodox content. Where the spirit of Christ is, there is the canon. But where is the spirit? Where do we find orthodox content? The difficulty with this attempt is that it is precisely the canon which is supposed to define where the spirit is and what is orthodox. Furthermore, in the early church, orthodoxy and heresy were not so easy to discern. In that early period lines were fluid. Only after long debate and struggle did orthodoxy emerge and heresy become evident. And in fact until well into the second century, all the baptized, having received the Holy Spirit in baptism, were understood to be inspired.

2. **What is canonical is apostolic.** But who are apostles according to the New Testament? Luke thinks of twelve apostles, the eleven plus Matthias (Acts 1:26), plus two, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14). In Rom. 16:7 Paul writes of Andronicus and Junias who were apostles before him, in Phil. 2:25 Epaphroditus is called an apostle, and in 2 Cor. 8:24 apostles are simply those who are missionaries. The New Testament books by Mark, Luke, and Jude are clearly not written by apostles, and if the claim is made that these men were closely associated with apostles, then already the understanding of apostolicity has been greatly widened. Very early questions were raised about the Pauline authorship of Hebrews; in spite of being associated with "John," the Book of Revelation was the last book accepted into the canon because its form and content did not match other Johannine literature and because it seemed to lend support to Montanism.

3. **What is canonical is early or the earliest.** To go back to the sources is not only an appeal to tradition, in this case the early or earliest tradition, but also an appeal to the humanistic principle that one must go back to the sources. What comes from the early church establishes the canon, or what belongs to the era of salvation history establishes the canon. Yet, as is well known, not all the writings from the early tradition have been included in the canon. Even if the earliest writings are more likely to be a more accurate reflection of what was said and done, some were not selected for the canon. The early church struggled with this problem, for some early writings, like Barnabas, were included and then rejected while others, like Revelation, were rejected and finally included.

4. **What is canonical is what the Church establishes as canonical.** If this were the case, the Church would be more authoritative than the Bible. Some would take this point of view. As a matter of fact, however, formal recognition of the canon by the Church took place rather late in the process. The first time that all twenty-seven books in the New Testament were listed was by Athanasius in his Easter letter in A.D. 367. The first formal recognition by the Church of this list of books came from a local council—possibly at Rome in A.D. 382, certainly at Hippo in A.D. 393; another local council followed suit at Carthage in A.D. 397. Innocent I in A.D. 405 cited this same list. In some parts of the Orthodox Church the Book of Revelation was not accepted until the tenth century. At the Council of Florence in A.D. 1442 the Roman Catholic Church for the first

time formally defined the extent of the biblical canon. As already noted, Lutherans have not formally defined the extent of the canon. The Bible of the Nestorian Church in Syria, the Peschitta, has only twenty-two books in the New Testament, while the Bible of the Ethiopian Coptic Church has thirty-one books in its New Testament canon.

Already in the second century the sayings of Jesus and letters of Paul had canonical authority, but it took centuries for the canon of the New Testament as we now know it to be established. Even the Gospel of John was not fully accepted until the end of the second century because it was suspected by some to have gnostic tendencies. If the claim is made that the Church establishes the canon, the question must be asked: Which church and at what point in history? Most important of all, however, is that those making this claim understand the Church to be more authoritative than the Bible.

5. **What is canonical is what has been used as canonical.** The canon has simply developed; certain books have been used, and for this reason they have formed the canon. The difficulty with this attempt to explain the canon is that there has been a great deal of variety. At times Hermas, 2 Clement, or the Apocalypse of Peter was included. Why were the letters of Ignatius not used as canonical letters? To claim that usage makes a book canonical does not explain why certain books were used and others not used.

6. **What is canonical is what is found in the early creeds.** For example, 1 Cor. 8:6 and 15:3-5 are creeds or fragments of creeds used in the early church. According to this viewpoint such creeds are canonical; they are the final authorities for the Christian faith. Thus a certain pattern of preaching developed and became normative, a pattern of authenticity. Later, in the second century, Papias would claim unique authority for the sayings of Jesus. About this time the creed of the church of Rome also played a role in defining the Christian faith.

But from all the creeds and fragments of creeds, where does one find "the" creed, "the" pattern which is normative? In addition, one must ask if this attempt to establish the canon does not make the twenty-seven books of the New Testament subordinate to the creed.

7. **What is canonical is what the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit shows is canonical.** A woman told of the great spiritual blessing she received from the word "selah" in the Psalms. Yet scholars are not certain of the meaning of "selah"; it probably is some sort of

direction to the conductor for the music. Does not this attempt to establish the nature of the canon ultimately mean my internal experience becomes the final authority? How is one to distinguish between the spirits (1 John 4:1-4)?

8. What is canonical is the canon within the canon. The canon within the canon is not the canon in a wooden sense. In other words, the canon within the canon is not a certain passage from the Bible, such as John 3:16, or a certain author, such as Paul or John or Matthew, or a certain book, such as Revelation. The canon within the canon is that which is used to deal with difficulties found within the Bible. The Bible contains such difficulties when it is taken literally. As a consequence, each tradition uses some kind of hermeneutics to sort out these difficulties. Each tradition has a theological approach to the Bible, an approach often described as the "hermeneutics of the gospel"; what is meant is that by this process the central truth of the Bible can be discerned and kept intact. In a sense the historical canon and theological canon stand in tension. The canon within the canon is not an authority by itself, separate from the gospel, the theological canon; and the canon within the canon is not an authority separate from the book called the Bible, the historical canon. Nevertheless, the hermeneutics of the gospel is that which determines the central truth called the gospel, and each Christian tradition has its own "hermeneutics of the gospel," its canon within the canon. A Lutheran "hermeneutics of the gospel" will be described in Section III of this chapter.

II. Basic Questions and Presuppositions

Christ is the answer. What is the question? The question might be: How does one decide that Christ is the answer? Or the question might be: What does it mean that Christ is the answer? Then all sorts of questions and presuppositions come into play. The point is that although all agree that Christ is the answer, not all agree on what this means. Nor does it help to claim to hold to Scriptures as absolutely inerrant and infallible in every detail or to claim to use a method of interpreting Scripture that is literal and "historical-grammatical," instead of "historical-critical," for there is clearly no unanimity among those claiming to hold such positions.

But there is no unanimity among those claiming to use the historical-critical method either. Therefore some other criterion will have to be found for deciding whether the historical-critical method is

acceptable for those holding to Christ as the answer. Those who attack the historical-critical method apply certain tests, and these tests are really the presuppositions of those opposing the historical-critical method.

A. The Presupposition of the Unity of Scripture

The historical-critical method asks: "What happened?" What it discovers is not only that the Bible was written over many hundreds of years and in many different literary forms but also that the Bible contains a great variety of ideas, some of which at least appear to oppose each other. A famous example is the story of King David's census; in 2 Sam. 24:1 it is reported that the Lord incited David to take the census, whereas in 1 Chron. 21:1 it says that Satan incited David to number Israel. Historical critics unravel the difficulty in these verses by noting that they were written by different authors at different times with different theologies.

Opponents of historical criticism presuppose the unity of Scripture. Is this a unity such as Christians posit for the Trinity, a unity which is finally a mystery? Or is this a unity which excludes contradictions, a unity built on logic, so that even if items stand in contradiction, a contradiction cannot exist because the presupposition of unity does not allow for contradiction? In that case the reader is expected to suspend judgment, to oppose his intellect, because of the supreme authority of the presupposition of unity. Most of the time, to be sure, the unity of Scripture is defended by means of an overarching concept such as the Word, or the covenant, or salvation history, or God's plan, or God's kingly rule, or God's grace.

The rejoinder by the historical critics is simple: How are difficulties solved by refusing to deal with them? More importantly, is it not in fact true that instead of working on the basis of the unity of Scripture, each stream of Christian tradition uses its own theological approach, its own canon within the canon, to sort out and solve the difficulties in Scripture?

B. The Presupposition that Reason is to be Subordinate to Scripture

The basis for this presupposition is often 2 Cor. 10:5: "We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25). At first glance no one would fault this argument. Reason is not God, and reason cannot be superior to Scripture. Scripture tells us who we

are and who God is, not reason. Reason can at best play a servant role, as a tool which helps us understand more fully what Scripture means.

The question, of course, is whether reason for historical critics is necessarily made superior to Scripture or whether historical critics do not also use reason as a tool. During the French Revolution, to be sure, reason was made into a goddess, and no doubt individuals have made reason superior to revelation. But for the vast majority historical criticism is a method, not a philosophy. In order to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of Scripture, it is necessary to think. Thinking always includes the use of the principle of analogy, for how else is it possible to comprehend at all? Surely no one would claim that Scripture must in principle be irrational or incomprehensible. Nor did Paul in 1 Cor. 1:18-25 and 2 Cor. 10:5 intend to reject thinking or trying to comprehend Scripture with the use of modern historical tools. Furthermore, modern thinkers are well aware of the fact that reason itself is part of history and subject to change.

C. The Presupposition that Miracles Happen

But what is a miracle? The common understanding among those raising this question is that miracles are evidence or proof. By this they understand creation to be run by natural laws, like a clock; a miracle is that which breaks into such a world and in doing so provides proof that God has intervened. Some would also point out that the modern scientific view of the world as an open system allows for miracles, and others would also claim that through God's sustaining work everything is a miracle. As a result, the Christian faith can be defended as truth because there is evidence to back up the faith; few, to be sure, would deny that faith is also needed, but the important thing is that the proofs are there for all who are willing to see. And the proofs are there because the Bible records such miracles and intends them to be evidence and proof.

Those using the historical-critical method do not reject "miracles" in the sense defined above, for as defined above "miracles" stand outside of history and the historian can only state "I don't know." But the historian is able to ask the question whether the Bible intended "miracles" to be understood in the sense defined above. Not everyone who observed a miracle was convinced, and some said that Jesus did miracles by the power of Beelzebul (Mark 3:22). Thus it was well known that miracles were done by those who were not Christians. The Gospel of John has a very complex understanding of "signs" or

"miracles" (cf. 2:23-25; 3:2; 6:26; 10:19-21; 11:45-48; 20:29-31). Paul indicates that demanding "signs" is one way the Jews show their unbelief, for Christians hold to the stumbling block of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 1:22; cf. 2 Cor. 12:9-13). The historian is also aware of the fact that literary forms sometimes give the reader a clue to the intent of a miracle story. The important point, however, is that the historian does not try to deny or destroy what the Bible describes; rather, the historical critic helps us understand the text and in fact helps us focus on Jesus Christ alone and him crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

D. The Presupposition of Facticity

It is a fact that the modern mind often assumes that "facts" exist. What is meant is that a certain kind of information is demonstrable, directly accessible to the five senses, and available to all human beings. A popular view of science is that science is able to produce facts. Sometimes it is assumed that history also is able to produce facts and that the Bible, a book of history, is full of facts which Christians are to believe in. Historical criticism, in turn, is thought by some to be very destructive because it seems to question some of the facts in the Bible.

The trouble with "facts" is that truly modern science no longer claims to produce facts but rather statistical averages. And modern historical study no longer claims to produce facts but rather a record of interpretations and ideas. Even the person on the street knows that an accident at the crossroads will be interpreted differently by different witnesses. And even the person on the street knows that people in other times and cultures perceived and thought differently.

On the other hand, the person on the street still thinks that words have a specific meaning, a meaning which can be established by means of a dictionary after determining the context. What people do not realize is that dictionaries are history books, which is quickly perceived when someone looks into the Oxford English Dictionary, for example. Grammar is the same kind of problem. Most suppose that grammar is exact, that correct usage can be established. Some think that with a "historical-grammatical" method it is possible to avoid the perils of the historical-critical method. Yet grammar too is historical and depends on the philosophies of language operative at a specific time. In general it can be said that theologians need to bring the historical nature of words and "facts" to the attention of the person on the street.

E. The Presupposition of Propositional Truth

Can truth be captured in a statement which then is "the truth"? After all, two plus two equals four. But I have never seen a "two" or a "four." Numbers belong to the unreal world of mathematics. In the real world we live in, life is historical and truth is historical. This does not mean that truth does not exist or is not truth. It does mean that even a proposition such as "God is one" must be understood as a historical proposition (cf. James 2:19). Who is God in this statement? What are the actions of this God? Furthermore, what is "one" in this context? Is it one over against the many? How does this fit in with Christian language about God being triune? What is at stake here is not a kind of new math, but what it means to be human, to be historical.

In times past theologians did hold that truth in religion could be stated in propositions and that the Bible contained propositions which Christians should hold to as the truth. That was because of the prevailing philosophy of the time, a philosophy built on a static, logical view of truth. But the Bible is not tied to any particular philosophy or any particular philosophical view of truth. For Christians truth is a person (cf. John 14:6) whom we know by faith. Truth is therefore dynamic, personal, relational, historical. Today the presupposition of propositional truth belongs largely to a bygone era. Even sentences that are propositions often communicate more by what they evoke than by what they denote logically. Thus the historical-critical method with its dynamic, historical view of truth and propositions is not a threat but a help in understanding what the Bible means for you and me.

III. A LUTHERAN APPROACH

Fortunately no one is saved by the correct interpretation of Scripture, or none of us would be saved. We are saved by Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we need to discern who it is we believe in. How can we discern? What is the final authority? The Bible is the final authority, of course. The problem is that the Bible must be interpreted, for it must speak to all time as well as to its time. Who can authoritatively interpret the Bible? Is it satisfactory to say that the Bible is simply to be taken as it is because it is inerrant? But those who do this disagree widely among themselves. Is it satisfactory to say that the Church is to interpret the Bible? But there is no "church" to which all churches grant such authority. Nor can the matter be left to individuals, for they go their own ways. Lutherans propose a theological answer. Basic to Lutheran understanding is that the word of God is to be understood in three senses, in descending order to importance. First of all, the Word of God is Jesus Christ (cf. John 1:1-14). Second, the word of God is the preached word, the living voice of the gospel. Third, the word of God is the written word, the text of Scripture.

A. Five Lutheran principles for interpreting Scripture:

1. The New Testament interprets the Old. In other words, the two testaments are not equal. Not only is the New Testament that which came later and therefore interprets the Old, but also the New Testament brings something new, Jesus Christ. Not only does the New Testament fulfill the Old, and therefore the Old Testament is to be taken very seriously, but the New Testament brings that which the Old Testament does not have, the cross and resurrection. The Old Testament, to be sure, describes the sufferings of Job, the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, and the laments of Jeremiah, but these are not to be compared with God's son dying on the cross in the New Testament. For this reason those whose faith is centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ interpret the Old Testament through the New.

2. The clear interprets the unclear. The converse is not true; the unclear does not interpret the clear. First of all, the interpreter is not to begin with difficult passages, such as 1 Sam. 2:6: "The Lord kills and brings to life," or 1 Cor. 15:29: "What do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?" Instead, the interpreter must begin with clear passages describing the human predicament and how God has acted; it is possible to place difficult passages in their proper context. But another step is involved beyond historical and intellectual clarity, for in the second place, clarity is that which points to Christ and whatever does not point to Christ is unclear; final authority is the clarity found in Christ. In other words, clarity is internal, theological, and not historical or intellectual. At times Luther did, to be sure, argue for the external clarity of Scripture; that was in order to defend himself against "enthusiastic" opponents (*Schwärmer*). True clarity, however, is found only in Christ.

3. Scripture interprets itself. But does this not mean that one is arguing in a circle? Does this mean that one cannot use other material to help understand Scripture? To the contrary! Every possible tool needs to be used in order to understand what Scripture has to

say. Nor is Scripture understood therefore to be a perfect system, containing all knowledge and truth. What is meant is that Scripture is the final authority and cannot be subsumed under or judged by any other authority. Yet such finality is not finality in a wooden sense. Scripture is the final authority because it points to Christ, and nothing can be allowed to be a higher authority. Christ is the one who gives Scripture whatever authority it has.

4. **"Was Christum treibet."** No satisfactory translation into English exists. Literally the words mean: "What drives Christ." What is meant is that what "promotes" Christ is the truth, that where one finds Christ, there is the truth. This may seem to be simply another slogan, like "Christ alone," yet it expresses in a profound sense the heart of the Lutheran approach to Scripture.

5. **Interpreting Scripture can only be done within the Church.** This may sound intolerant. And it does not solve the question where "the" Church is. Again, what is meant is that Christ is found in and through his Church and that it is in his Church that his Spirit is working. A person might speculate about whether Christ and his Spirit are present outside of the Church, and if so, the definition of the Church would need to be broadened or what it means for Christ and his Spirit to be present might need to be redefined. All such speculation remains pure speculation. What the Christian knows for sure is that Christ and his Spirit are present within his Church and that those who are outside of Christ are, because they lack his Spirit, unable to interpret Christ correctly and therefore unable to interpret Scripture correctly.

It is obvious that all five Lutheran principles really state the same thing, that where one finds Christ, there one finds the truth and that this is how Scripture is to be interpreted. Finally this is a theological judgment. As a consequence, Lutherans not only have no problem with the historical-critical method but use it gladly when it helps point to Christ and question the method and its results when it does not point to Christ.

The reader will object. Is it not impossible to believe in the "who," Jesus Christ, without also believing in the "what" about what he did and what he means for you and me? Is not therefore the historical-critical method to be rejected because it calls into question or may seem to call into question some or all of the "what"?

Lutherans take the "what" very seriously. As is well known, Lutherans take Scripture very seriously. They also take Christian tradition

very seriously. Three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, are all part of the beginning of the Lutheran confessional book, the *Book of Concord*. The *Book of Concord* is very specific about the "what" of the Christian faith and is, furthermore, full of references to the so-called church fathers of the Christian tradition. Finally, however, for Lutherans the question is "how" the "what" is used. Commitment to the "what" by itself could be a historical faith that has nothing to do with salvation. Christian faith is not only or primarily philosophical or historical truth. The important question is "how" such faith is part of a person's life.

B. When Lutherans spell out this stance, they normally use five slogans. Each of these slogans is like a miniature creedal statement.

1. **Christ alone.** Christ is the sole foundation, "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Thus "the truth" is a historical person of a particular time and place, who did certain things and said certain things. Yet he is "the truth" who determines what all other truth is.

The difficulty is that although everyone agrees that Christ is "the truth," very different views of Christ remain. "Christ alone" remains a hollow formula. Nor is anything changed by holding that "the gospel" is the truth, for "the gospel," like "Christ alone," remains a hollow formula that has been filled with varying content. Therefore the alternatives are either to identify truth and gospel with the whole book called the Bible or to try to find some way to sort out the different views of Christ and gospel. No matter how much some claim to take the first alternative, everyone in fact operates on the basis of the second.

2. **Grace alone.** No one denies that salvation is by "grace alone." But what does this mean? Is grace truly "alone" or does it include works? What about the law? Is grace to be categorized variously, as natural grace, actual grace, prevenient grace, and the like? Because of these difficulties, Lutherans make use of the Pauline phrase "justification of the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5) so that grace truly remains grace and sin truly remains sin. Arguments remain, to be sure, about the "law" and "works" and "rewards," but the basic thrust of the Lutheran stance is made clear by the Pauline phrase "justification of the ungodly." Yet more must be said.

3. **Faith alone.** All may agree on "grace alone," but few agree on "faith alone." Is there nothing else except "faith alone"? Do no works apply? Yes, the Christian has no guarantees as the world reckons guarantees, for all experience, including the experience of faith itself, is ambiguous. Faith is based upon God's faithfulness to his promise in Jesus Christ, not on any security a person might find in the experience of faith or any other experience. Since through the promise a person is free from all demands of the law, a new world begins, a joyful life freely doing what others need.

4. **Cross alone.** Lutheran theology is cross-centered. The cross, symbol of torture and defeat, is the power of God for salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-24). The cross without the resurrection is simply a tragedy. Conversely, the resurrection without the cross is simply a fantasy. Both cross and resurrection must be held as a unity. Yet as long as Christians continue in this world, their lives continue to be lives under the cross, broken by sin, sickness, weakness, and death.

5. **Scripture alone.** Would this be the place where Lutherans finally establish the "what" in some other way than by means of "theology"? Not at all. "Scripture alone" does not mean that Scripture in all its parts is equally valid. Precisely because Lutherans take Scripture seriously and in its literal sense, they take the difficulties in Scripture seriously, whether brought to their attention by the historical-critical method or by any other means. But Christ is the truth, not the difficulties.

Why should these five Lutheran slogans, all stating "Christ is the truth," be thought to be authoritative for the Christian faith? Could not other slogans such as "the church alone" or "inerrancy alone" be used just as well? And have not Lutherans with these five slogans tied themselves to "what" instead of "how" after all? But when Lutherans spell out their stance, they take one final step.

Final authority lies in the proclamation of the promise. To put it another way, when Lutherans are asked about the "what," their proper answer is to proclaim the promise that for Christ's sake all your sins are forgiven. The reason for doing this is that the question of authority is but the symptom of a deeper question, sin, and the answer is to proclaim the promise to you, not to present you with the "what" that supersedes all other "whats." And if you ask why this promise, the Lutheran will proclaim the promise to you once again. It is in the proper use of the promise that final authority lies; this is the "how."

Final authority lies in the fact that through the Holy Spirit the promises are self-authenticating. As children Lutherans used to memorize Luther's explanation to the third article of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or understanding believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel . . . ."

For all of these reasons Lutherans do not reject the historical-critical method. Moreover, a person cannot escape this method because it belongs to the very air we breathe in this century. It can help us better understand ourselves and Scripture. At the same time Lutherans are aware of the fact that the historical-critical method is itself historical and must be examined critically (just as each method is historical and must be examined critically). Finally whatever points to Christ is the truth, and what is needed is that the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ be proclaimed.

IV. EPHESIANS

Almost nothing hints at a concrete setting for the letter. Most satisfactory is the thesis that the original actually stated "in Ephesus" and that the copyists for some of the oldest and weightiest manuscripts, knowing that the contents of the letter do not match what the Book of Acts says about Paul and perhaps hoping to transform the letter into a letter for the whole Church, simply omitted the destination.

Did Paul write the letter to the Ephesians? The first and most telling reason for holding that Paul did not write Ephesians is the close relationship between Ephesians and Colossians. Larger patterns within the two letters are conspicuously similar. Most decisive is the use of similar terminology but in a different sense. Which letter was written first? Colossians has to have been first because it deals with a concrete situation. The author of Ephesians abstracted from that situation. It is difficult to imagine how the opposite sequence might have occurred.

The second reason for holding that Paul did not write Ephesians is theological. More specifically, the Church for Paul can be either the local congregation or the universal Church. He does, to be sure, think it important to agree with the mother church in Jerusalem and twice writes of the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13). Yet in Ephesians the Church always is the universal Church. According to Paul it is better not to marry because the end is near, although those who are married should stay as they are and those who lack self-

control ought to marry (1 Cor. 7). Ephesians paints an entirely different picture of marriage. It is to be a reflection of the perfect unity which exists between Christ and his bride, the Church (5:22-33).

The final reason for holding that Paul did not write Ephesians is stylistic. What stands out most of all is the lavish use of words; a freshman English teacher would say the style is redundant.

Taken individually none of the reasons against Pauline authorship may seem overpowering, but the cumulative weight of evidence becomes conclusive. Who then wrote the letter to the Ephesians? He was someone well acquainted with Paul's teaching and probably, because of his literary style and knowledge of Jewish tradition, a Jewish-Christian. More than that one cannot say. When was the letter written? Since Ephesians is dependent on Colossians and familiar with most of Paul's other letters, the earliest date is probably A.D. 80. Ignatius of Antioch, martyred shortly after A.D. 110, seems to be familiar with Ephesians (Eph. 12:2; cf. Polycarp 5:1), which would set the upper limit.

Externally Ephesians has the form of a letter, with a proper opening, thanksgiving/blessing, intercession, body, and closing. In actual fact Ephesians is hardly a letter at all, for it is too general and theological. At the same time it is quite specific, aimed at mature Christians who are being asked to remember what their baptism means for the Church and their life in Christ. The best way to categorize Ephesians is to call it a liturgical discourse which has been put in the form of a letter.

V. EPHESIANS 2:1-10

At first glance this section might seem to be a break in the thanksgiving/intercession which began in 1:15 and continues in 3:1, 14. Yet the overriding theme of God's action in Christ continues, as can be seen by the way what is stated in 1:20 is applied to the Christian in 2:5-6. Redemption and forgiveness, mentioned in 1:7, is the theme of the first section of the second chapter, while reuniting all things (1:10; cf. 1:23) is the theme of the second section, and 2:19-22 picks up the theme of the Church in 1:23.

The structure of this section, and for that matter the whole chapter, is also based on the pattern "once—but now," found in succinct form in 5:8 but here spanning many verses. In modern America this pattern exists as well. We find it, for example, in the line "I once was lost but now am found" from the hymn "Amazing Grace." In New Testament times it is used in Rom. 6:17-22, Gal. 4:8-9, Col. 1:21-22, and 1 Pet. 2:10, to cite but a few places. Its purpose is to bring out the contrast between past and present, between being without Christ and being in Christ, and as a consequence it is often connected with baptism. With thankfulness the Christian reflects on the evils of the past and the glorious certainty of his new status; at times an appropriate life in Christ is also mentioned. The words "once—but now" are not required for the pattern, for the contrast by itself is all that is needed. In verses 2 and 3 the word "once" appears as a clue to the contrast introduced by "but" in verse 4. In verse 5 the contrast lies in the content of the verse. Only in verse 13, after "at one time" (v. 11) and "at that time" (v. 12) have appeared again as clues, do the words "but now" actually appear along with another "once." In verse 19 the contrast again lies in the content of the verse. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this pattern used more frequently.

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible (RSV), a translation originally prepared under American Protestant auspices and widely used in Protestant (and some Catholic) churches, contains the following translation of Eph. 2:1-10:

> [1]And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins [2]in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. [3]Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4]But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, [5]even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6]and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7]that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8]For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—[9]not because of works, lest any man should boast. [10]For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The first seven verses are one long sentence, and the verb "made alive" does not occur until verse 5. "Walking" according to the flesh (vv. 2-3) is the first half of a parenthesis that is closed by the "walk" according to good works in verse 10. The first seven verses state the problem, which is sin, and the solution, which is God's action. The final three verses sum up what salvation by grace means, although a parenthetical slogan in verse 5 anticipates the summary.

V. 1. "And" is simply a connective. "Dead" refers, of course, to spiritual death, which is the most serious kind of death possible because it means being cut off from God. The cause of death is "trespasses and sins." No distinction should be drawn between these two terms, which both by the fact that two are used and that they are plural express the totality of sin. According to Paul's theology, sin brings about death (Rom. 5:12, 21; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:56); he is referring, however, first of all to physical death. Nothing indicates that "you" is a reference to Gentile Christians. Rather, this is a description of the predicament which includes all, and "you" would normally be used in a letter at this point. The RSV has supplied the verb "he made alive" from verse 5.

V. 2. Three names, which are really the same name, are given for the evil force which opposes God. The first has been translated as "the course of this world" by the RSV. The phrase actually describes Aion, the god of this age, who according to the syncretistic thought of the Hellenistic world ruled all of space and time. "This world" stands in opposition to the "coming world" that God will rule. Another name for the evil one is "the prince of the power of the air." As in Col. 1:13, "power" does not mean a quality but the sphere that the "prince" rules. The "air" is the lowest level of the heavens; human beings reach up into this level, for they either battle against evil (6:11-12) or are subject to it, as in this verse. The "spirit" is simply a general name for the same evil force. Each of the three names describes the totality of evil (cf. 1:21; 6:11, 16). This is the evil force that is "now" at work among the disobedient ones, leading them through sin to death (v. 1). Thus by implication evil is not "now" at work among Christians and consequently they are free from its rule.

V. 3. A change is made to "we." Nothing indicates that Jewish Christians are meant, as some have claimed in order to support the thesis that in verse 1 "you" refers to Gentile Christians. "We all" is a shift to the inclusive style used in confession; we all confess that we are subject to sin, death, and evil. In addition, "we" anticipates the use of "we" and "us" in the following verses and may reflect Col. 2:13. "Lived" more consciously describes life together (2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 3:15), while "walked" (v. 2) tends to be more individualistic (cf. 5:2, 8, 15). Only here in Ephesians does "flesh" have the negative sense it does in Paul. "Passions" and "desires" point to the abundance and completeness of sin, just as "body and mind," which could be translated as "flesh and evil thought," is the whole man in opposition to God. Radical sin in verse 3 produces an effective contrast to radical grace in verse 4. The concluding part of this verse has been

one of the classical proof texts for the doctrine of original sin. Unfortunately the RSV has added "so," as if a conclusion were being drawn which could be considered a general principle, when in matter of fact this clause is parallel to the earlier part of the verse. What is meant is that since we too were dead in our trespasses and sins and enslaved to the prince of this world, we too were children of wrath like the sons of disobedience. "By nature" should therefore be translated as "really" or "totally" (cf. Gal. 4:8; Wis. 13:1). "Wrath" stands in contrast to mercy in verse 4 (cf. 5:6).

V. 4. "But now God has acted" is what the beginning of this verse intends, for the "once—but now" pattern applies here. The basis of God's action is his mercy, which is mentioned in 1 Pet. 1:3 and Titus 3:5 in connection with baptism. Thus here also baptism probably should be understood. God's predestining love has already been set forth in 1:5 and Christ's very concrete love for the Church will be described later (cf. 5:2, 25). In verse 5 the words "were dead through the trespasses" are repeated from verse 1 in order to bring out once again the contrast between our problem and God's solution. The shift back and forth between "we" and "you" in this verse and in verses 8-10 demonstrates that the author did not write at one point to Gentile Christians and at another to Jewish Christians. Such a hypothesis would become extremely complicated in this section! Instead the author made use of traditional slogans and materials which he did not follow slavishly, making it difficult for us today to determine exactly what is traditional and what is adaptation.

Vv. 5-6. That we were "made alive together with Christ" begins to apply 1:20 to us. Col. 2:13 is clearly parallel to this passage. When were we made alive? The aorist tense points to a specific time in the past, which the parallel in Col. 2:11-13 shows to be baptism. Paul would have written that we have been buried with Christ and that we shall be made alive and raised and made to sit at the right hand, but here nothing has been reserved for the future (cf. Rom. 6:8; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:22, 52; Phil. 3:9-11). This is very close to realized eschatology. It cannot be lightly dismissed as mere rhetoric occasioned by the enthusiastic joy that baptism evokes or as simply the description of Christ, the representative of the new humanity, already sitting in the heavenly places. The author fully intended to state that salvation is complete, even though, as in 1:14, he qualified his position and did not fall into the heresy condemned in 2 Tim. 2:18 or into Gnosticism.

In the middle of things the author adds a parenthesis that anticipates verse 8: "by grace you have been saved." The verb is in the

perfect tense, indicating that salvation took place in the past and continues into the present. Paul did not use the verb "to save" in the past tense except for Rom. 3:24, where the aorist indicating an event in the past is kept in balance by the future reference of the phrase "in this hope;" for him "to save" refers to those who are in the process of being saved yet will be saved at the last judgment (1 Cor. 15:2; 2 Cor. 6:2) and to future salvation (Rom. 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:8-9). Understanding grace as the principle of salvation is very similar to what is stated in Rom. 3:24, where Paul adapted earlier materials with a liturgical background, just as the author of Ephesians at this point adapted liturgical materials.

That we "sit with him in the heavenly places" is one of several very striking examples of how the author of Ephesians tends to think in terms of space instead of time. Even the pattern "once—but now" is really a description of two opposing spheres rather than progress across time. At times Paul did, to be sure, use space categories (for example, Rom. 10:6; 1 Cor. 15:47; Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:16), although he preferred time categories and occasionally a space category will also have a future reference (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16). But in the letter to the Ephesians space categories have a decisive place, as in 1:3, 20-22; 3:19; 4:9-10, 15-16, and this passage.

V. 7. In spite of his preference the author of Ephesians, like Paul, used both categories. "In the coming ages" refers to the future. Tempting as it might be to understand the "ages" as personal evil forces in analogy to the "Aion of this world" in verse 2, elsewhere in this letter the plural has a purely temporal meaning (3:9, 11, 21). The plural form by this time had become customary through use in doxologies and simply meant "all times." Thus verse 7 means that in all future times God will effectively "show" (cf. 1:9) the "riches of his grace" (cf. 1:7) to us in Christ. Yet this verse must not be understood apart from 1:21 and the fact that Christ already rules the "coming ages."

Vv. 8-9. The parenthesis from verse 5 now develops into a short summary of Pauline theology. The summary is made up of Pauline slogans and as in verse 5 seems to echo the same sort of materials Paul used in Rom. 3:24. The sovereignty of God's grace could hardly be confessed with greater clarity. But even though "grace alone" and "faith alone" are present, "saved" is once again, as in verse 5, in the perfect tense. Paul's eschatological dialectic of justification is absent where it is hard to imagine Paul himself would have omitted it. Two "not" phrases define what grace is: "not of ourselves," "not of works." Paul's polemic against the works of the law is nowhere implied. Where Paul spoke only of "works," his polemic was always implied (cf. Rom. 4:2, 6; 9:32; 11:6). Eph. 2:9, however, simply counterposes grace and every human work. Paul frequently warned against "boasting" (cf. Rom. 4:2; 1 Cor. 1:28-31; 4:7; Phil. 3:3), which in its most insidious form is the claim to be better than others, so that grace is still not sovereign.

V. 10. In this context to be "created" is the same as what Paul meant by becoming God's "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; cf. Eph. 4:24). When did this new creation take place? Baptism could be meant (cf. Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:24), yet in addition before the foundation of the world God "destined us to be his sons" and to be "holy and blameless" (1:4-5, 11-12). In no way does this passage mean that Christians have been prepared to do good works, for it is the "good works" that have been prepared beforehand. But Christians will "walk" the way of good works because of freedom and gratitude, not because of an attempt to save themselves (cf. Rom. 1:5; 6:16-18; Phil. 2:12-13). That Christians "should" walk the way of good works is also intended by the author.

Conclusion

Has anything important been lost in the translation of Paul's apocalyptic theology of justification by faith into ecclesiological universalism in the letter to the Ephesians? In Ephesians Christ clearly is central, as is grace. But Paul's eschatalogical tension between "already" and "not yet" has been greatly lessened. Already "we have redemption" (1:7), already "we sit with him in the heavenly places" (2:6). Therefore the need for ethics and battling the evil one (4:27; 5:6; 6:11-17) has been greatly diminished, in spite of the space these topics are given. The role of the law has become much smaller (2:15). For Paul the law is not exclusively a Jewish issue, but plays a decisive role in evaluating who one really is before God. The law, in fact, is a key to the polemic function of justification by faith. Ephesians is, of course, written in a different time and situation. The question is whether anything essential for Paul's theology has been lost when judgment and the law have lost much of their significance.

To put it another way: Something has changed in Ephesians. The Church has become determinative, and justification by faith takes second place. Is it important if the basic christological emphasis of justification by faith alone is lessened or even lost? Lutherans and those in the Reformation tradition have claimed that justification by faith alone is central and have been unwilling to allow ecclesiology to determine Christology.

VI. SUMMARY

Lutherans understand the Word of God as Jesus Christ, the preached word of the gospel, and the written word of Scripture. The five Lutheran principles for interpreting Scripture are the following:

the New Testament interprets the Old;
the clear interprets the unclear;
Scripture interprets itself;
what "promotes" Christ is the truth;
interpreting Scripture can only be done within the Church.

The Lutheran stance is captured in the five "alones"—Christ, grace, faith, the cross, and Scripture.

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EVANGELICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

The Background to Contemporary Evangelical Exposition

by

GRANT R. OSBORNE

It is commonly believed among many nonevangelicals that fundamentalism-evangelicalism is a uniform tradition, characterized by a rigid, atomistic, and static view of Scripture. Some have gone so far as to caricature the movement as a "nineteenth-century heresy" which has no roots in the Church before that time. For this reason it is important to realize that wide diversity exists within the camp and to understand the historical reasons why this should be so.

At the outset, I would assert that there are indeed historical roots for the evangelical doctrine of inerrancy, which means that the Bible is without error in its original autographs. Some among the evangelical tradition follow the commonly held view that inerrancy developed out of the application of Scottish Common Sense Realism to Scripture in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This philosophy stemmed from the inductive method propounded by Francis Bacon (1561-1626). It entailed an optimistic epistemology which assumed that definite apprehension of truth could be derived from an objective observation of facts. Therefore, one could ascertain with certainty the exact meaning of the Bible, which as divine revelation must be free from error. George Marsden argues that the Old Princetonians of the late nineteenth century (Charles Hodge, Archibald A. Hodge, Benjamin B. Warfield) forged their strong views on the basis of Common Sense Realism, "that the Scriptures not only contain, but ARE THE WORD OF GOD, and hence that all their elements and all their affirmations are absolutely errorless."[1]

[1] George B. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University