



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

THE **STANDARD BEARER**

Special Issue
THE REFORMATION AND SCRIPTURE



Luther and the Bible

*Vol. 70, No. 2
October 15, 1993*

The Profit of Our Inspired Bible — Rev. Jason L. Kortering	27
Editorial - Prof. David J. Engelsma	
"Far Brighter even than the Sun"	29
The Reformation and	
Biblical Interpretation — Prof. Herman C. Hanko	31
The Believer and His Bible — Prof. Robert D. Decker	33
Reformation, Revival,	
and Scripture's Authority — Rev. Jerome M. Julien	35
The Reformation and the Philosophy of	
Vernacular Translations of the Bible — Theodore P. Letis	37
Whence the Authority of the Bible?	
or Why the Great Reformers Preached	
with Confidence — Rev. Russell J. Dykstra	40
The Bible, A Divine Book	
John Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture — Rev. Dale H. Kuiper ...	42
Doctrine of Scripture in the	
Reformed Creeds — Rev. Kenneth Koole	44
Book Review	47

Editorially Speaking...

As is our custom with the October 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* each year, this issue is a special issue commemorating the 16th century Reformation of the church.

This special issue is devoted to the Reformation doctrine and corresponding practice of Holy Scripture. It covers a wide range of vital topics: inspiration; message; authority; interpretation; confessional doctrine; translation; use; and profit. It offers a close look at Martin Luther's doctrine of Scripture's clarity and at John Calvin's doctrine of Scripture's divinity.

All of the writers have taken pains to relate the truth of Scripture as recovered by the Reformation to the calling and struggle of the church and Christian in the present day.

We thank all who contributed. We welcome to the pages of the *SB* the Rev. Jerome Julien, pastor of the Independent Reformed Church in Troy, Ontario, Canada, and Mr. Theodore P. Letis, a post-graduate student in ecclesiastical history with special interest in the Greek text of the New Testament.

I encourage our readers to celebrate the Reformation this month by means also of another magazine. *Christian History* has just published a superb issue on Martin Luther, "Martin Luther: The Later Years and Legacy" (issue 39, vol. 12, no. 3). It gives a thorough overview of Luther's life and labor in the years between 1522 and the Reformer's death in 1546. It includes both humorous and gripping excerpts from Luther's own writings. The issue is the follow-up to an earlier issue, "Martin Luther: The Early Years." Both issues are available. Order from *Christian History*, Past Issue Sales, P.O. Box 550-A, Church Hill, MD 21690. Ask for issues 34 and 39 on Martin Luther. Cost is \$4.00 per issue plus 10% for shipping, prepaid.

The cover of this issue of the *SB* shows the young Luther discovering a complete Bible in the library of the University of Erfurt. The Bible, however, was still "chained."

— DJE



THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.
Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.,
4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Second Class
Postage Paid at Grandville, Michigan.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer,
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The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume. Such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume year.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

The Profit of Our Inspired Bible

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

II Timothy 3:16,17

A perfect man of God, a perfect woman of God!

Furnished unto all good works.
Breathtaking!

Does not your soul cry out for that spiritual condition? Victory over all the appetites of the flesh. Satan and his hordes, vanquished forever. We become so complete in our salvation that we fulfill exactly the purpose that God had in sending Jesus to die for us.

Yes, to be the perfect man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, we must ultimately wait until we open our eyes in glory. Then every tear shall we wipe from our eyes, the former things shall pass away, and we shall be complete. That will not only be true for us individually, it will be true for all of us who make up the perfect church. In some ways this is best of all. Sometimes our greatest hurt is the way we treat each other in the church. Ah, what a day, when doctrinal controversy will be a thing of the past, for we will all profess unity in the truth. Our tongues will be sanctified to speak the truth in love. We will get along with each other perfectly. We will fully appreciate God's work in each saint.

Thoroughly furnished unto all good works!

The more we practice this now, the closer we are to heaven already in this life. As Christians we become perfect now, by being equipped, that is, thoroughly furnished, unto all good works. The very purpose of God in saving us is that we may perform good works (Eph. 2:8-10). Think that through a for moment: we become complete Christians when we are rich in all good works. Thus it is in our personal life, in our home and family life, in our dealing with our neighbors, yes, also in the church of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the Holy Bible is to accomplish this. It is our God-given equipment that enables us to walk in all good works.

Does your Bible show it? How many Bibles have you worn out in your lifetime? Do you have your own personal Bible which you take with you to the society meeting or Bible study? Is it with you when you worship on the Lord's Day? Do you have the same Bible at family worship and for your own quiet time with your Lord? Is your present Bible well marked, noted with points that have been made in sermons or Bible studies, thoughts which came to you when you reflected in the inner closet?

One of the first things our missionaries learn to appreciate is that outside the sphere of our churches the above things are true, while within our churches and families it is rare. This ought not to be. One of the best

things we could do as churches is throw out the "pew Bible." Our personal Bibles should be working Bibles; and they won't become that, as long as we have school Bibles, church Bibles, society Bibles. How many Bibles presented to our children at school graduation get worn out? We can learn something from others. This is one thing we ought to learn.

The proper use of our Bibles affords spiritual change in our lives. We are told that the Bible "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Doctrine is, literally, teaching. The Word of God forms the basis of our faith, what we believe and hold for truth. Righteousness is our legal standing before God, we are viewed as conforming to God's divine law. Such proper standing before God's law involves two things: *reproof*—it points out sin and error by calling us to repentance; and *correction*—it directs us in the right way, the way of obedience, of sanctification. The sum total of such activity is called in verse 15, "wise unto salvation."

The process whereby we take hold of the Word of God is described in verse 14: "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned." The assumption is that someone taught him. Further, in verse 16 we read of

"instruction in righteousness"—literally, training, which implies repeated lessons. This comes in many ways. Paul mentions particularly to Timothy that it started for him when he was young and his mother and grandmother taught him. The influence of a

*How many
Bibles
have you
worn out in
your lifetime?*

Christian home in our youth is inestimable. The reading of God's Word and Bible stories to our children is so important. We teach our growing children to have a "quiet time" with God each day by being an example to them ourselves. More and more we learn to appreciate the preaching of the gospel and the loving care of the Christian church through her officebearers and fellow members. In the center of all this activity is the Word of God.

And no wonder!

The Bible is God's message to us. It is His clear instruction on all aspects of Christian belief. We hold for truth what God Himself declares to be truth. Our Christian life is not a novelty invented by austere Puritans or liberating Germans. The Bible sets forth God's unchangeable law and purpose for our serving Him. Good works are clearly defined in His Word. He determines good and evil.

The Bible is nothing to play with. It carries the stamp of divine authority. One cannot read the imprecatory Psalms or the warning of the prophets without bowing in humble awe before the "Thus saith Jehovah." He whose eyes are as flaming fire, who melted the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into an inferno of fire and brimstone, calls everyone of us to account. The lie originates in His adversary. Sin carries an awful smell in His holy nostrils. Can we read His Word and actually think that we will decide what parts of it are human and what are divine? O presumptuous fools who tread on His holy ground with such fatal pride. Rather, we bow in humble gratitude, for His revelation is reliable. Rather would I place the care of my immortal soul in the hands of Him who inhabiteth eternity, than in the wisdom of the fool, be he the scholarly professor, the intelligent guru, or the all-wise philosopher.

Yes, our children can read and understand. Their implicit faith is held before us by our Master, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

The traditions of men cannot compare. Men err; but God's Word is free from human error and conveys truth from beginning to end.

He who has the Word of God is equipped, having been furnished for every good work.

The lessons of history teach this to us. No wonder Satan's attack is upon the Word of God. Yes, he attacks it in many ways, none more effective than simply getting us to abandon the proper use of our Bibles. Why did the prophet Hosea cry out, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6)? Why? Because the people rejected knowledge. There were times when the Word of God was scarce, but that was God's judgment upon the people for rejecting His prophets. The height of apostasy is for the church either to forbid

God's people God's Word or to corrupt what Word they have. Hence the Reformation was a time of re-forming, for the old was beyond saving. And for the faithful who pay attention to God's Word, Satan has his subtle and not so subtle ways to attack the Word of God itself or those who are determined to declare it. If the blood of translators and publishers cannot stop the distribution, the devil

If the blood of translators and publishers cannot stop the distribution, the devil quietly gets the job done by higher criticism and corrupt translations.

quietly gets the job done by higher criticism and corrupt translations. He never stops, for our enemy knows the battle of faith is over the Word of God.

Why is that Word so special? Why is it so effective in the lives of God's people, and why does it consequently draw like a lightening rod the sparks of hostility from the enemy of the church?

The answer is in this passage as well, "All scripture is given by inspi-

ration of God." The Scriptures which are referred to here are first of all the Old Testament writings which Timothy had learned from a child. In addition to them, the "all" refers to those New Testament writings which were already available to the church. Some of these writings were copies of the original manuscripts; some were translations from copies, for in all likelihood Timothy's mother used the Greek version of the Old Testament as well. Paul isn't interested in getting into the issue whether the autographs were inspired, whether copies are inspired, whether translations are inspired. He simply says, and that through the Holy Spirit, that *all* the Scriptures, no matter which ones Timothy used and which ones were in use in the early church, came by inspiration. The original ones were uniquely inspired, but since the copies and translations have come from that original, we can say we have an inspired Bible. This does not negate necessary and careful textual criticism and examination of translations. It rather establishes our faith and certainty that when we do the above prayerfully and carefully, we do have the Word of God.

Inspiration is the key. We saved the best for last.

The Holy Bible is God-breathed. Yes, many times God breathed in the realm of His creation. The Spirit, whose very Name means "Breath," brooded upon the face of the deep in the creative act of God. God breathed into Adam's nostrils and Adam became a living soul. All things are also sustained by God's breath. The great work of re-creation is a mighty breath of the Holy Spirit. We sing, "Breathe on me, Breath of God." The work of inspiration is another aspect of this Work of the Holy Spirit. Our Bible did not come by the will of men, not even the cooperative act of God and man. It came by the mighty will and work of God Himself. Just as He planned history from eternity, He planned all 66 books of the Bible and the place each would have in the finished canon. He saw to it that each writer would have the exact character and quality

to write what portion was his. He moved them to desire to write and to take up the task, which could not have been an easy one. At the right time and place, God gave them revelation or enabled them to make perfect use of pre-existing information and guided their hand to write perfectly. The miracle is that each wrote in his own personal style and vocabulary, yet each wrote exactly as God wanted him to write. The end product was free from human error and possessed the stamp of God Himself. Eventually the church was guided by the same Author to select the 66 books, so that we have a complete and finished revelation of God which we call the Bible.

Amazing, yet not beyond imagi-

nation, for God is an Amazing God. All His works force us to say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him and through him and to him are all things: to whom be glory forever, Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

What a blessing it is to observe the precious work of God in the Reformation of the mid-sixteenth century.

There was a time when the church service and the Bible were in a foreign language, unintelligible to the com-

mon people. Living in Singapore we can identify with such difficulties. What a blessing to possess a Bible, to be able to read it and grow by it, to enjoy the lively preaching of God's Word which expounds its truth and applies its principles.

Change has taken place.

Not easily, for the pages of this history are written in the blood of the martyrs.

God has seen fit to continue to equip us with the Word, so necessary to be properly furnished in order that we may be rich in good works.

Not the heretic, nor the sword, is our greatest enemy today.

It is plain old dust! And it is everywhere.

May we who read, beware. □

Editorial

"Far Brighter even than the Sun"

It is well known that Martin Luther's great work, *The Bondage of the Will*, sets forth the Reformation's central doctrine of salvation by the sovereign grace of God alone. The introduction to J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston's translation of *The Bondage* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957; the quotations that follow are taken from this fine translation) calls the book "the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther's pen." It quotes the Reformation scholar E. Gordon Rupp as approving the description of *The Bondage* as "the finest and most powerful Soli Deo Gloria to be sung in the whole period of the Reformation." Accurately, it identifies the message of *The Bondage* as the heart of the theology of all the Reformers: "the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only."

What is not so well known is that

this grand work on the central message of the gospel also puts forward a splendid defense of Holy Scripture as the source and standard of the gospel. This defense focuses on the clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture. Clarity is a quality of Scripture that is somewhat overlooked in the struggle of the Reformed church today to maintain a sound doctrine of Scripture. To the mind of Luther, clarity is basic to a sound doctrine of Scripture and to the functioning of Scripture as the Word of God in the church. Denial of Scripture's clarity is the destruction of the doctrine of Scripture.

The defense of Scripture's clarity is no incidental aspect of *The Bondage*. With this, Luther begins. It is a recurring theme in the book, undergirding the message of sovereign grace. *The Bondage* presents the two great truths of the Reformation, sovereign grace and the authority of

Scripture, in their unity.

The reason for Luther's consideration of the clarity of Scripture lay in the book that occasioned his writing *The Bondage*. This was Erasmus' defense of free will, *A Diatribe or Sermon concerning Free Will*. In his attack on Luther's teaching that the will of fallen man is enslaved to sin, Erasmus suggested that Scripture is not clear on the issue of the bound or free will:

If (wrote Erasmus) you turn your eyes to Scripture, both sides claim it as their own. Furthermore, our controversy is not merely over Scripture (which is somewhat deficient in clarity at present), but over the precise meaning of Scripture; and here not the numbers, learning and distinction on the one side, much less the paucity, ignorance and lack of distinction on the other, can advance either cause (p. 123).

The implication, Luther notes, is that "the matter is therefore left in doubt."

Luther regards Erasmus' opinion that Scripture is obscure as grave error. The result of this notion in the church will be that the views of men replace the Word of God:

No more disastrous words could be spoken; for by this means ungodly men have exalted themselves above the Scriptures and done what they liked, till the Scriptures were completely trodden down and we could believe and teach nothing but maniacs' dreams. In a word, that dictum is no mere human invention; it is poison sent into the world by the inconceivable malevolent prince of all the devils himself! (p. 124)

It was exactly this doubt concerning Scripture's clarity that enabled the pope to subdue the church, and Scripture, to himself:

On the same account I have thus far hounded the Pope, in whose kingdom nothing is more commonly said or more widely accepted than this dictum: "the Scriptures are obscure and equivocal; we must seek the interpreting Spirit from the apostolic see of Rome!" (p. 124)

Expressing a conviction that would become the foundation of the Reformation, Luther asserts that the Scriptures are clear — "far brighter even than the sun":

It should be settled as fundamental, and most firmly fixed in the minds of Christians, that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun, especially in what relates to salvation and all essential matters (p. 125).

The entire Scripture is clear. Scripture is clear in its totality. The whole of it is light, not darkness. The difficult passages are clarified by the other passages.

The clarity of Scripture is two-fold, internal and external. The internal clarity is the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, which gives understand-

ing of all the teachings of the Scriptures. Every believer has this enlightening. The external clarity is the inherent perfection of Scripture itself. The Holy Book is not obscure or ambiguous. Rather, its meaning is plain (pp. 73, 74; 124, 125).

Two important qualifications attach to the external clarity of Scripture. The first is that Scripture is clear to believers through the preaching of Scripture: "all that is in the Scripture is *through the Word* brought forth into the clearest light" (p. 74; my emphasis — DJE).

This is intriguing. Luther personally and the Reformation generally refused to separate Scripture from the preaching of Scripture. Scripture is light, but it shines through faithful preaching, not otherwise.

The second qualification attaching to the external clarity is that Scripture must be interpreted in its simple, natural sense. Clarity rejects, indeed abominates, the allegorizing methods of interpretation. Luther condemns Origen and Jerome for their "pestilent practice of paying no heed to the simple sense of Scripture" (p. 240; cf. pp. 191, 192).

What proof is there that Scripture is clear? This is an urgent question especially because Erasmus had raised the argument that many men of superior ability did not understand Scripture on the issue of the bound will as Luther explained it. Does this not prove that Scripture is obscure? The proof of Scripture's clarity, says Luther, is the testimony of Scripture itself. Scripture claims to be clear. Luther cites and explains Deuteronomy 17:8; Psalm 19:8; Psalm 119:105, 130; Isaiah 8:20; Malachi 2:7; II Corinthians 3, 4; and II Peter 1:19. Luther readily acknowledges that this way of proving Scripture's clarity amounts to "arguing in a circle": One appeals to Scripture to prove that one can appeal to Scripture. But this is the "circle" of the Reformation faith that Scripture is the Word of God.

The reason why many of superior

ability have not understood Scripture rightly is their own natural, sinful blindness. Indeed, Erasmus himself, the most learned scholar in Christendom, denies Scripture's clear teaching of the bound will because he is a blind man standing in the bright rays of the "external clarity" of Scripture:

The church must assert, but she can assert only if Scripture is clear.

The Diatribe (of Erasmus, that is, Erasmus himself — DJE) and its beloved Sophists, standing open-eyed under the bright light of Luke's words and of clear fact, continue in blindness;

such is their lack of care in reading and marking the Scriptures. And then they have to brand them "obscure and ambiguous"! (p. 247)

The church must know the clarity of Scripture for two main reasons. The first is eminently practical: only then will Christians read Scripture. What fool will bother to study and to hear preached an obscure book? By suggesting that Scripture is obscure, Erasmus "well-nigh frightened us off reading the Bible altogether — though Bible-reading is something to which Christ and the Apostles urgently exhort us" (p. 99). In Erasmus' charge that "in Scripture some things are recondite and all is not plain," Luther sees the horns and hooves of Satan:

Satan has used these unsubstantial spectres to scare men off reading the sacred text, and to destroy all sense of its value, so as to ensure that his own brand of poisonous philosophy reigns supreme in the church (p. 71).

The second reason why the church must be convinced of Scripture's clarity is that only then will the church make "assertions." Concern that the church make "assertions" is the heart of Luther's defense of the clarity of Scripture in *The Bondage*. By "assertions," Luther means firm confessions of all the teachings of Scripture. Included is the rejection of all errors.

By "assertion" I mean staunchly hold-

ing your ground, stating your position, confessing it, defending it and persevering in it unvanquished (p. 66).

So uncompromising is the asserting Christian that he is ready "to die for what you confess and assert" (p. 67).

Luther takes up this matter of asserting at the outset of *The Bondage* because Erasmus had disparaged assertions. Erasmus found no satisfaction in assertions, preferring "an undogmatic temper to any other." Erasmus of Rotterdam, uncharacteristic Dutchman, was the compromiser, ready to give up doctrine for peace. This marked him, as far as Luther was concerned, as no genuine Christian, for "to take no pleasure in assertions is not the mark of a Christian heart; indeed, one must delight in assertions to be a Christian at all" (p. 66). Asserting is the essence of Christianity: "Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity" (p. 67).

The true church of Christ is an asserting church. Every real Christian is an asserting Christian. Particularly, every true church and every real Christian assert the bondage of the will of the natural man and the salvation of every sinner by sovereign grace alone.

The alternative is doubt and uncertainty about the doctrines of the Bible, that is, skepticism. This is impossible, in Luther's glorious statement, because

the Holy Spirit is no Sceptic, and the things He has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions — surer and more certain than sense and life itself (p. 70).

The church must assert, but she can assert only if Scripture is clear, since she asserts "what has been delivered to us from above in the Sacred Scriptures" (p. 66).

How evident it is that Protestant churches and professing Protestant Christians at the end of the 20th century have lost the faith that Scripture is clear!

They cannot assert!

They cannot assert the bondage of the will. They cannot assert biblical creation. They cannot assert the cessation of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. They cannot assert the exclusion of women from the government of the church. They cannot assert the wickedness of divorce except for fornication. They cannot assert the lawfulness of sex only in the lifelong bond

of marriage between a husband (male) and wife (female).

They can only assert that there ought not be assertions in the church.

Their synodical decisions and personal testimonies run like this: "Scripture does not make clear, and we cannot decide with certainty...."

What use, we ask, is a Scripture that is unclear on every issue? Whatever could have been the motivation of an otherwise wise God to give us more obscurity in our already sufficient darkness of uncertainty?

But, of course, to propose obscurity as an attribute of Scripture is to open up the way of every error into the church. Pleading uncertainty and appealing to Scripture's obscurity, Desiderius Erasmus, in fact, advocated free will and opposed the gospel of salvation by the grace of God.

The need of the hour is that churches and Christians assert. They must assert every doctrine of Scripture. They must especially assert the doctrine of the bound will.

They must assert, but they also can and will assert.

For the Scriptures are "a spiritual light far brighter even than the sun."

□
— DJE

Prof. Herman Hanko

The Reformation and Biblical Interpretation

Introduction

One part of the great heritage of the Protestant Reformation, to which we owe so much, is its doctrine of

Scripture. Not only did the Reformation return the Scriptures to the church, but the Reformers laid down fundamental principles of biblical interpretation which the church has followed to the present. Many, even in Reformed and Presbyterian circles, have abandoned these principles in the interests of accommodation to modern secular trends and scientific

discoveries, but the church which is faithful to the Word has cherished what the Reformers insisted on as the only correct method of biblical interpretation.

Medieval Background

To understand properly the valuable and significant contribution of the Reformers in this area, we ought

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to have some idea of the false teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in the years preceding the Reformation.

The Romish Church effectively took the Bible from the people of God. It did this in the firm belief that only a trained and ordained clergy was capable of understanding Scripture. Not only did Rome consider the Bible in itself to be difficult of interpretation, but it denied that the people of God possessed the spiritual ability to understand this difficult and obscure book. It forbade, therefore, the common people to possess and read God's Word, and it persecuted those who attempted to translate the Scriptures into the common tongue and distribute God's Word to God's people. Tyndale was killed for translating the Scriptures into the English language.

The obscurity of the Scriptures was due, according to Rome, to the fact that Scripture had a fourfold meaning. Different levels of interpretation required someone extremely skilled to penetrate to the lower levels where the true meaning of Scripture lay.

Furthermore, Scripture derived its authority from the church. And, while this meant many different things, it also meant that only the church possessed the authority to interpret Scripture. What the church said Scripture meant, that was its true meaning.

Thus the Bible was forcibly snatched from the hands of God's people. And so it is today. With the methods of interpretation employed by those who defend women in office, evolutionism, homosexuality, the Bible has become a closed book to all but the "experts." It is no wonder that Bible study is on the decline. Who cares to read a book which one cannot understand anyway in its true meaning? Why read God's narrative of creation if the Bible does not mean what it says? Reading is an exercise in futility.

The Doctrine of Scripture

With a few minor exceptions, all the Reformers of the 16th century Reformation agreed on the doctrine of Scripture. Luther, Zwingli, Knox, Calvin, and all the second-generation Reformers held to the truth that Scripture is a unique and God-inspired book.

The whole question of the nature of inspiration was not discussed much by the Reformers, chiefly because it was not an issue with Rome. But that Scripture in all its parts and down to its very words was the Word of God was firmly held. Calvin writes in his commentary on II Timothy

3:16: "All those who wish to profit from the Scriptures must first accept this as a settled principle, that the Law and the prophets are not teachings handed on at the pleasure of men or produced by men's minds as their source, but are dictated by the Holy Spirit.... We owe to the Scripture the same reverence as we owe to God, since it has its only source in Him and has nothing of human origin mixed with it."

Along with this truth of inspiration, the Reformers also believed that Scripture was the sole authority in matters of faith and life. This was the truth, sometimes called "the formal principle of the Reformation," of *sola scriptura* — by Scripture alone.

It is sad that this principle has been so recklessly abandoned today. Those who support evolutionism use as one of their arguments that the creation clearly demonstrates evolutionism; that the creation is also God's revelation; and that, therefore, we must accept the testimony of creation along with Scripture. Many of those who attempt to promote women in ecclesiastical office openly admit that Scripture is opposed to this notion; but they insist that Scripture must be interpreted in the light of our modern

*"We owe
to the Scripture
the same
reverence
as we owe
to God."*

*Scripture is
self-authenticating
in its authority.*

times. Thus Scripture is no longer the sole authority for our faith (in creation) and our life (in the church of Christ).

This authority of the Scriptures is not given to God's Word by the church. The Scriptures are self-authenticating. The second point of "The Ten Conclusions of Berne" (1528), drawn up under Zwingli's influence, stated: "The Church of Christ makes no laws or commandments apart from the Word of God; hence all human traditions are not binding upon us except so far as they are grounded upon or prescribed in the Word of God." Luther's stirring appeal to Scripture at the Diet of Worms was a total commitment to the authority of Scripture, although he had come to this position two years earlier at the Disputation of Leipzig where he had debated with the Roman theologian John Eck.

The authority of Scripture was, by the Reformers, based foursquare on the principle of Scripture's perspicuity. Scripture is clear and easy to understand. But Scripture's perspicuity was, in turn, based on the truth that the literal meaning of Scripture is the correct one. Scripture means what it says; thus Scripture is clear; thus Scripture is self-authenticating in its authority.

Rules for Biblical Interpretation *The Grammatico-Historical Method*

When Rome spoke of four levels of meaning in Scripture, Rome held to an allegorical method of interpretation. All Scripture is basically allegorical.

Over against this view, the Reformers held to the grammatico-historical method. By this they meant several things.

They meant, first of all, that Scripture is the record of God's revelation in history, and that a text must be explained in its historical setting. One must understand what the temple meant for Solomon and Israel when it was built in order to understand what God is saying to us

in the building of the temple.

Secondly, Scripture is written in human language and must be interpreted according to the rules of Hebrew and Greek. God wrote Scripture in our language so that we could understand it. God spoke of Himself in such a way that it is clear to us what He says. Calvin compared God's speech to us as the "lisper" of a nurse maid who speaks to a child in a way the child can understand.

Thirdly, the grammatico-historical method meant that Scripture was to be taken literally. While this principle cannot be so rigidly applied to Scripture that even figures of speech and symbols are taken literally (as the Anabaptists attempted to explain Scripture), Scripture itself will clearly indicate when it is not to be taken in its absolutely literal sense. Luther put it this way: "The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the literal sense, as they call it. For it alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology; it alone holds its ground in trouble and trial."

Fourthly, this literal sense destroys allegory once and for all. Luther had learned the hopelessness of allegory while he was a monk, and he sharply condemned such interpretation as "mere jugglery," "a merry chase," "monkey tricks," and "looney talk."

Again today the church is beset by those who wish to resort to allegory to learn from Scripture by allegory that which is not clearly taught,

and indeed to learn even that which is contrary to Scripture. Harold Camping has even discovered the date of Christ's return by hopeless allegory, and he leads many astray. The Reformers would have none of it.

The Reformers did not deny that some Scriptures were more difficult to understand than others; but, so says Luther, "a doubtful and obscure passage must be explained by a clear and certain passage," for, "Scripture is its own light. It is a fine thing when Scripture explains itself."

Christ-centered Interpretation

It is, said the Reformers, the literal meaning of Scripture which will lead us to Christ. Allegory hid Christ. The literal meaning leads the believer to Christ. "He who would read the Bible," Luther says, "must simply take heed that he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and led, but let no one lead it according to his own inclinations but let him lead it to the source, that is, the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center." The literal meaning "drives home Christ."

Christ is the "center" of Scripture, for Scripture reveals to us our salvation and leads us to Christ. "Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it."

The Spirit Interprets Scripture

Perhaps the most fundamental

principle of all is the Reformers' insistence that the Holy Spirit alone interprets Scripture.

This means two things.

It means, first of all, that Scripture interprets Scripture. The Reformers insisted that this principle, sometimes call the "analogy of faith," was not merely a principle of convenience. By it they meant that Scripture was the Spirit's book, for it was inspired by the Spirit as a unity; and the Spirit used His own writings in one place to explain His writings in another place.

But, secondly, and equally important, the Spirit was the Interpreter of Scripture in the hearts of the people of God. Reason cannot explain Scripture, for the man who relies upon reason is an unbeliever whose mind is darkened. To him Scripture is a "closed book." Scripture, Luther said, "is foreign and strange to reason, and particularly to the worldly-wise. No man can accept it unless his heart has been touched and opened by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit alone can open the Scriptures because the Holy Spirit gives faith by which we lay hold on Christ taught us in God's Word.

Thus the interpreter of Scripture is the man who comes to Scripture in humility, seeking to be taught by the Holy Spirit that he may take Christ as his all-sufficient Savior.

Would that these towering principles of the Reformation would still today be the confession of the church!



Prof. Robert Decker

The Believer and His Bible

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The sixteenth century Reformation proclaimed three fundamental principles: justification by faith alone, Scripture alone, and the priesthood of all believers. In opposition to Rome's hierarchy the Reformers insisted that the only authority for the faith and life

of God's people is Holy Scripture. They further insisted that every believer as prophet, priest, and king in Christ could read and understand the Word of God. Rome had effectively taken the Bible out of the hands of the people. Rome's hierarchy, the clergy

and especially the pope, stood between the believer and his Bible. The church (clerical hierarchy) interpreted the Bible for the people (laity).

Today a new hierarchy has arisen in the churches, *viz.* that of the professional theologians, the archaeologists and geologists, the scientists, the learned scholars. These are telling us that we cannot understand the Bible anymore. They are telling us that the Bible does not say what we have always thought it says. Furthermore, because of this they are telling us we need them to tell us what the Bible really means and how it applies to our lives today. They represent a new hierarchy between the believer and his Bible.

According to this new hierarchy the Bible contains man's witness to God or to Jesus. What we have in the Bible is the record of the various writers' religious experiences or encounters with God. The Pentateuch is the record of Moses' encounter with God. Isaiah witnesses to God as he and his contemporaries experienced God. The Evangelists wrote about Jesus as they saw and heard Him. The same is true of the apostles and other writers of the New Testament. The early church gradually adopted these writings as sacred Scripture.

The Bible, therefore, is *time bound* according to these experts. It was written in its own time in history, and its writers were limited by the times in which they lived. They were influenced by the primitive vision of the ancient world of Bible times. They conceived, for example, of a three-storied universe: heaven above, the earth beneath, and hell under the earth. They thought that the sun revolved around a flat earth. The biblical writers had many other mistaken notions as well, such as, for example, the following: the world was created by God in six twenty-four hour days, there was a universal flood, an ax head floated, Jonah was in the belly of a great fish, a dry path was made through the Red Sea, water out of a rock went bouncing along after Israel in the desert. These men wrote in their times and for their times, but

now in our scientific and sophisticated age we know better. Either these things just did not occur or there is a natural explanation for them.

These men also say that the Bible is *culturally conditioned*. Each writer wrote in the context of his own culture, and this affected his witness to God. When, for example, Paul wrote about marriage and divorce, or about the headship of the husband, or about women keeping silence in the churches and not usurping the authority of the man in the church, Paul was under the influence of his rabbinical training and the cultural mores of his day. Likewise were the other biblical writers limited by the cultural influences of their day.

All this radically alters how we are to understand the Bible. The Bible, according to these scholars, contains myths and teaching models. Genesis 1,2 tells us that God created the universe, but not how and when. Genesis 3 teaches that the human race fell into sin and death, but no more than that. The Bible contains misconceptions arising out of primitive conceptions of reality. And there are just plain errors in the Bible. One of these is the Bible's account of creation. Science has proved a very old universe. The earth simply cannot be about six thousand years old as Scripture teaches. Adam and Eve were not real people living in a real garden called Eden or Paradise. Further, what Paul said about women applied in his day when women ran around with veils and were living in a male-dominated society. But all this does not apply in our enlightened times.

Many factors are involved in interpreting the Bible. Two questions need to be answered in Bible interpretation: What did the writer mean by this passage relative to his own time and culture, and what does it mean for us today? The answers to those two questions often

are quite different. In Paul's day women had to keep silence in the churches, while today they may occupy church office. In Paul's day homosexuality and lesbianism were considered a manifestation of the reprobate mind; while today such people may occupy not only the pew but also the pulpit.

Thus it is, we are being told, that we need to know ancient history, culture, language, mythology, philosophy, archeology, and the sciences, if we are to be equipped to understand the Bible. Of course, we need to know these disciplines if we are to expound the Bible correctly. But the theologians mean something quite different. They mean that if there is a conflict between one's scientific discoveries and the Bible, one must reconsider the traditional interpretation of the Bible and be willing to change. Science determines the meaning of the Bible.

The conclusion is that God's people really cannot understand the Bible. We are not equipped to read it correctly. We need the theologians, linguists, and scientists to tell us what the Bible is *really* saying.

And so it is that a new hierarchy has arisen in the churches, that of the theologians and scholars. These must tell us the meaning of Scripture. Without them we cannot understand what we read in the Bible. Just as effectively as Rome, these have placed themselves between God's people and the Bible. They have effectively taken the Bible out of the hands of the people of God.

This is very serious indeed! The church has always confessed, and the Reformation reasserted, these precious truths that the Bible is inspired and therefore infallible. The Reformation also asserted that the Bible is perspicuous, or clear. Because the Bible is inspired and infallible it is the only rule for our

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faith and life. And in the Bible God speaks to us in language which we can understand. The question or issue we face is not whether we can or do *understand* what the Bible is saying, but whether we *believe* what the Bible is saying? This is, no doubt, at least one of the reasons Jesus told us we had to become as little children in order to enter the kingdom of God. This writer teaches a catechism class of six-year-old children. These little ones have no difficulty understanding that Jesus was born of the virgin, that He healed the sick and raised the dead, that He suffered and died on the cross and was raised from the dead and now sits at God's right hand in glory and is coming again at the

end of the ages. The Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15).

Our calling is plain! We must let no one, no synods, no theologians, no experts take our Bibles away from us. Still more, we must insist that the Word of God be faithfully preached. And faithfully means properly. The church does not need Sunday School stories from the pulpit, or dissertations on political or social issues. The believer needs to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd (John 10) by means of preaching. Without faithful preaching we cannot call upon the name of the Lord in faith and be saved (cf.

Romans 10:13-15) Faithful preaching is preaching that expounds the Word of God. The sermons we hear must contain nothing more or less than what Scripture itself says. And we need to search the Scriptures daily, prayerfully to meditate on the Word of God.

By these means we may be assured that the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16).

Following the example of Martin Luther let each of us, with Bible in hand, say to the new hierarchy, "Here I stand, I can do naught else, God help me." □

Rev. Jerome Julien

Reformation, Revival, and Scripture's Authority

Today the church of Jesus Christ is being torn apart. This should not surprise us, since Scripture reminds us that this will happen. The fact remains, however, that this is happening, and it is very painful. If we carefully analyze this terrible situation, we realize immediately that this is happening because Scripture's authority is being undermined. In one way or another all of the problems in the church can be traced to this undermining.

The oldest temptation in the world continues to plague us. When Satan came to Eve, it was with the words, "Has God said?" We all know what God said and that His words were a command! Nevertheless, Adam and Eve disobeyed God. What they ques-

tioned was the truth of God and the authority of His words.

Today, things are no different. Concerning Scripture, the question is either, "Has God said?" or "What can we add to, or how can we get around Scripture?" The issues of feminism, homosexuality, theistic evolution — or just plain evolution — to name a few, which tear apart the church have their source in a denial of the authority of Scripture.

Unfortunately, those who call themselves Protestants — sons of the Reformation — have begun to sing a very un-Protestant song! The song which the Reformers sang had several stanzas, one of which was *Sola Scriptura*. Today their song is not being heard!

Through the dark years of the Middle Ages, Scripture was more and more overshadowed by church traditions and dogmas. Officially, the

Church of Rome held to the inspiration of Scripture. In 1546, the Council of Trent made it clear that the Scriptures were dictated by the Holy Spirit. However, in the same breath were included the "unwritten traditions."

Over against this stood the Reformers, for whom Scripture alone had the ultimate authority — the first and last word. This was true because it is God's Word. Luther, in 1520, said that the disturbance in the church world, i.e., the Reformation, was because of the Word of God.

The difference between Rome and the Reformers was not over the authority of Scripture, but over what came first. For Rome the church existed in time and logically before the Scriptures. Therefore, the Scriptures owe their existence to the church. The church could exist without the Scriptures, but not the Scriptures without the church. Authority was vested

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first in the church. Thus, the Council of Trent could lump Scripture and tradition together and see them both as authored by God. The Reformers, on the other hand, saw Scripture as having authority, not because it is given or declared by the church, but because it came from God alone, being inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures must be believed because of what they are. Since they are God's Word, God's people must be in subjection to them. Of course, this was the reason why the Reformation brought a rebirth to the ancient practice of preaching.

The Confessions of the Reformation underscored this. Article V of the Belgic Confession states: "We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith...." Notice: "and these only." Article VII adds: "it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to *add unto or take away anything from the Word of God*, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all parts." Other confessions indicated the very same thing.

The development since those early days has been at the same time predictable and very strange.

The development is predictable as far as Rome is concerned. She went so far as to declare that to deny the inspiration of the Bible is anathema (1870)! But even though she continued to declare the inspiration of Scripture, and thus its divine origin, Rome also continued to decree extra-biblical ideas as being truth: Mary's immaculate conception, her assumption into heaven, etc. These ideas could become "truth" because they, too, like Scripture, proceeded from the church! How predictable! Although Rome will not deny what Scripture says, she will add to it. Reformed believers have confessed through the centuries that they do not add to Scripture.

Therefore, we must admit that the development in Protestant circles is very strange, indeed. While men give lip service to the Word of God, there are many ways in which the Word is being eclipsed, just as in the days of the Reformation.

For example, the authority of the church bodies is to be accepted without question, according to some Protestant leaders. We hear from them that when the synod speaks it is the voice of God! How strangely like the Catholic statements this is! Does not the Belgic Confession warn us that the church must not ascribe "more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God" (Art. XXIX)? And the tragedy is that, when this kind of pronouncement is made, it is usually without exegetical basis. Instead, necessity and current situations become the reasons! This, of course, is a backhanded way of questioning the authority of Scripture.

We are told that present conditions in the world require certain decisions and actions even though they may even be in direct conflict with Scripture. We are told that Scripture really does not mean to say what we think it says, and what the church throughout the centuries has understood it to say. The present-day method of interpreting Scripture is the reason that these ideas may be voiced!

There is another way in which Scripture's authority is questioned. We find many who would rather read a devotional book than the Bible itself. Ministers often hear from parishioners that they read certain books for devotional purposes. Do not these readers say by their actions that they find men's words more valuable than God's Word? Of course, they would never say that, but in practice they do! Are not devotional books of value? What of the great devotional classics? Certainly, they have value, but never

in place of God's Word.

In still another way — and that seemingly harmless — the authority of Scripture is undermined. There are those who want Bibles with the words of Jesus in red! Why? These words, they tell us, are very important. Some even request sermons on the words of Jesus because they are so outstanding. But is not God's Word the complete Bible? Why should some words be highlighted?

Protestants today have become guilty of exchanging a Pope and his decrees, not for the Bible, but for the voice of their conscience and for their feelings! This began early in the Reformation when some people placed too much emphasis on feelings, and not enough emphasis

on revelation. The histories of this development are fascinating to read. However, what took place back then is still taking place today, only in different clothing.

The rise of emphasis on revelations is a direct assault on the authority of Scripture — and not much different from the Church of Rome, except that Rome says her pronouncements come from the church, but within Protestantism we hear that these revelations come from the individual.

The emphasis on revelations in addition to Scripture grows out of an individualism which elevates man and his feelings. It is made to sound very spiritual, and those who follow that teaching want everyone to know that they are spiritual. However, while we cannot infallibly judge their relationship with the Lord (and should not try), we can say that adding to Scripture is not a sign of spiritual health, as they would have us believe.

Even though they would have us believe that their experience is the result of the witness of the Spirit, their view is a great departure from the historic Reformation view of this witness. The testimony of the Holy Spirit

The emphasis on revelations in addition to Scripture grows out of an individualism which elevates man and his feelings.

as taught by Calvin has always been understood as not being revelation, but that the Holy Spirit works in connection with God's revelation (Calvin, *Institutes*, I, ix, 2). To teach that the witness of the Spirit means that we now receive new truths is a departure from Reformation truth, because Reformation truth is *Sola Scriptura*. And really, how reliable would such revelations be, especially when two folks claim equally authoritative but contrary revelations?

There is one blatant way in which the authority of Scripture is questioned: out and out denial of God's truth. "Has God really said....?" That is the question they ask. Did God

really mean that He created as He said in Scripture? Did God really say that there was a flood in Noah's day? Does God really say that miracles took place during the Old and New Testament eras? There have even been those who question the virgin birth and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, even the Bible as a book has been critiqued as being other than what it says it is.

Sadly, all of this is done in the name of "Protestant" scholarship. But these questions do not arise out of faith—at least, the faith which is born of the Spirit. Nor is it the Reformation faith! It is a strange song being sung by people in disguise.

Only as we return to the faith of our fathers will we see reformation and revival. When the church is weak it is because her commitment to God's truth is at best weak. And that commitment to God's truth is weak because the church is willing to compromise on Scripture. The church must repent of her coldness to God's truth.

Equally important, however, is that the church must not only hold to the truth, but she must *live out* of that truth. Her confession must be her life! Life and confession cannot and must not be separated.

Thus, if we say that Scripture is authoritative, we must demonstrate by our lives that we believe this. □

Theodore P. Letis

The Reformation and the Philosophy of Vernacular Translations of the Bible

Many will be surprised to learn that it was not Luther, nor Calvin, nor Tyndale in the sixteenth century who first advocated that the Bible should be made available to all in their own language. It was a Roman Catholic and Dutch humanist, Desiderius Erasmus (ca. 1466-1536).¹ In his *Paraclesis* (Greek for "exhortation"), a foreword published in his Greek *Novum Instrumentum* (1516) a year before Luther had even posted his *Ninety-Five Theses*, Erasmus had said:

I absolutely dissent from those people who don't want the holy scriptures to be read in translation by the unlearned — as if, forsooth, Christ

taught such complex doctrine that hardly anyone outside a handful of theologians could understand it, or as if the chief strength of the Christian religion lay in people's ignorance of it. Perhaps the state secrets of kings have to be concealed, but Christ wanted his mysteries to be disseminated as widely as possible. I should prefer that all women, even of the lowest rank, should read the evangelists and the epistles of Paul, and I wish these writings were translated into all the languages of the human race, so that they could be read and studied, not just by the Irish and the Scots, but by the Turks as well, and the Saracens.... I would hope that the farmer might chant a holy text at his plow, the spinner sing it as she sits at her wheel, the traveller ease the tedium of his journey with tales from the scripture.... Let each individual grasp what he can, and give expression to what he feels.

If the last remark sounds like the formula for a charismatic prayer meeting, it is not far from Erasmus' goal. While all the Reformers were profoundly indebted to Erasmus' inspiration and nearly all of them put his recommendations into practice, none of them would have been happy with the reductionistic, non-dogmatic, lay Christianity Erasmus envisioned and hoped that popular translations of

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¹ Of course, Wycliffe was earlier than Erasmus, but his effort predated the age of printing and so his influence was much more limited than that of Erasmus.

the Bible might produce. But in twentieth century America, certainly it is Erasmus who has triumphed over the Reformers.

In the sixteenth century, however, it was only the many Anabaptist communities who most radically caught Erasmus' vision to disempower the structures of catholic Christianity — both Protestant as well as Roman — by means of vernacular translations of the Bible. Against hierarchy and creed, these free church traditions were keen to replace received dogmatic and ecclesiastical consensus with a religion by democratic consensus. In seventeenth and eighteenth century England this simple, Erasmian Christianity resulted in the emergence of various non-conformist, anti-trinitarian groups — Socinians, Sabellians, and Unitarians — and eventually Deism. All of these developments were, in one way or another, the result of putting the Bible into the hands of the common man without reference to how the church had interpreted her sacred text.

The magisterial Reformers advocated a different strategy. While they agreed with Erasmus that the Bible should be translated into the vernacular, they never assumed it would be studied outside of the ecclesiastical context, that is, outside of the catholic dogmatic consensus which all Protestants retained while rejecting the unbiblical accretions of Romanism developed during the Middle Ages. Hence, Luther produced the *Small Catechism* and the *Larger Catechism*; and the Lutheran Church as a whole produced the confessional standard, *The Book of Concord*. Calvin in Switzerland produced the *Geneva Catechism* (1541); and in Germany, Hungary, Belgium, and the Netherlands the Reformed produced the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563). In England the Presbyterians produced the *Westminster Standards*. Finally, the Reformed Anglicans had their matchless *Prayer Book* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the twentieth of which recognized the church as "the witness and keeper of Holy Writ."

Each Protestant community had its own confessional standards, all of which assumed the validity of the orthodox standards of the ancient Catholic Church.² As James Moffatt put it,

Calvinists and Lutherans amid all their differences have been agreed, from the outset, that the Church is not a mere conventicle, a self-started body of "pious variers from the Church," gathered round some "heated pulpiteer" or of provincial religionists who belong to one class in the main. The spirit of the authentic creeds, confessions, and testimonies of the Presbyterian Churches may be summed up in the words of the apostle, "I speak of Christ and the Church."³

Therefore, the study of the Bible was always prefigured in confessional Protestant traditions by the received orthodoxy contained in the catechisms, creeds, and confessions.

One of the tenets one learned during catechesis within these confessional traditions was a belief that the Bible was alone the inspired Word of God. And because every word of it was inspired and sacred, it could only be authoritative in a final sense in the *original* languages in which it had been given by inspiration. In the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*:

The Old Testament in Hebrew ... and the New Testament in Greek ... being immediately inspired by God, and, by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic.... so as in all controver-

sies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal to them (WCF 1:8).

So for confessional Protestants, while vernacular translations certainly had their place, ultimately the Greek and Hebrew texts were decisive on matters of belief. This had a definite effect on how these texts were translated. Calvin, for example, "favoured a literal translation, even to the extent of preserving the word order where no difference between Greek and Latin syntax forbade."⁴ Therefore it is not surprising that when Reformers, such as Tyndale, decided to take Erasmus' advice seriously by Englishing the inspired Hebrew and Greek texts, they tended to keep very close to a literal translation, as close as possible to one English word for each inspired word from the Hebrew and Greek texts.

Even then, however, because the Protestant Reformers were all learned men they knew it was impossible to convey *all* of the meaning found in the Greek and Hebrew texts in another language by way of translation. Hence, Francis Turretin, the orthodox Protestant scholastic and heir to Calvin's Geneva Academy, argued — as did all Protestant divines — that although translations

are of great value for the instruction of believers, no other version can or should be regarded as on par with the original [language texts], much less as superior. Because no other version has any weight which the Hebrew or Greek source does not possess *more fully*, since in the sources not only the content ... but also the *very words*, were directly spoken ... by the Holy Spirit, *which cannot be said of any version....* The translations are all streams; the original [language] text the source whence they take their lasting quality. One is the *rule*, the other the *ruled* which has merely human authority (emphasis mine).⁵

² On the place of creeds within the history of the Church a very accessible work is Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ* (Downers Grove, 1984). Although, I find myself at odds regarding Dr. Bray's strange advice advocating that the creeds and confessions should be in modern language, which goes counter to the very idea of static phraseology which accompanies the finality of confessional literature.

³ James Moffatt, *The Presbyterian Churches* 2nd ed. (London, 1928), p. 4.

⁴ T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, 1971), p. 102.

⁵ Francis Turretin, *The Doctrine of Scripture* trans. by J.W. Beardslee III (Grand Rapids, 1981), p. 152.

Therefore, all the qualities that accompany divine inspiration only fully apply to those original language texts in which Scripture was given by inspiration: "a given translation made by human beings subject to error is not to be regarded as divine and infallible verbally," although "it can be properly so regarded *in substance* if it faithfully renders the divine truth of the [original] sources..." (emphasis mine).⁶

That no translation, no matter how carefully or literally rendered, can fully communicate word for word all the meaning of the original languages can be most clearly seen in the historic and official Bible of the Reformed Church of England, the *Authorized Version*. Though the translators sought to retain Tyndale's masterful, literal, word for word rendering from the Greek and Hebrew, when this was not possible and more words were needed in English than were used in the original sources the additional words were placed in italics. This did not mean that these words were unnecessary, unimportant, or superfluous (I once was handed a Bible by someone who believed he had arrived nearer the truth by crossing out all the italicized words in the book of Genesis). Rather, these italicized words signaled what Turretin was at pains to make clear: no translation can fully convey all the meaning from the original languages, which is why the Greek and Hebrew alone must be final.

Where translations failed, preaching was to offer additional clarity. Within historic Reformation churches, liturgy and preaching, in Beardslee's words, "continues the work of Bible translation; hence the importance of an educated ministry."⁷

What happens when the ministry is no longer fully educated as were the Reformation pastors of the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and even the nineteenth centuries; and

what happens when creeds and confessions are jettisoned in favour of "the Bible alone"? The answer is found in two impulses cultivated most fully in the American religious context: 1) *restorationism* and 2) *demythologization*.

Restorationism argues that historic orthodoxy as found in the creeds and confessions of Reformation Christianity reflects a degenerative and defective form of the faith, and what is necessary is a *return* to a more primitive form of Christianity.⁸ This conviction is held by two groups of moderns: 1) those who are interested in reconstructing earlier recensions of the New Testament than that which was preserved and used within historic orthodoxy since the fourth century (sometimes called the Byzantine text, but here I will refer to this as the *Ecclesiastical text* since it became normative outside as well as inside of the Eastern or Byzantine Church); 2) those Anabaptist communities who reject creeds and confessions, believing their churches alone have retained the primal Christian tradition. Oddly enough, many fundamentalists in this group have clung to the old Anglican Bible because of a defective historiography which claims this Bible represents a now lost MS tradition reaching back to the earliest, first century, Anabaptist communities.⁹ Both groups are menacing because the former are never able to arrive at a consensus, thus they continue to offer approximation after approximation while the data remains in flux; while the latter have in a misinformed and confused way instilled in the English of the Anglican Bible all the qualities which Reformation scholars attributed exclusively to the original language texts.

⁸ A wonderful introduction to this phenomenon is Richard T. Hughes, ed. *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana, 1988).

⁹ For a brief study of this see, Theodore P. Letis, *The Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text and the Claims of the Anabaptists* (Fort Wayne, 1993).

The Demythologizers are those who are not interested in either *preserving* catholic consensus in Bible translation, or *restoring* a more primitive and alien, ancient, Near-Eastern religious tradition—they simply want to communicate in contemporary idiom.¹⁰ These are the pragmatists bred in business schools and in mass-media journalism and communication departments in many American universities. They have little scholarly interest but know how to make the Bible sell. Hence, everything that would be a barrier to communicating the bare essentials of the Bible so that, in Erasmus' words, "each individual [can] grasp what he can, and give expression to what he feels" is demythologized, that is, made contemporary. One demythologizes the Bible in translation, that is, casts its message in terms that are relevant to various special interest groups, to certain ideologically oriented communities (e.g., feminists), or to those seriously deficient culturally or intellectually, for purposes of cultivating diversified markets. Here we discover the very inversion of Turretin's principle: the ruled (translations) now become the rule (the true standard for what is the essence of Christianity) and the verbal content of the original languages is left behind. Gerald Hammond put it this way:

The basic distinction between the Renaissance [and Reformation] and modern translators is one of fidelity to their original. Partly the loss of faith in the Hebrew and Greek as the definitive word of God has led to the translator's loss of contact with it, but more responsibility lies in the belief that a modern Bible should aim not to tax its readers' linguistic or interpretive abilities one bit. If this aim is to be achieved then it seems

¹⁰ I cannot take credit for this analysis concerning Bultmann's project as it applies to modern Bible translations since I am indebted to Jakob VanBruggen's observation on this point in his important, *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville, 1978). This is soon to be reprinted by the Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies.

⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

⁷ Ibid., p. 154, no. 3.

clear that a new Bible will have to be produced for every generation — each one probably moving us further away from the original text, now that the initial break has been made.¹¹

This is a major, neglected theme in American religious studies which could go a long way in explaining the state of much of modern American Christianity.

¹¹ Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (New York, 1983), pp. 12, 13.

The only antidote to this plight is for those small remnant Reformation communities who still retain confessional and catholic integrity to act as salt and light in this insipid and ever dimming age. With little promise of success they must walk by faith and not by sight and celebrate their distinctives with intelligence, dignity, and winsomeness¹² in hopes of at-

¹² I should like to thank my friend, Wallace Bell, for teaching me the value of a "Winsome Christianity."

tracting with the full fragrance of the old classic translations those whose senses have been dulled by the pollutants of modernity (II Cor. 2:14-17).¹³ □

¹³ For those interested in an academic organization intended to assist in this project, please write for a free bibliography and information to: *The Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies*, P.O. Box 5114, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46895.

Rev. Russell Dykstra

Whence the Authority of the Bible?

Or: Why the Great Reformers Preached with Confidence

The great Reformation of Luther and Calvin was preeminently a preaching Reformation. Both Calvin and Luther were powerful preachers, as were many of the other leaders in the Reformation. They were great theologians who ably defended the doctrines of the Reformation in print. Yet the power that carried the Reformation into the hearts and lives of the people was their preaching of Christ crucified, salvation by grace, justification by faith, and the necessary God-glorifying life. In short, they preached the truths of the Bible; and, by this, God "re-formed" the church back to the standards of the Scripture.

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For the Reformers, the question always came back to this — What does the Bible teach? Their insistence on the inspiration of the Bible was in the interest of proclaiming the authoritative message of the gospel. Clearly, if the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then the faithful preaching of the Bible has great authority! If it is not inspired, then the preaching is but the opinion of man. The Reformers insisted that the Bible as God's Word is the only rule for faith and life.

Exactly over this issue has arisen a particularly deceptive attack on Scripture's authority. Arising out of the Reformed camp, it maintains that the Bible is inspired only as far as its main message is concerned. This view maintains that, because God gave the Bible in order to give a saving knowledge of Himself, any given passage in

it is inspired and authoritative only in so far as it contains that saving knowledge. On any other topic the Bible has no divine authority, being fallible and quite possibly unreliable. Since the emphasis is on the divine, inspired message of the Bible, this might seem at first to be in harmony with the Reformation's emphasis on the authoritative message of the gospel. On the contrary, it is an attack on the very foundation of an inspired and infallible Bible and consequently on the authoritative proclamation of the gospel.

The idea that the authority of Scripture depends on its content is not new. In the 1890s Dr. Benjamin Warfield criticized the view of a certain Dr. Evans in the Presbyterian churches who said that "he accepted the Scriptures as an infallible rule of

faith and practice, and not as infallible in their every statement"; and that "when we acknowledge the Scriptures to be an infallible rule, we do not affirm them to be inerrant in their statements of history and science."¹ Dr. Evans maintained that the Bible is the product of the divine and the human. How is one to discriminate between the two elements? According to Dr. Evans "the divine element concerns only what 'makes wise unto salvation'; all that makes wise unto anything else is human."²

More recently in Reformed circles the same idea has found increased support. For example, in 1972 the Christian Reformed Church approved a report on the Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority (Report 36/44) which gives evidence of this kind of thinking. It states that "Scripture presents itself solely as a divine self-revelation of God for redemptive purposes" (p. 14). It adds that "the issue now is whether the church can come to greater clarity on the nature and extent of biblical authority and what has been called 'the connection between the content and purpose of Scripture as the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the subsequent and deducible authority of Scripture'" (p. 14, emphasis mine, RJD).

That last is a very telling statement. It can only mean, first of all, that Scripture has authority *because* it reveals salvation in Christ. And secondly, Scripture has divine authority only *when* it reveals salvation in Christ. It follows that when the Bible touches on other areas, as, for example, science or history, it does not have God's authority behind it. Then it becomes some man's account, no more reliable than any other record. The Bible is inspired (authoritative) in matters of redemption only.

Now if this meant merely that the Bible does not describe the creation

with scientific language (e.g., that in describing the sun's movement the Bible says the sun arose or went down instead of saying the sun revolved around the earth), no one would disagree. If this meant that the Bible does not give a complete account of historical events, again, any Reformed man would agree. Those facts do not detract from Scripture's authority one iota. But this is not the force of the above. Subsequent debates on Genesis 1-11 show that some favor the accounts of history drawn from the clay tablets of ancient civilizations over the Bible's account of early history. Others accept the findings of unbelieving scientists on the origin of the universe as a better explanation than the Bible gives. Why? Because history and science are outside of the Bible's redemptive purpose. The accounts of the Bible are not more authoritative than other studies.

In practice then, if scientific studies support the biblical account of creation, one may accept it as genuine; if science disagrees with the Bible, he may feel free to go with science. If the written histories of Egypt and Babylon substantiate the Bible in a given passage, you can trust the Bible's account there. If the other records contradict the biblical record, the scholarly conclusion is that the writer in the Bible was mistaken. To say that the Bible is mistaken, that it is, in fact, replete with errors of this kind, does not trouble these men. They rather piously reassure us that the Bible is still reliable on matters of redemption. Your salvation and faith in God need not be affected.

Really?

Putting aside for now the obvious and devastating effect this will have on the believer's trust in the Bible and his confidence in God, its Author, face the question, Is this the language and thinking of the Refor-

mation? It is not. Search as you will, you will not find such ideas from the pen of Calvin, Luther, and the rest of the Reformers. They did not consider the Bible to be inspired only as to its

main message. They considered the Bible to be the divinely inspired Word of God, and after maintaining such they did not play around with silly distinctions that weakened or destroyed it. The authority of the Bible, and thus of the preaching, is not due to the content of the passage; it is due simply to the fact that the passage is from the Bible, God's Word. Although the following

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(from Calvin's *Institutes*) was addressed to the Romish Church, it applies well to the errors of today. "A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed — viz. that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God could depend on the will of men. With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times?" (I, VII, 1).

The Catechism of the city of Geneva written by Calvin, to the question, "How are you to use it [the Holy Scriptures] in order to profit from it?" replies "By embracing it with entire heartfelt persuasion, as certain truth come down from heaven...."

The confessions of the Reformation addressed the question of the Bible and the consequent authority of biblical preaching. Consider the Tetrapolitan [Four Cities] Confession (1530), formulated largely by Martin Bucer for the Swiss/German Reformed Churches. Chapter 1 of the Subject Matter of Sermons:

... We ... enjoined our preachers to teach from the pulpit nothing else than is either contained in the Holy

¹ *Limited Inspiration*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962, p. 3.

² Warfield, p. 9.

Scriptures or hath sure ground therein. For it seemed to us not improper to resort in such a crisis whither of old and always ... the children of God everywhere, have always resorted — viz., to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1562) powerfully asserts the authority of the Bible, simply because it is the Word of God. (Chapter 1)

We believe and confess the Canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spake to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures....

We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be taken true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as

also instruction in all duties of piety; and, to be short, the confirmation of doctrines, and the confutation of all errors, with all exhortations; according to that word of the Apostle, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof," etc. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Again, "These things write I unto thee," says the Apostle to Timothy, "that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God," etc. (1 Tim. 3:14, 15). Again, the selfsame Apostle to the Thessalonians: "When," says he, "ye received the Word of us, ye received not the word of men, but as it was indeed, the Word of God," etc. (1 Thess. 2:13). For the Lord himself has said in the Gospel, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaketh in you": therefore "he that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me" (Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20).

Wherefore when this Word of God

is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is preached, and received of the faithful....

In the end, the views of the Reformers do not determine what we believe about the Bible, its inspiration and authority. But these great spiritual giants were not ashamed to use any passage of Scripture, being confident of its divine authority simply because it was the very Word of God. Therefore, solid, authoritative, biblical preaching is part of the glorious heritage of the Reformation. The Reformers were right. And preacher-descendants of the Reformation still today must preach from any passage with the confidence that it is God's inspired Word. Believers still receive such preaching as the very Word of God. □

Rev. Dale Kuiper

The Bible, a Divine Book

John Calvin's Doctrine of Holy Scripture

Just as children of the Reformation understand that the greatest event between Pentecost and the return of Christ was above all a return to the Scriptures, so Calvinists ought to know what the theologian of the Reformation held those Scriptures to be. "It was Calvin's *Institutes* which, with its calm, clear, positive exposition of the evangelical faith in the irrefragable authority of Holy Scripture, gave stability to wavering minds, and confidence to sinking hearts, and placed upon the lips of all a brilliant

apology in the face of the calumnies of the enemies of the Reformation" (B.B. Warfield, p. v).¹

Calvin's view of Scripture is set forth in the first nine chapters of the *Institutes*. It is only after he has laid down the principle of biblical authority that he allows himself and the reader to proceed to a consideration of the doctrines of God, man, Christ, salvation, and the church. After several chapters in which he treats such subjects as the connection between the knowledge of God and the knowl-

edge of ourselves, the nature of the knowledge of God, and what the fall has done to man's knowledge, he stresses in chapter six that the guidance and teaching of Scripture is necessary even to know God rightly as Creator. Repeatedly he emphasizes that "God uses not only mute teachers (creation, DHK), but even opens his own sacred mouth; not only proclaims that some god ought to be worshipped, but at the same time pronounces himself to be the Being to whom this worship is due" (p. 81). He reminds us that he is not treating the covenant or salvation here, "but only showing how we ought to learn from Scripture, that God, who created the world, may be certainly distinguished

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¹ All quotations are taken from Calvin's *Institutes*, translated by John Allen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949).

from the whole multitude of fictitious deities" (p. 81).

It is clear, therefore, that Calvin taught that the study of creation by science, although more than sufficient to deprive the ingratitude of men of every excuse, was not sufficient to give anything more than confused notions of deity. There is not, in his view, a reciprocal relation between Scripture and scientific findings by which each casts true light upon the other, as the theistic evolutionist holds today. Calvinists must avoid that proud pitfall and confess that Scripture alone gives us the truth regarding creation and the Creator.

The Establishment of Scripture's Authority

In chapter seven Calvin teaches that unless the authority of Scripture is firmly established, doubts will flourish in the mind and there will be a lack of reverence for the Word. "But since we are not favoured with daily oracles from heaven, and since it is only in the Scriptures that the Lord hath been pleased to preserve his truth in perpetual remembrance, it obtains the same complete credit and authority with believers, when they are satisfied of its divine origin, as if they heard the very words pronounced by God himself" (p. 85). He calls it a pernicious error that the Scriptures derive their authority and weight by the suffrages of the church, or that the church decides what reverence is due the Scriptures, and what books comprise the canon.

Calvin destroys the argument that the Scriptures depend on the church's decisions by quoting Ephesians 2:20, where we read that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. If the foundation of the church is Scripture, Scripture precedes the existence of the church, and the church cannot exist without Scripture. How, then, can she be the judge of them? "Wherefore, when the church receives it, and seals it with her suffrage, she does not authenticate a thing otherwise dubious or controvertible; but knowing it to be the truth of her God, performs a duty

of piety, by treating it with immediate veneration" (p. 87).

The enemies of biblical authority like to quote Augustine's line "that he would not believe the Gospel unless he were influenced by the authority of the church." Calvin calls this false and unfair because the context of his statement is ignored. Augustine, when arguing against the Manichees, writes this only of aliens from the faith who could not be persuaded to believe the Gospel as the truth of God unless they saw uniform agreement in the church. For how can the church command the obedience of faith if she herself does not agree on doctrine? Augustine held that the authority of the church was only an introduction to prepare the hearer for the faith of the Gospel.

Calvin insists that the principal proof for the authority of the Bible is derived from the character of the Divine Speaker. "The prophets and apostles boast not of their own genius, or any of those talents which conciliate the faith of the hearers; nor do they insist on arguments from reason; but bring forward the sacred name of God, to compel the submission of the whole world" (p. 89). He immediately adds that "the testimony of the Spirit is superior to all reason. For as God alone is a sufficient witness of himself in his own word, so also the word will never gain credit in the hearts of men, till it be confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit" (p. 90). What must we think of Calvinists who wonder at the nature and extent of biblical authority in the twentieth century? Why appoint committees to study such a question? It is faithless conniving against the fundamental principle of the Reformation.

After calling it an undeniable truth that "they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture, and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence" (p. 90), a grand statement echoed in Article 5 of our Belgic Confession, Calvin is not afraid to place the inability of reason to establish the Bible as the Word of God right alongside the reasonable-

ness of faith which believes this is so. "It is such a persuasion, therefore, as requires no reasons; such a knowledge as is supported by the highest reason, in which, indeed, the mind rests with greater security and constancy than in any reasons; it is, finally, such a sentiment as cannot be produced but by a revelation from heaven" (p. 91). This is what every believer experiences in the depths of his heart. This is what Isaiah means when he states that "all the children shall be taught of God" (Is. 54:13). And this great gift of faith is what distinguishes the elect from the rest of mankind. Only the elect are given to understand the mysteries of God.

Rational Proofs Assist Belief in Scripture

Although faith is necessary to establish the truth and authority of Scripture in one's heart, Calvin concedes that certain rational proofs can help the believer in his confession and defense of biblical doctrine — but only if the foundation of faith has first been laid. "Whilst, on the contrary, when, regarding it in a different point of view from common things, we have once religiously received it in a manner worthy of its excellence, we shall then derive great assistance from things which before were not sufficient to establish the certainty of it in our minds" (p. 93). Calvin has in mind the "order and disposition of the Divine Wisdom dispensed" in Scripture, the "heavenly nature of its doctrine which never savours of any thing terrestrial," the "beautiful agreement of all parts with each other," and the "dignity of the subjects rather than the beauties of the language." He believes that "the force of truth in the sacred Scripture is too powerful to need the assistance of verbal art" and that "the sublime mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are communicated, for the most part, in humble and contemptible style" (p. 93, 94).

Nevertheless, the "diction of some of the prophets is neat and elegant, and even splendid; so that they are not inferior in eloquence to the heathen writers. And by such ex-

amples the Holy Spirit has been pleased to show, that he was not deficient in eloquence, though elsewhere he hath used a rude and homely style" (p. 94). Whether biblical language is a sweet flow of words or characterized by rusticity, the inspiration of the Spirit is everywhere in evidence.

Another assisting proof to faith in Scripture is the endurance of the Word of God throughout all generations. Himself in awe, he writes, "For it is not an unimportant consideration, that, since the publication of the Scripture, so many generations of men should have agreed in voluntarily obeying it; and that however Satan, together with the whole world, has endeavored by strange methods to suppress or destroy it, or utterly to erase and obliterate it from the memory of man, yet it has always, like a palm-tree, risen superior to all opposition, and remained invincible" (p. 103). Calvin ascribes the preserving of Scripture throughout the ages, not to the church or the faithfulness of men, but to the providence of God. This comforting, historical fact is further proof that the Bible is a Divine Book.

The final proof that can assist our faith in receiving the doctrines of the Bible with confidence is that it has

been confirmed by the blood of so many saints. "Having once received it, they hesitated not, with intrepid boldness, and even with great alacrity, to die in its defence: transmitted to us with such a pledge, how should we not receive it with a firm and unshaken conviction? Is it therefore no small confirmation of the Scripture, that it has been sealed with the blood of so many martyrs" (p. 103)? Calvin closes chapter ten with the reminder that "the Scripture will then only be effectual to produce the saving knowledge of God, when the certainty of it shall be founded on the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Thus those human testimonies, which contribute to its confirmation will not be useless, if they follow that first and principal proof, as secondary to our imbecility" (p. 104).

Claims of Special Revelations Subversive to Piety

Calvin is intolerant of those who pretend not to need the Scripture because they have received special revelations from the Spirit. He calls this attempt to separate Word and Spirit ridiculous, puerile, mean, and subversive. "The office of the Spirit, then, which is promised to us, is not to feign new and unheard of revelations, or to

coin a new system of doctrine, which would seduce us from the received doctrine of the Gospel, but to seal to our minds the same doctrine which the Gospel delivers" (p. 106). Since the Spirit is the author of Scripture, He cannot by secret revelations be inconsistent with Himself. He always testifies to His own truth which He has expressed in Scripture, with the result that "he only displays and exerts his power where the Word is received with due reverence and piety" (p. 108). The antidote to the growing mysticism and improper emphasis on the Spirit in our day is the Reformation doctrine of the *sufficiency of Holy Scripture*.

In summary, Calvin sharply limits what can be known from creation to confused notions of deity, denies that the authority of Scripture depends on decisions of the church, warns against rational arguments for biblical inspiration if faith is not first present, and concludes with severe criticism of those who would separate Word and Spirit. We have quoted extensively from the *Institutes* to show this. But we have another reason for doing this. Is not your appetite whetted to give the *Institutes* a first, or another, careful reading? □

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Doctrine of Scripture in the Reformed Creeds

For the sake of space we cannot quote here the Articles of Reformed creeds that most fully articulate the doctrine of the Scripture. Those two creeds are the Belgic and the

Westminster Confessions. The reader will have to peruse them on his own. The Belgic Confession devotes five full articles to the doctrine (Arts. III - VII). The Westminster's opening chapter sets forth the doctrine, and it does so in no fewer than ten articles. In both confessions the early placement and the length of treatment of

this doctrine indicate how basic and vital for true faith and a true church their writers considered a proper confession of the Scriptures to be.

What is striking is how similar in content and expression the two creeds are. To be sure, the Westminster's treatment of the doctrine is a bit longer than that of the Belgic and shows

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maturing of thought and expression. For instance, the Westminster addresses the importance of good translations for the people (I,8), and it sets forth the regulative principle of biblical interpretation, namely, Scripture by Scripture, the more difficult, presently obscure passages explained in the light of the more clear (I,9). That there is this maturity should not surprise us. It was written 80 years after the Belgic Confession, and by a "multitude of counsellors."

But it is obvious that the Westminster Confession is the child of the Belgic, and was written by men who had the Belgic open before them, along with the Scriptures, as they discussed and wrote. Anyone who has any respect for the work of the Spirit in the church of the past could do no less.

To anyone who is at all current with what is taking place in apostate protestantism today it should be as clear as the sun in the heavens that the confessions are not archaic documents which deserve to be consigned to some museum of interest only to scholars of ancient history. They are as relevant and pertinent to the need and issues that confront the church of Christ as the day they were written. This is especially true in light of the growing assault upon the trustworthiness of the Scriptures themselves.

The issue of the day is the authority and sufficiency of the Bible as the Word of God. The issue has not changed since the day these two creeds were written, except now the Scriptures are being betrayed in the house of her friends. There is a cry in Protestantism to retire the confessional standards from active service. This is done in the name of returning to the direct, unfettered study of the pages of Scriptures. "No creed but

Christ and His Word, because they are always so contemporary and up-to-date." Churchmen will lead the church out of the deadness of confessionalism back to the Scriptures and their primitive, simple, pristine teachings.

My, such reborn zeal! Be not deceived. These men are about as interested in a return to the Scriptures as the infallible, authoritative Word of God as they are in becoming Nazarites and eating grasshoppers with John the Baptist in the desert. These men simply want to get rid of the creeds in order to get rid of their binding view of the Scriptures, and thus to be rid of believers looking over their shoulders with confessions in hand pointing out every departure from the historic, Reformed, and Apostolic faith. And especially they want to be rid of common believers judging their doctrine of the Scripture itself (not God-breathed and binding in

every last part!) as defective and "anathema" (Gal. 1:8-12, B.C. VII).

In their treatment of the doctrine of Scripture the two confessions are concerned basically with three things: with the Canon of Scripture (which writings [books] were divinely inspired), with the authority of Scripture (especially whence it derives its authority — from the Church?), and with the sufficiency of Scripture (the only trustworthy and needed rule of faith in every age).

Both the B.C. and the W.C. speak of and set forth the "canon" of Scripture (Arts. 4, 5, 6 & I.2, 3). The word "canon" comes from the Greek and denotes "any straight rod or bar, especially to keep a thing straight." It has reference then to an official, recognized standard by which all else is measured. The confessions list which writings, which prophetic books,

Psalms, Gospels, and Epistles, belong to the sacred Canon of Scripture, or, in the language of the Belgic Confession, are to be received as "holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith..." — which are indeed truly "God-breathed."

To this issue of which books (66 in all) belong in the Holy Scripture we give scarcely a thought. For us, adding to the approved books is unthinkable. At times however this was a burning issue. The early church had to distinguish between the pseudo-apostolic writings and the genuine ones. And the Reformers had to rid the church of any reliance upon the writings of the Apocrypha. The Romish Church had elevated them to the status of sacred Scripture. Any number of unbiblical and superstitious teachings (such as purgatory) had slipped in via this addition to the received canon. The Reformers, through the confessions, returned the church to the decisions of the earliest church councils on this matter. The Westminster is especially sharp in its rejection of the claims of the apocryphal writings. We can be thankful the confessions dealt with this issue so decisively, thus settling the issue with us. We have been spared much confusion.

In the area of apologetics (or controversy) the central concern of the confessions is the relation between the authority of the church and that of the Scriptures — i.e., which is the supreme or final authority, which derives authority from which. The genius of the confessions is their articulating the doctrine of the self-attestation of the Scriptures.

The Belgic Confession declares that we believe all things contained in the Scriptures, "not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts, that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves" (Art. V).

The Westminster declares, "The authority of the Holy Scripture ... dependeth not upon the testimony of

The issue of the day is the authority and sufficiency of the Bible as the Word of God. The issue has not changed since the day these two creeds were written, except now the Scriptures are being betrayed in the house of her friends.

any man or Church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and, therefore, it is to be received, because it is the Word of God" (Sect. 4).

Note the decisive language of the Belgic Confession. "... not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such...." This was the contention of Rome as she insisted that the authority of Scripture and what it taught depended on her approval.

In his book *Captive To The Word*, A.S. Wood writes that Rome claimed "that the Church is superior to Scripture because it was responsible for selecting the books included in the canon. The thesis of the ecclesiastical sophists ran like this, according to Luther: 'The Church has approved only four Gospels, and therefore there are only four. For if it had approved more, there would have been more. Since the Church has the right to accept and approve as many Gospels as it wishes, it follows that the Church is superior to the Gospels'" (p. 124).

With one dazzling analogy Luther demolished the argument. "What a splendid argument!... I approve Scripture. Therefore I am superior to Scripture. John the Baptist acknowledges and confesses Christ. He points to Him with his finger. Therefore he is superior to Christ. The Church approves Christian faith and doctrine. Therefore the Church is superior to them" (p. 124).

The authority of the Scriptures is not derivative, depending on the witness of men or the verification of the church, but is primary and self-contained. They carry the proof and weight of this authority within themselves. Indeed, Rome's contention in this matter is mere sophistry.

This does not mean that the testimony of the church has no value. As the Westminster points out, "We may

be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to an high and reverent esteem of the Holy Scripture; ... yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and Divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts" (Sect. 5).

Note that the church is called to direct the believer (and all men) to submit to the supreme authority of the Bible. The one who will actually do the convincing and convicting is the Holy Spirit. It is not just the Word alone, and it is certainly not the church, which is able to persuade men to acknowledge Scripture as the Word of truth. It is the Holy Spirit. But what He convinces men of is not the unassailable authority of the church. Rather it is of the unassailable authority and pertinency of the Scriptures.

And finally, for the work of the Spirit to bring the elect to saving faith and to preserve the church from all error and evil, the Scriptures are wholly sufficient (Art. 7 & I.6). This is relevant to the spirit of our age. Not only does it dismiss the "traditions" of Rome, her papal "ex cathedra" pronouncements, and all writings of men, no matter what their antiquity, from competition with (and contradiction of) the Scriptures, but also the Spirit's promise to bind Himself to the Apostolic Word exposes the new revelations and prophecies of the modern day charismatic movement, as false and not of the Spirit of God (I John 4:1). There ought to be no more confusion on this in Christ's church than on the matter of the received canon of Scripture.

In the interests of true unity of faith, the teachings of the confessions on the doctrine of Scripture are as relevant and needed as ever. This

was brought home by a statement made by the well-known author and Anglican theologian, J.I. Packer, in an article in the April 5, 1993 issue of *Christianity Today*. There Packer explains his reasons for finally parting ways with the World Council of Churches (WCC), which, in the judgment of this writer, has epitomized the worst of what has characterized the liberal ecumenical movement. He makes a telling statement. It became plain, he says, as far back as the 1960s that the WCC then already "... appeared as sponsoring a consensus theology that celebrated the Bible without encountering its authority."

Now, read that sentence over. Consider: "consensus theology" — a creed of theology to which, in the name of Christianity, nearly every one could subscribe. How to be achieved? While you praise the Bible, you strip it of its authority. This has always been the heart and method of apostasy. Somehow, set aside Scripture's supreme authority.

The venerable creeds of the Reformed and Apostolic faith encounter this 'unclean spirit,' expose it for what it is, 'extra-celestial,' and dismiss it as militating against the true unity of Christ's church. Thank God for the confessions written by men who were bound by the Word of God.

□

*The authority
of the Scriptures
is not
derivative,
depending on
the witness of
men
or the
verification
of the church,
but is primary
and
self-contained.*

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Book Reviews

The Revival of the Ecclesiastical Text and the Claims of the Anabaptists, by Theodore P. Letis. Fort Wayne, Indiana: The Institute for Reformation Biblical Studies, 1992. 54 pages. \$4.00 (paper). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Theodore P. Letis is a young scholar who will be heard from and ought to be listened to on the subject of the Greek text of the New Testament and the English version of Holy Scripture. Standing in the tradition of Burgon and Hills, Letis is a defender of the Greek text used in the translation of the King James Bible and an advocate of the King James Version.

Letis' defense of the KJV, particularly as regards the Greek text of the

New Testament, is scholarly. Letis is knowledgeable in the field of textual criticism and thoroughly familiar with the issues. He is also concerned to bring the confessional orthodoxy of the Protestant Reformation to bear on the matter of Bible translation.

In this 54-page monograph, Letis reacts against the radicalism of some American fundamentalists in their exalting the KJV unduly. They regard the KJV as the perfect Bible. Superior to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that have come down to us, it is not to be corrected by the original languages, but the original-language documents must be corrected by the KJV.

This, says Letis, is the anabaptistic threat to Protestant orthodoxy in the

area of Scripture translation. Just as the anabaptists posed a threat to the Reformation, so this fundamentalism poses a threat to an orthodox Protestant position on the translation of Scripture. The danger is not only from the left (the NIV), but also from the right.

The stage for this charge is set at the beginning of the booklet by a brief historical sketch of the struggle of the Reformation with Luther's "Schwärmerei" ("fanatics").

This little book is helpful especially to ministers and seminarians. It can be obtained from Old Path Publications, 223 Princeton Road, Audubon, NJ 08106. □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Annual Reformation Day Lecture

Thursday, October 28, 1993

in the auditorium of

South Christian High School

160 68th St. S.W.

Grand Rapids, Michigan

8:00 P.M.

Rev. Barry Gritters will speak on:

She Shall Be Called Woman.

Two follow-up Bible Study classes:

Byron Center

Protestant Reformed Church

Thursday P.M., November 4

Thursday P.M., November 11

Questions to be addressed at the lecture and follow-up classes:

For what purpose did God create woman?

What does the Bible teach concerning the calling of the Christian woman today?

What duties and responsibilities does the woman have in her home and church today?

How has the Women's Liberation Movement changed the role of the woman since the Reformation of the 16th century?

How can women learn contentment in their all-important calling?

What should be the goal of the Christian woman in the 21st century?

Mark your calendars

and plan to attend!

REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

Topic:

Soli Deo Gloria

Speaker:

Rev. Carl Haak

Date:

October 28, 9 P.M.

Place:

Lynden Protestant

Reformed Church

315 N. Park Ave.

Lynden, Washington

Sponsored by:

Lynden Protestant

Reformed Church Extension

Committee

Celebration of the

Protestant Reformation

Not mere nostalgia over interesting history! The church today must remember the glorious truths of God which were restored to the church by this wonderful event. Join us therefore at:

Hope Prot. Ref. Church

1307 Brockton Ave.

Redlands, California

for a Conference on

Luther, Reformer of the Church.

Fri., Oct. 29, 7:30 p.m.

Luther, Man of Conviction

Sat., Oct. 30, 10:00 a.m.

Luther,

Theologian of the Glory of God

Lecturer:

Prof. David Engelsma,

from the Theological School

of the PRC

(Directions to the church: Take the 10 freeway to the University exit. Go north to the corner of the campus of the University of Redlands, and take Brockton Ave. about four blocks east to the church.)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 16, 1993, our beloved parents,

**GORDON and EILEEN
TERPSTRA,**

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We their children and grandchildren express our hearty congratulations to them and our gratitude to God for their Christian instruction, counsel, and example to us over the years. May the Lord continue to bless them and provide for them in the days to come. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6).

- ❖ Sue Looyenga
Lisabeth, Brendan, Brianna, Caitlin,
Meghan, Drew
- ❖ Tom and Luanne Schipper
Jason, Dirk, Nicole, Andrew, Betsy
- ❖ Rev. Charles and Verna Terpstra
Corey, Amber, Kimberly, Thad,
Kyle, Justin
- ❖ Todd and Val Terpstra
Gordon, Jillian
- ❖ Jeff and Kathy Terpstra
Lindsey, Kelsey

Grand Rapids, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, IL expresses its heartfelt sympathy to its fellow officebearer, Elder Menno Smits, and his wife Sadie, in the passing of her brother and sister:

**MR. TED ENGELSMA
and**

MISS SYBIL ENGELSMA.

May the comfort of the family be in this, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Rev. Charles Terpstra (Pres.)
Mr. George Vroom (Clerk)

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On October 18, 1993, the Lord willing, our parents and grandparents, **ROGER and PHYLLIS KING,** will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary.

With much thankfulness to our heavenly Father for providing us with parents who gave us love and covenant instruction, we rejoice with them and pray that God will bless them and keep them in His care.

"Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue forever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed forever" (II Samuel 7:29).

- ❖ Lou and Cheryl Regnerus
Luke, Jade, Leah, Glen
- ❖ Marcia King
- ❖ Michael King
- ❖ Bill and Lori Smeda
Ashley
- ❖ David King

Grand Rapids, Michigan

NOTICE!

The Randolph, WI Protestant Reformed School Society continues to make progress toward opening school in the Fall of 1994. Preliminary plans include hiring of two teachers for a multi-grade setting; one for K-4, one for 5-8. One teacher also will serve as principal. Because of the newness of the venture and the need for advance planning, we would like to establish talks with interested teachers prior to contract time in Spring, 1994.

Protestant Reformed teachers who may be interested in these positions are asked to contact Gary Buteyn at (414) 326-5666 or Pastor Key at (414) 326-5642.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on October 20, 1993, our parents and grandparents, **JOHN and ANNETTE OUDMAN,** will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and thank God for the years they have shared together. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to bless and keep them.

"Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

- ❖ Jack and Ann Oudman
Brian, Karen, Michael
- ❖ Jim and Margaret TeVelde
John, Roger, Heather
- ❖ Ray and Pauline Prins
Julie, Mark, Wayne, Lorne
- ❖ Clarence and Patty Oudman
Tim, Julie, Rebekah
- ❖ Howard and Fran Oudman
- ❖ Ron and Teresa Gyor
Crystal, Angela, Lisa, Rachelle,
Nicole
- ❖ Gordon and Maureen Oudman
Lacombe, AB, Canada

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Lynden PRC extend their sympathy to Mrs. Marie Kaptein and her children in the death of her husband and their father,

MR. ALBERT KAPTEIN.

May the Word of Jehovah be their abiding comfort: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psalm 73:25, 26).

Lynden PRC Council
Mel Yonkman, Clerk